



ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

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Parenting any child is a challenging job. But parenting a child with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) takes those challenges to new heights. It takes more planning, it takes more involvement and it takes more patients.

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a disorder with three main attributes. They are:

Inattention – A child with ADHD may find it extremely difficult to pay attention to things that he finds neither stimulating nor highly interesting.

Hyperactivity – A child with ADHD may not be able to sit still in situations, such as classroom circle time. After a few minutes a child may get up, walk around the room, poke his neighbour in the ribs or do other things almost certain to get him into trouble.

Impulsivity – A child with ADHD may not always be able to stop himself from saying or doing something he knows is inappropriate. Children with ADHD act first and think later.

How is ADHD diagnosed?

Symptoms are:

- Pervasive (they happen daily)
- Happen in at least two settings in the person's life (home and school)
- Are inappropriate for the child's age
- Begin before the age of twelve
- Are long term (present for at least 6 months)
- Cannot be explained by another reason or another disorder (ie. a trauma in the child's life – death, divorce; absence seizures – where child blanks out for a few seconds; autistic spectrum disorder – Aspergers; Anxiety; Depression; an undiagnosed learning disability)

It is, however, possible for a child to have any of these conditions in addition to having ADHD

How can I get a professional diagnosis for my child?

- Developmental paediatrician
- Child Psychiatrist
- Psychologist
- Paediatric Neurologist

If your child has ADHD, he will be diagnosed with one of three types. These are

- **ADHD, Predominantly Inattentive Type** (Children have significant difficulty focusing and paying attention. They are not especially hyperactive or impulsive)
- **ADHD, Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Type** (Children have significant difficulty sitting still and thinking before they speak or act. They can focus when these problems are under control)
- **ADHD, Combined Type** (Children are inattentive, hyperactive and impulsive)

What Causes ADHD?

Neurobiology, Genetics - a poor or dysfunctional environment, lack of structure, consistency and routine can make symptoms seem worse.

Why is it important to treat ADHD?

- Children with untreated ADHD are at risk for school failure
- They may also have behaviour problems
- ADHD can also wreak havoc with family life - a lot of yelling, punishment after punishment with no positive result, frustrated parents and a child who feels helpless and hopeless.
- Making friends is difficult for many children with ADHD. They may fail to pick up on social cues, such as the body language children use to say “join us”, or “you’re standing to close”.
- Children who are inattentive can lose track of the back and forth social conversation.
- Children who are hyperactive or impulsive may have trouble controlling their behaviour if they get upset. They may respond with aggression to mild or even good-natured teasing.

Tips for Parents

Give Rewards/Token System: Consider giving your child points or tokens for finishing tasks or showing good behaviour. Let him spend his points to earn rewards. Agree with your child in advance about everything – the tasks you want done, the behaviour you expect, the rewards and the consequences. Write these down and place them in a visible place.

Be clear and specific: Tell your child exactly what you want him to do and break it down into steps: “Pick up the shirts from the floor. Hang them in your cupboard”. Give another direction only after he completes the first task. Also focus on behaviour you want to see, rather than behaviour you want to stop (ie. “Please put your hands in your lap and keep them there,” rather than “don’t touch anything on the table”).

Stick to a schedule: Children with ADHD usually thrive on structure and routine. Have regular times for meals, homework, play and sleep. Try to let your child know ahead of time if there is going to be a change.

Get organized: It is essential for a child with ADHD to have a set place to put things like books, homework, notes for school. He should clean up every day at the same time.

Homework help: When doing homework ask a child to read the instruction carefully, repeat in his own words what is required of him to do, complete the task, re-check work for mistakes and praise himself for work well done.

Encourage strengths: Allow your child plenty of time to do the things he enjoys and is good at. This may boost her self-esteem.

Help your child make friends: Set up play dates; involve your child in structured extra mural activities (this allows your child to practice social skills in a supervised environment).

Give unconditional love: You won’t always like your child’s behaviour, but make sure he knows you love him no matter what.

Help at School

The following services (of benefit to the ADHD child) are offered by the Phoenix Learning Support Centre at the German School:

- Marburger Concentration Training (Grade 0 to Grade Four – here children learn effective learning techniques, relaxation techniques, how to lessen impulsivity, etc.)
- Social Skills Training (children learn skills ranging from how to join in a game, how to consider another person’s feelings and point of view, as well as how to solve conflict situations that may arise)
- Cognitive, Scholastic and Emotional Assessments by Psychologists
- Individual therapy
- Parental guidance
- Referral to family therapy, developmental paediatrician, child neurologist, child psychiatrist, etc.

Medication

- Medication is part of the treatment package for many children with ADHD. Despite its controversy, medication is a highly effective way to treat ADHD symptoms.