

ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDERS



Attention Deficit Disorder (also known as ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are terms used to describe patterns of behaviour that appear most often in school-aged children. Children with these disorders are inattentive, overly impulsive and, in the case of ADHD, hyperactive. They have difficulty sitting still, attending to one thing for a long period of time, and may seem overactive.

What are ADD and ADHD?

Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder are disorders that interfere with the learning process because they reduce the child's ability to pay attention. It is important to understand that ADD and ADHD are not disabilities in the learning process, although they may be present in addition to a learning disability. A learning disability is a neurological condition that affects the child's ability to learn.

ADD and ADHD are difficult to diagnose because they affect all areas of a child's life: family, school, friendships, team sports and work.

This pamphlet is intended to provide only some basic information on the impact of ADD and ADHD on the child and the potential emotional, social and family problems that may result. If you need more detailed information, you should contact a community organization that is dedicated to children with attention deficit disorders.

What are the emotional effects of ADD and ADHD?

Your child can have a wide range of emotional responses to ADD and ADHD, which can be confusing to both him/ her and to you. He / she may have already experienced years of frustration and failure which can lead to emotional stresses and further problems.

Some of the emotional responses are:

- aggressive or violent behaviour - Feelings of failure can result in aggressive or violent behaviour at home or outside it
- withdrawal, anxiety and depression - Your child may turn inward and try to isolate him/herself from the rest of the work, or he/she may become anxious and depressed.
- low self-esteem - If your child has been unable to have positive experiences because of ADD or ADHD, he/she will likely have trouble developing a healthy self-esteem.
- physical symptoms - Possibly, your child will bury his/her feelings so deeply that they will come out in the form of headaches, stomach or back aches, or pains in the hands or legs.

What are the social effects?

Because ADD and ADHD are so hard to diagnose, you may be confused by your child's social behaviour. A teacher may not investigate difficult or disruptive behaviour because he / she

cannot see the underlying attention problems. Two ways your child may try to mask his/her difficulty in the classroom or in a peer group are by:

- becoming the "class clown" or the "class bully," or
- avoiding or refusing to become involved in activities where he/she is unsure of success.

How do ADD and ADHD affect the family?

All members of your family will be affected by these disorders. As a parent, you may feel anger and guilt, and wonder if you could have prevented the problem or if you should have noticed it earlier. Your child's brothers and sisters may be confused about what exactly ADD and ADHD are. They may experience anger and anxiety about the situation because of their lack of understanding.

Overcoming the difficulties

If you think your child may have ADD or ADHD, your first goal should be to reduce the stress caused by the confusion and frustration your child is experiencing. It will be best if you work together with a team of professionals to find out what is wrong:

- Your family doctor should examine your child for physical causes, including seeing, hearing or speech problems.
- A psychiatrist should work with your child to see if there are any emotional or social problems in addition to or caused by ADD or ADHD.
- A psychologist or sociologist should examine the family environment.
- An education specialist should examine your child's academic abilities and test for any seeing, hearing or speech difficulties.

Once this professional team has evaluated your child completely and the problem is correctly diagnosed, the team can recommend the most appropriate treatment program for your child.

With the right kind of help, most children with ADD or ADHD overcome their disabilities, and their emotional problems usually disappear. They do better at school, improve their relationships with family and friends, and will be more likely to achieve their full potential. With help from family, school and other professional people, children with ADD or ADHD have more than a good chance to grow up to be healthy, happy and productive adults.

Getting further help

If emotional, family or social problems continue, your child may need the support of a mental health professional. Your family doctor can refer you to the most appropriate people. Counselling for your child and the rest of the family may be what is needed to ease the problems and to teach all family members how to support each other through the difficult times.

Do you need more information?

If you are concerned that your child may have ADD or ADHD, talk to your family doctor or your child's school; they can refer you to professionals who can assess your child's behaviour. If you need more information or family support, contact a community organization dedicated to children with attention deficit disorders or learning disabilities, which can help you find additional support.