

Parenting the Child With Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

What is ADHD?

ADHD stands for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. This disorder prevents many bright students from doing well in school because it is difficult for them to focus and pay attention. If their disorder has not been diagnosed, they may be seen as troublemakers and underachievers. When ADHD is properly diagnosed and treated, most of these students can learn to focus and become good students.

As many as 6% of school-age children have ADHD. It begins before the child is 7 years old and may last into adulthood. Some students are diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD), which is similar but lacks the hyperactivity component.

Basic Symptoms of Children with ADHD

- Short attention span
- Impulsive behavior
- Hyperactivity
- Beginning new activities before they have completed the previous one
- Difficulties in social interaction
- May have low self-esteem
- May be easily frustrated
- May experience strong emotions

Diagnostic Process

Just because a child shows overactive behavior and impulsive tendencies does not mean the child will be diagnosed with ADHD. An accurate diagnosis requires input from several different sources, including teachers and parents.

The professional making the diagnosis can be a social worker, pediatrician, child psychiatrist, psychologist or other knowledgeable professional from the mental health fields or medicine. It is suggested that the parents inquire whether the professional has knowledge and experience regarding ADHD diagnosis.

The diagnostic process includes information provided by teachers and parents. A diagnosis based solely upon an office visit and professional observation may be highly inaccurate. Information from both parents is important. Information from teachers who know the student well is highly beneficial and many times essential. Behavior checklists are the most efficient tools used to

gather information from parents and teachers regarding ADHD symptoms. Along with information from home and school, the professional in charge of the final diagnosis will observe the child's behavior for more than one session. Additional testing materials may or may not be needed.

Treatment

Treatment for students with ADHD attempts to alleviate the disruptive effect of the symptoms. No single treatment approach has been proven to be sufficient to deal with all of the ADHD symptoms. Two approaches, so far, have provided the most effective results. These are behavior/cognitive interventions and medication.

Behavior/Cognitive Interventions

- Counseling and coaching describes this intervention. The counselor coaches the child to solve problems by improving relationship and organizational skills and managing impulsivity and strong feelings.
- Consistency—This is one of the key issues and includes:
 - * establish routines for organizing activities
 - * do what you say you are going to do
 - * use the same directions at home and when visiting others
 - * react to your child's behavior according to the preplanned program rather than mood
 - * give single directions rather than multiple directions
 - * enforce rules on a consistent basis
 - * give clear directions in positive terms—what you want to see happen rather than the stopping of something
- Problem solving and social skills—It is important to teach how to respond to peers, during play time and study time. Many of the disruptive reactions and awkward responses result from children with ADHD "not knowing better." Conversations about how to make and keep friends, how to respond to provocations for a fight, or invitations to play are important issues that children with ADHD may not manage well.

Medication Interventions

- Many children with ADHD find that their symptoms decrease or are eliminated when they take appropriate medi-

cation.

- Medication for children with ADHD presents risks similar to other medications in terms of side effects.
- Medication has to be prescribed by a physician. Teachers, psychologists, counselors, parents, and social workers are able to provide valuable information to the physician to help the physician prescribe specific medication and doses. However, only a physician can prescribe and monitor the side effects of medication.
- Consultation with the prescribing doctor is recommended at least every other month to closely monitor progress and side effects.
- Finally, medication must be used as prescribed to be effective. Medications used for ADHD are generally fast-acting and their effects only last for a matter of hours. Medication should be used in conjunction with behavior/cognitive interventions so that by the time medication is discontinued, these interventions can take over in the process to overcome the disruptive symptoms of ADHD.

