

Attention-Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder Fact Sheet



Minnesota Association for
Children's Mental Health

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Symptoms/Behaviors

The DSM-5 lists three types of ADHD

Inattentive type

- Short attention spans
- Problems with organization
- Trouble paying attention to details
- Unable to maintain attention
- Easily distracted
- Trouble listening even when spoken to directly
- Fail to finish their work
- Make lots of mistakes
- Forgetful
- Frequently lose things to complete tasks (pencil, book)

Hyperactive-Impulsive type

- Fidget and squirm
- Difficulty staying seated
- Run around and climbs on things excessively
- Trouble playing quietly
- On-the-go as if driven by a motor
- Talk too much
- Blurt out an answer before a question is completed
- Trouble taking turns in games or activities
- Interrupt or intrude on others

Combined type

Symptoms of both inattentive and hyperactive-impulsive type

Resources: See macmh.org/edguidelink for more ADHD specific resources.

About the Disorder

Children and adolescents with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may be overactive, and be unable to pay attention and stay on task. They tend to be impulsive and accident-prone. They may answer questions before raising their hand, forget things, fidget, squirm, or talk too loudly. On the other hand, some students with this disorder may be quiet and spacey or inattentive, forgetful, and easily distracted.

The DSM-5 classifies ADHD as a Neurodevelopmental Disorder. It lists three forms of ADHD: inattention, hyperactivity-impulsivity, and combined inattention, hyperactivity-impulsivity. Students with inattentive symptoms may be described as daydreamers or spaced out. These students are more socially withdrawn and have more frequent problems with mild anxiety than students with the hyperactive-impulsive type. They frequently experience forgetfulness and boredom. They may also have trouble remembering instructions and responsibilities, have problems with focusing, and have an aversion to mentally challenging tasks. Symptoms of inattentiveness may be difficult for teachers to detect, and many students—especially girls—are diagnosed much later or are never identified. Girls are more likely to have the inattentive type of ADHD.

Students with hyperactive-impulsive symptoms of ADHD often experience difficulty controlling their actions. Teachers frequently mistake their impulsive tendencies as rudeness, disregard for others, or willful disobedience. These students are likely to explore new situations with enthusiasm and touch objects without asking for permission. Their unrestrained behavior may lead to careless accidents, the disapproval and irritation of teachers, and rejection from peers. Because of the nature of this type of ADHD, it is typically identified more easily than the inattentive type. The hyperactive type of ADHD appears to be more prevalent in boys than in girls.

Symptoms may be situation-specific. For example, students with ADHD may not exhibit some behaviors at home if that environment is less stressful, less stimulating, or is more structured than the school setting. Or students may be able to stay on task when doing a project they find enjoyable, such as an art project. They may have a harder time when they have to work on something that is more difficult for them.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that an estimated 11 percent of children ages 4-17 were diagnosed with ADHD in 2011 and that boys were almost twice as likely to be diagnosed than girls. ADHD is the leading cause of referrals to mental health professionals and special education programs, as well as the juvenile justice system. Students with the inattentive type (those who are not hyperactive) tend to be overlooked in school or dismissed as “quiet and unmotivated” because they can’t get organized or do their work on time.

Students with ADHD are at higher risk for learning disorders, anxiety disorders, conduct disorder, and mood disorders such as depression. Without proper treatment, students are at risk for school failure. They may also have

difficulty maintaining friendships, and their self-esteem will suffer from experiencing frequent failure because of their disorder.

If you suspect that a student has ADHD, refer the student for a mental health assessment. Many students benefit from medications. A professional, such as a child psychiatrist, pediatrician, or neurologist who is experienced in treating ADHD, must manage medications. In addition, many mental health professionals will work with the family and school personnel to find ways to teach students with ADHD more effectively.

Students identified with ADHD at a young age should be monitored because changing symptoms may indicate related disorders such as bipolar disorder, Tourette's disorder, or underlying conditions such as a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Remember that ADHD is a neurobiological disorder. Students can't get organized or learn social skills on their own, but educators can find interventions that may greatly increase a student's capacity to succeed.

Educational Implications

Children with ADHD may have trouble staying on task or finishing assignments. They may lose books, supplies, and homework. Students may blurt out answers before teachers can finish asking the question. They may be irritable, impatient, hard to discipline, clumsy, reckless, and accident-prone. Students with ADHD may struggle with low tolerance for frustration and have trouble following rules. Often they are poor sports in games, and they may seem intrusive or bossy in their play. As a result, students with ADHD face social challenges because their peers may perceive them as immature and annoying, or students may dislike them. They may come to see themselves as bad and lazy, and powerless to do any better. This chain of failure can lead to depression, low self-esteem, behavior problems, and, unfortunately, school failure.

Instructional Strategies and Classroom Accommodations

- Have the student check with the teacher or have the teacher check with the student to ensure that assignments have been written down correctly. Some teachers initial an assignment notebook to indicate that information is correct.
- Consider a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA). Understanding the purpose or function of the student's behaviors may help you respond with more effective interventions.
- Once you have a better understanding of a student's behaviors and learning style, consider modifying or adapting the curriculum and environment.
- Provide consistent structure and clearly define your expectations.
- When giving instructions or tasks, it's helpful to break them into numerous steps. Give the student one or two steps at a time.
- Allow the student to turn in late work for full credit.
- Allow the student to redo assignments to improve score or final grade.
- Allow the student to move about within reason. For example, give them tasks that require them to get out of their seat, such as passing out papers, or give them short breaks to exercise or stretch.
- Teach social skills.
- Catch your student being good. Look for positive behaviors to reward and reinforce. Many students with ADHD receive constant criticism for their behavior, which creates a cycle of negative behavior, poor self-esteem, and attention seeking.
- Have a secret code to help the student recognize that they have gotten off task and must refocus. This helps the student stay on task without embarrassment.
- Allow a student to use tables or formulas—memorization may be very difficult.
- Allow the student to answer directly in a booklet. This reduces the amount of movement and distraction during an assignment.
- Teach students with ADHD self-monitoring techniques. Help them identify social cues from their peers and adults that would suggest a need for a behavior change. Also help students identify an aid or technique that will help them calm down or refocus, such as exercise, short breaks away from stimulation, or meditation.
- Reduce stress and pressure whenever possible. Students with ADHD are easily frustrated. Stress and pressure can break down a student's self-control and lead to inappropriate behaviors.
- Ask parents what works at home.

For additional suggestions on classroom strategies and modifications, see An Educator's Guide to Children's Mental Health chapter on Meeting the Needs of All Students.