

I find being informed is the best way to develop an understanding of ADHD.



Understanding Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

For years, Joe has been teased about having 'the attention span of a two-year-old.' Though he's admired for his creativity, he often seems distracted at work and frequently forgets important meetings. His boss is starting to question his reliability and Joe wonders if it's the reason he was overlooked for a promotion...

Jane is only seven but she's already been to the principal's office several times for being disruptive in class. Though she seems to know the answers when asked, Jane has trouble completing assignments at home and school because she can't sit still and focus. Her parents try hard to keep her behaviour on track, but have trouble getting Jane to settle down and concentrate on homework, cleaning her room and other daily tasks. They're at a loss about what to do...

Distractibility, daydreaming and restlessness are 'childlike' behaviours that are often seen as a right of passage for kids. But when traits such as hyperactivity, distractibility, impulsiveness and restlessness begin to become obstacles in either a child or adult's life, they could be symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

What are ADD and ADHD?

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, ADD and ADHD are disorders that interfere with a person's ability to pay attention and focus and, as a result, get in the way of learning processes. As neurologically-based developmental disorders, they are different from learning disabilities, though it's possible for both conditions to be present. While ADD and ADHD usually appear in childhood, they can carry on into adulthood and can negatively impact a number of areas in a person's life.

Though in the past, ADHD was used to distinguish the additional presence of hyperactivity and impulsiveness, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is now the common term used when discussing the condition. ADHD is a widespread disorder estimated to affect five to 10 per cent of children and three to six per cent of adults worldwide. As more information about ADHD is learned and produced, more and more people are questioning whether it is the underlying cause of learning and social issues experienced by children and adults alike.

ADHD is a disorder with many different subtypes that can have a variety of symptoms. Those affected by ADHD may experience any combination of impulsiveness, hyperactivity and inattentiveness. While most of us show symptoms of ADHD at some time or another, it doesn't mean you have the condition.



Symptoms and Diagnosis

Though the disorder can be difficult to identify, symptoms must be frequent, happen over a long period of time and be diagnosed by a medical professional who has examined all factors and ruled out other possible causes. Children suspected of suffering from ADHD, for example, should undergo eyesight and hearing tests to ensure there are not physical causes for their symptoms.

Common signs of hyperactivity-impulsivity include:

- Feeling restless, often fidgeting with hands and feet or squirming while seated.
- Running, climbing, or leaving a seat in situations where sitting or quiet behaviour is expected.
- Blurting out answers before hearing the whole question.
- Having difficulty waiting in line or taking turns.

Signs of inattention include:

- Being easily distracted by irrelevant sights and sounds.
- Trouble paying attention to details and making careless mistakes.
- Difficulty following instructions carefully and completely.
- Losing or forgetting things like toys, or pencils, books, and tools needed for a task.
- Often skipping from one uncompleted activity to another.

Source: www.idonline.org

By staying informed, consistent and scheduled, parents can have a hugely positive influence on managing their child's disorder.

These tips helped me help others.



Treating ADHD

Treatment for ADHD can include medication, special education—such as behavioural therapy and psychotherapy—and counselling for the individual and family. Teaching those diagnosed with ADHD and their families about the disease can be very helpful in treating the disorder over the long term. Regular visits with the doctor to track progress, continual updates on the latest ADHD treatments and medication, when necessary, can all help manage the disorder and minimize its negative impact. Though many adults with ADHD are able to self-manage the disorder (usually with the help of structured or professional support), children and teens are especially susceptible to its effects and should be carefully monitored.

The ADHD Child

Raising a child diagnosed with ADHD can present some definite challenges in a parent's life. But by staying informed, consistent and scheduled, parents can have a hugely positive influence on managing their child's disorder. The small steps found in the across column can make a big difference in your child's day-to-day life. Below are some additional examples to help keep parents on track:

- **'Catch' them in the act of being good.** Kids with ADHD get used to being scolded for bad behaviour. Catching them being good—especially when they're not trying to please you—reinforces positive actions and can help kids feel proud of their accomplishments.
- **Stay consistent.** Children with ADHD respond to structure, rules and an immediate response to behaviour challenges. Provide clearly defined boundaries for your child and make sure the consequences for stepping out of line are consistently enforced every time.
- **Be an advocate.** You are your child's biggest ally. Make sure your child is getting the support he or she needs, whether in or outside of school.

Tips for teens with ADHD

- Teens with the disorder should let their friends know about their condition as peers are more likely to be understanding of symptoms if they understand the cause of the behaviour.
- Teens need clear boundaries in their activities and responsibilities as they are more likely to act impulsively.
- While young people with ADHD should be treated with compassion and understanding when they make mistakes, appropriate consequences (which should have been clearly outlined beforehand) should be swiftly and consistently enforced.
- Parents should talk openly about sexuality with teens suffering from the condition and help them to create boundaries and guidelines for their behaviour.

The ADHD Adult

ADHD can happen at any age. Many adults can go untreated for a long time or never be diagnosed, not realizing the symptoms until later in life. But ADHD can negatively affect an adult's life, leading to occupational, education and family dysfunctions. Adults with ADHD often blame themselves for problems related to finishing projects, remembering important dates and conversations not realizing they're part of a larger problem. Often it takes the diagnosis of their own child for adults with ADHD to seek diagnosis. The symptoms and treatments are similar but an adult must have shown ADHD symptoms as a child to be diagnosed with the condition as an adult.

While those diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder can face challenges at school, work and socially, the obstacles can be overcome. Through proper diagnosis, treatment and maintenance of consistent routines, children and adults with ADHD can break through the barriers of the disorder and learn to deal with ADHD effectively and go on to thrive.

The ADHD Child: Steps for Parents

Get on schedule. Set a regular routine your child can follow so he or she knows instinctively what to do next. Waking up at the same time every morning and having dinner at the same time every evening, for example, are a few simple ways to create a predictable routine.

Put it in its place. Since people with ADHD often forget or lose things, creating specific places for items such as school books, or keys can make a big difference and speed up departure time for school and extracurricular activities.

Jot it down. Recording information can help keep track of important dates and appointments so take notes and encourage children (who are able to read and write) to jot things down as reminders. Create a large calendar with appointments and important dates and put it in a highly-visible place like the refrigerator door to help kids keep on top of daily events.

Break tasks down into manageable chunks. Confusing or long-winded directions can make a child with a short attention span shut down. Step-by-step instructions or requests can help children with ADHD stay focused, successfully complete the tasks at hand and build confidence.

Channel energy positively. Outside interests such as karate, drama, swimming or other group activities can help burn off excess energy and boost low self-esteem—often a common side-effect of ADHD.

If you have any questions about this topic, or if you wish to discuss a personal situation you may be experiencing, we invite you to contact your EAP. All contact between you and your EAP is completely confidential.

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