

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in Children

ADHD is a neurological disorder that develops during childhood and can persist into adulthood. Although adult ADHD is more common than initially thought, not all children who have these symptoms will go on to have the adult version of the disorder. Childhood symptoms may also change across the lifespan; some fade (e.g., blatant hyperactivity) while others may be expressed differently (e.g., chronic disorganization may result in getting fired from jobs). Because ADHD often "looks" different in kids and adults, the adult version of the disorder will be discussed in its own section.

ADHD is one of the most common childhood disorders. Approximately 3-7% of school-aged children have the disorder. Prevalence rates seem to vary by community, with some research indicating that larger cities may have rates as high as 10-15%.

ADHD produces symptoms that are characterized by distractibility, hyperactivity, poor impulse control, and forgetfulness. The "attention deficit" component of ADHD refers to inattention, or difficulty focusing for long periods and being easily distractible. The "hyperactivity" portion of ADHD is used to describe behavior that is restless, agitated, and difficult to resist. Hyperactive individuals often appear as if they NEED to move. They are in almost constant motion, and frequently make excessive noise. Although impulsivity is not included in the diagnostic label, it is also considered a behavior characteristic of this disorder. When impulsivity is paired with hyperactivity, the person appears to act without prior thought or intention. Impulsive behaviors are often intrusive, rude, and dangerous, sometimes resulting in accidents. For example, children may not think about landing when they jump off a ledge to catch a ball.

Given that all children tend to exhibit some of the behaviors characteristic of ADHD, such as daydreaming, restlessness, or thoughtlessness, it is important to understand the difference between normal behaviors and a true disorder. True ADHD symptoms are long-term and severe enough to impair someone's every day functioning. Moreover, symptoms must occur in more than one environment. For example, in children, this means that the ADHD symptoms interfere with success in school and relationships with parents, siblings, or peers. For adults, ADHD interferes with both work and family functioning.

Experts consider ADHD to be a chronic condition that has no cure. However, individuals with this disorder should not give up hope. There are many different treatment options that can help people successfully manage ADHD symptoms and move forward in their lives.

The general symptoms of ADHD include:

- Failure to pay attention or a failure to retain learned information
- Fidgeting or restless behavior
- Excessive activity or talking
- The appearance of being physically driven or compelled to constantly move
- Inability to sit quietly, even when motivated to do so
- Engaging in activity without thinking before hand
- Constantly interrupting or changing the subject
- Poor peer relationships
- Difficulty sustaining focused attention

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- Distractibility
- Forgetfulness or absentmindedness
- Continual impatience
- Low frustration tolerance
- When focused attention is required, it is experienced as unpleasant
- Frequent shifts from one activity to another
- Careless or messy approach to assignments or tasks
- Failure to complete activities
- Difficulty organizing or prioritizing activities or possessions

ADHD is not:

An Attitude Problem - The difficulties associated with ADHD are not due to defiance or getting into a battle about control. Nor are they a sign of laziness or irresponsibility. The behaviors associated with ADHD are chronic and part of the disorder. With help, an individual can learn to manage these behaviors.

A Personality Disorder - ADHD is a neurological disorder that often co-exists with other disorders, including personality disorders.

An Absolute Problem - The impact of the issues surrounding ADHD vary in degree from person to person and are influenced by the environment. Individuals can learn a range of skills to manage their symptoms and their performance can improve with increased stimulation and behavior-specific reinforcement (i.e., reward) systems (described later).

A Lack of Intelligence - Often, individuals with ADHD are highly intelligent and creative.

ADHD is:

A non-curable neurological disorder that creates information processing challenges among those individuals affected by it. In other words, those with ADHD think differently and, at times, less clearly than other people without ADHD. These thought difficulties often lead people to respond differently to events that occur. For example, when a new child enters an ongoing playgroup, most children will notice the newcomer. However, children with ADHD might not be aware that the peer is new to the group, thinking instead that they didn't notice the peer before (like so many other people and things that suddenly appear in their environment).