

# **WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT ADHD**

**(This handout is intended to guide parents who suspect that their child may have ADHD)**

**The following introduction is taken from the American Academy of Pediatrics handout “Understanding ADHD”**

Almost all children have times when their behavior veers out of control. They may speed about in constant motion, make noise nonstop, refuse to wait their turn, and crash into everything around them. At other times they may drift as if in a daydream, failing to pay attention or finish what they start.

However, for some children, these kinds of behaviors are more than an occasional problem. Children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) have behavior problems that are so frequent and severe that they interfere with their ability to live normal lives.

These children often have trouble getting along with siblings and other children at school, at home, and in other settings. Those who have trouble paying attention usually have trouble learning. An impulsive nature may put them in actual physical danger. Because children with ADHD have difficulty controlling this behavior, they may be labeled "bad kids" or "space cadets."

Left untreated, some of the children with ADHD will continue to have serious, lifelong problems, such as poor grades in school, run-ins with the law, failed relationships, and the inability to keep a job.

Effective treatment is available. If your child has ADHD, your pediatrician can offer a long-term treatment plan to help your child lead a happy and healthy life. As a parent, you have a very important role in this treatment.

## **What is ADHD?**

ADHD is a condition of the brain that makes it difficult for children to control their behavior. It is one of the most common chronic conditions of childhood. It affects 4% to 12% of school-aged children. About 3 times more boys than girls are diagnosed with ADHD.

The condition affects behavior in specific ways.

## **Are there different types of ADHD?**

Not all children with ADHD have all the symptoms. The symptoms usually are classified as the following types of ADHD:

**Inattentive only** (formerly known as attention-deficit disorder [ADD])—Children with this form of ADHD are not overly active. Because they do not disrupt the classroom or other activities, their symptoms may not be noticed. Among girls with ADHD, this form is more common.

**Hyperactive/Impulsive**—Children with this type of ADHD show both hyperactive and impulsive behavior, but can pay attention. They are the least common group and are frequently younger.

**Combined Inattentive/Hyperactive/Impulsive**—Children with this type of ADHD show a number of symptoms in all 3 dimensions. It is the type that most people think of when they think of ADHD.

## **Diagnosis**

It is difficult to diagnose ADHD in children younger than 4 years. This is because younger children change very rapidly. It is also more difficult to diagnose ADHD once a child becomes a teenager.

There is no single test for ADHD. The process requires several steps and involves gathering a lot of information from multiple sources. You, your child, your child's school, and other caregivers should be involved in assessing your child's behavior.

To confirm a diagnosis of ADHD, symptoms:

Occur in more than one setting, such as home, school, and social situations and cause some impairment

Significantly impair your child's ability to function in some of the activities of daily life, such as schoolwork, relationships with you and her brothers and/or sisters, and relationships with friends or in her ability to function in groups such as sports teams

Start before the child reaches 7 years of age (However, these may not be recognized as ADHD symptoms until a child is older.)

Have continued for more than 6 months

## **WHAT TO DO NEXT???**

The first step is to have your child tested. Testing can be done **privately** or through your **school system**.

If you choose to do this through your **school system**, you must write a letter to your school guidance counselor requesting psycho educational testing for ADHD and/or learning disability depending on your suspicions or concerns. Keep a copy for your records. The school must do the testing within 60 days from the date of your request.

After your child has been tested, your school guidance counselor will schedule a meeting to discuss the results. This meeting may also include your child's teacher. The school will not officially make a diagnosis of ADHD. What they will say is that the testing was or was not "suggestive" of ADHD. They may suggest that you make an appointment with your pediatrician to discuss medication.

If your child attends **private school** a letter asking for an evaluation should be sent to the “Intermediate Unit” (IU) **where the private school is located**. The IU must also evaluate your child within 60 calendar days (minus the summer) from the date you give your written permission. Contact information for school districts and Intermediate Units is available from The Pennsylvania Department of Education on the following website:  
<http://www.edna.ed.state.pa.us/#county>.

If you choose to have your child tested privately by a **psychologist**, it may or may not be covered by your medical insurance. In general, complete psycho educational testing is **not** covered by medical insurance. However, many insurance plans will cover the consultation with the psychologist and often cover basic testing. The psychologist may suggest a trial of behavioral therapy or they may suggest that you discuss medication with your pediatrician.

If the testing is done by a **psychiatrist**, he or she may prescribe medication if indicated. Most psychiatrists either do not accept insurance or require that you first see a psychologist within their practice.

**Once the diagnosis has been made** (either by your school district and/or by a psychologist), the next step is to consider **treatment options**.

Each child's treatment must be tailored to meet his individual needs. In most cases, treatment for ADHD should include:

- \*A long-term management plan with
  - Target outcomes for behavior
  - Follow-up activities and monitoring
- \*Education about ADHD
- \*Teamwork among doctors, parents, teachers, caregivers, other health care professionals, and the child
- \*Medication
- \*Behavior therapy including parent training
- \*Individual and family counseling

If you would like to discuss medication with one of our providers, you should make a consultation appointment. Be sure to specify that you would like to discuss ADHD medication. That way, we can allow enough time in the schedule for a full discussion. **Please do not schedule a consultation until your child has already been tested**. Please drop off or mail your evaluation reports several days before the appointment for us to review ahead of time. Report cards or Emails from teachers can also be helpful if applicable. Please attach a note indicating which doctor will be seeing your child. Please bring your own copies to the appointment in case the reports get lost in the mail.

## **RESOURCES:**

1. Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)

Phone: (800) 233-4050, (301) 306-7070 [www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org)

2. National Attention Deficit Disorder Association (NADDA)

Phone: (847) 432-ADDA (2332) [www.add.org](http://www.add.org)

3. ADDvance Online Resource for Women and Girls with ADHD

[www.addvance.com](http://www.addvance.com)

4. Education Law Center of Pennsylvania

Phone: 215-238-6970 [www.elc-pa.org](http://www.elc-pa.org)