



ADHD and Learning Differences: A Parent's Guide

The transition back to in-person education can be pretty tough after virtual schooling and even harder for children with attention and learning difficulties. As a parent, you can look for some of the warning signs below.

What is ADHD?

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a very common mental health problem. It is a neurodevelopmental disorder. ADHD can impact relationships in the home, learning at school, relationships with teachers and other children and self-esteem.

What does ADHD look like?

You may notice the following common signs and symptoms:

Difficulties Paying Attention:

- Have a hard time focusing on one thing
- Easily distracted, miss details and forget things
- Have a hard time getting organized
- Have trouble planning time
- Difficulty completing a task or learning something new
- Loses things (e.g., pencils, toys, homework) needed to complete tasks or activities
- Have trouble completing or turning in homework

Hyperactivity:

- Talk a lot
- Fidget or move around a lot
- Have a hard time sitting still during dinner, school or story time
- Dash around, climb on things, touching or playing with everything in sight

Impulsive Behavior:

- Interrupt others
- Have difficulty taking turns or waiting
- Show their emotions without restraint
- Does not think before acting
- Blur out inappropriate comments

Youth with ADHD may only have inattentive symptoms or only hyperactive/impulsive symptoms, or both types of symptoms. Children and teens do not have to have all of the symptoms and ADHD. Although ADHD symptoms begin in childhood, ADHD can continue through the teenage years and adulthood and can look different as children grow older.

Childhood

Hyperactive symptoms are more common in younger children than in older teens or young adults. But children are naturally active and have short attention spans—how can you tell the difference between ADHD and normal childhood development? Only a trained professional can tell you for sure. However, here are some questions to consider:

- How does your child compare to other children of the same age? Are they similarly active or more active? Do they stand out from other children?
- Is your child's behavior causing problems and interfering with his/her ability to function and get along well in school and with peers?



Adolescence/Teenage Years

Many people think of ADHD as a childhood problem. However, ADHD can continue through the teen years and into adulthood.

- Hyperactive symptoms more commonly seen in young children often lessen over time and for teens and adults these behaviors are experienced more often as restlessness or fidgeting.
- Challenges with inattention, disorganization and impulsivity often continue through as teenagers and adults.
- Trouble paying attention may not get noticed until demands at school increase. These problems often continue in the teen and adult years. Using routines, organization skills and coping strategies can help people with these problems.
- Many teenagers with ADHD become frustrated easily and respond to stress more emotionally than other teens. Sometimes their moods are pleasant and other times they are more argumentative.

How does ADHD impact learning?

ADHD can make it really hard for a child to learn. Even for preschoolers, if a child cannot remain seated and listen during circle-time, they're missing out on learning.

In elementary school, children with ADHD may have difficulty with:

- Following directions or classroom rules
- Working quietly
- Keeping hands and feet to themselves
- Staying on task
- Listening to others and waiting for a turn to speak

In middle or high school, children/teens with ADHD may have difficulty with:

- Coming to class prepared and on time
- Working steadily on task
- Completing and turning in schoolwork on time
- Organizing their school materials (book bag, binders and electronic files)
- Recording assignments accurately in a calendar or planner
- Planning ahead for tests or long-term projects

What do I do if I'm concerned my child has ADHD or learning problems?

For more information about current services and programs at Children's National, as well as strategies you can try at home, visit our ADHD and Learning Differences Program page at

<https://childrensnational.org/adhd>

Talk with your child's pediatrician and/or a mental health provider. Oftentimes there are mental health providers embedded in the primary care clinic. Do not hesitate to reach out and establish care with a mental health provider to give your child additional support: contact Children's National at 202-729-3300.

