

# Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Question: **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder receives a lot of press, but what is it exactly?**

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common childhood disorders affecting more than 2 million children each year and can continue through adolescence and adulthood. ADHD is a diagnosis applied to children (mostly) who consistently display behaviors, such as inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity. Examples of this would be children having a hard time keeping their minds on a task and getting bored after just a few minutes. They often can't sit still and may talk or dash about incessantly. Not every child, or adult, with these behaviors has ADHD; scientists have learned a lot about this condition over the past decade and are now able to recognize and treat it with medication and therapy. It's important to remember that people with ADHD aren't doing it on purpose – the disorder causes these behaviors and the children aren't to blame.

Scientists are not sure what causes ADHD, although many studies suggest that genes play a large role. Like many other illnesses, ADHD probably results from a combination of factors. In addition to genetics, researchers are looking at possible environmental factors and are studying how brain injuries, nutrition, and social environments might contribute to ADHD.

It is normal for all children to be inattentive, hyperactive or impulsive at times, but for children with ADHD, these behaviors are more severe and occur often. To be diagnosed with the disorder, a child must have symptoms for six or more months and to a degree that is greater than other children of the same age and developmental level.

Children who have symptoms of **inattention** may:

- Be easily distracted, miss details, forget things and frequently switch from one activity to another
- Have difficulty focusing on one thing
- Become bored with a task after only a few minutes, unless they are doing something enjoyable
- Have difficulty focusing attention on organizing and completing a task or learning something new
- Have trouble completing or turning in homework assignments, often lose things (e.g., pencils, toys, assignments) needed to complete tasks or activities
- Not seem to listen when spoken to
- Daydream, become easily confused and move slowly
- Have difficulty processing information as quickly and accurately as others
- Struggle to follow instructions.

Children who have symptoms of **hyperactivity** may:

- Fidget and squirm in their seats
- Talk nonstop
- Dash around, touching or playing with anything and everything in sight
- Have trouble sitting still during dinner, school, and story time
- Be constantly in motion
- Have difficulty doing quiet tasks or activities.

Children who have symptoms of **impulsivity** may:

- Be very impatient
- Blurt out inappropriate comments, show their emotions without restraint, and act without regard for consequences
- Have difficulty waiting for things they want or waiting their turns in games
- Often interrupt conversations or others' activities.

Most ADHD symptoms usually appear early in life, often between the ages of 3 and 6 years. Determining if a child has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder takes time and effort. There is no single test to diagnose the disorder. As a result, a comprehensive evaluation is necessary to establish the diagnosis, rule out other causes, and determine the presence or absence of coexisting conditions.

With the right kind of help, most children and teens with ADHD can usually improve dramatically. Available treatments focus on reducing the symptoms of ADHD and improving functioning. For some children, increased structure and behavioral management techniques are enough. For others, a combination of treatment strategies, including behavioral management, parenting classes and medications are needed to manage their symptoms.

If you would like to speak confidentially with a trained professional about your child, please contact COMCARE of Sedgwick County at 316-660-7540. COMCARE is the licensed Community Mental Health Center for all residents of Sedgwick County.

***Jody Patterson, LCP is the director of COMCARE's Children's Services. Jody has been involved with children's mental health programs and services for more than 18 years. She is dedicated to helping children live healthy and productive lives in the community. In addition, Jody is involved in a number of local and state workgroups focused on improving the quality of life for children experiencing mental health disorders and their families***