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ADHD: DOES MY CHILD HAVE IT?

What are the signs of ADHD?

ADHD stands for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. Children with ADHD may have hyperactive behavior, a lack of attention and difficulty concentrating. Most children with ADHD have signs of both hyperactivity and attention problems. Some children, though, may have only signs of inattention. This kind of problem used to be called attention-deficit disorder (ADD). ADD is now thought of as a form of ADHD.

How can I tell if my child has ADHD?

It might help to ask yourself some questions about your child's behavior. This handout lists some of the information we will review.

How long has your child been too active?

Hyperactive children with ADHD have had problems with hyperactive, impulsive behavior since before age 7. Mothers of children with ADHD sometimes even remember that their baby was very active in the womb. Also, children with ADHD are often described by their parents as having been fussy and difficult to quiet as babies.

Is your child's behavior a problem in several different settings?

ADHD is less likely if your child only shows behavior problems at home, not in other places, such as at school or at the grocery store. ADHD problems often become worse where there is more activity and noise. Children with ADHD show some of the signs of hyperactivity in several different settings, for example, in the classroom, on the playground, and at home watching TV. (Children with ADHD are often able to stay focused on the fast pace of cartoons and video games. But even though their eyes are on the screen, they're fidgeting.)

When your child is misbehaving, does he or she seem to be off in "another world"?

Children with ADHD cannot control at least some of their hyperactive, impulsive behavior. Suspect ADHD if your child appears off in "another world" and does not respond to you when he or she is climbing or misbehaving in some way. In contrast, children who misbehave on purpose often will look to see how adults react to their misbehavior.

Are you more angry with your child or more frustrated?

Sometimes it's normal for parents to get angry with their children, especially when they misbehave on purpose. The hyperactivity of children with ADHD is irritating, but parents can sense that their child simply can't--as opposed to won't--sit still or quiet down. The parents feel more frustrated than angry.

Can your child stick to activities, or is the house full of unfinished games and projects?

Children with ADHD often lose interest in an activity in 5 minutes--or even less. They go from one activity to another, and another and another. You may ask your child many times to clean up, but he or she will not even be able to focus long enough to do that.

Has disciplining your child worked?

Parents of children with ADHD usually have "tried everything"--from ignoring their child's misbehavior, to "time-outs," to spanking--but nothing seems to work.

What should I do if I think my child has ADHD?

Contact our office. A diagnosis of ADHD can be made only by getting information about your child's behavior from several people who know your child. The physician will ask you questions and may want to get information from your child's teachers or anyone else who is familiar with your child's behavior. We will do vision and hearing tests if these tests haven't been done recently.

It might be hard to tell if your child has ADHD. For this reason, we may want your child to see someone, such as a psychologist, who specializes in helping children with behavior problems. Many children with ADHD aren't hyperactive in the doctor's office.

We may recommend trying medicine to see if it helps to control your child's hyperactive behavior. A trial of medicine alone cannot be the basis for diagnosing ADHD, but it can be an important part of evaluating your child if ADHD is suspected.