

ADHD - Know the signs.

Learn the signs of ADHD and how treatment can help

There are many reasons a child may have trouble sitting still (often called hyperactivity), following directions, or paying attention. This could be due to age or how mature they are. However, if these happen often, they could be a sign of ADHD.

How can you tell if your child is acting like other children their age or if they are showing signs of ADHD? The answer might depend on the age of your child, along with several other things.

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a condition that makes it hard to do things like pay attention, listen, keep still or wait. A person with ADHD may find it difficult to keep focused in certain situations, such as during school. Some people with ADHD may be able to do things without thinking or find it hard to sit still, but this is not always the case.

ADHD can begin in early childhood but may not really be seen until they begin school. Some children with ADHD grow out of these behaviors as their brain matures. However, some people still have ADHD as an adult.

Signs of ADHD in children

Your child's doctor will see if your child has ADHD based on several behaviors, including attention levels and how active they are. A child with ADHD may have the following signs more than most children their age:

- Trouble sitting still
- Difficulty following directions
- Poor planning and managing work and time
- Difficulties in class (talking at the wrong time, interrupting, leaving seat)
- Forgetful
- Hard time keeping hands to oneself
- Do things without thinking first

ADHD can affect how well a child does in school. But it can also make it harder for them to get along with others and make friends. They may not notice clues other children learn, such as how someone's face and voice give clues about their feelings, this can make it difficult for others to understand and accept them.

Signs of ADHD don't just happen in school though. For their doctor to decide that they have ADHD, the signs must be present for at least 6 months and show up in different settings (school, home, places of worship, when visiting friends).

How to know if it my child has ADHD

Dr. Johnson stresses that it's important not to confuse signs of ADHD with normal activity for their age. Most pediatricians can evaluate for ADHD and refer you to a specialist if needed. A specialist, like a pediatric psychologist, can confirm the diagnosis.

Sometimes ADHD can happen with other conditions such as autism spectrum disorder, depression, anxiety, learning disorders and language disorders. Some conditions can have signs that look like ADHD, but not be caused by ADHD.

Treatment for ADHD in children

“Although there is no ‘cure’ for ADHD”, says Dr. Karni, there are treatments that can help. With the help of medicine, education, therapy and training your child can have an improved quality of life.

One treatment that works well is called “behavior modification”. A child therapist works with the child to find certain actions or behaviors that need to be improved. A reward system may be set up to help the child to work on the action. The therapist will also teach parents how to use the reward system.

There are many different medicines that can help. These medicines should be used together with therapy to help the child best. ADHD medicines may have some side effects, including less of appetite and problems sleeping. Each child responds to medicine differently, and a few may need to be tried before finding the one that works best for them.

Teachers, doctors, and therapist working together are an important part of the treatment plan. Parents can ask for school services, such as a 504 plan, to make sure their child gets the support they needs to learn best in school. The child's doctor and therapist can help parents understand what these are and even go with them during meeting to support the child's learning.

With the right treatment, children with ADHD can learn to manage their symptoms. However, left untreated, ADHD can have long-term effects on a child. These include a higher risk for poor feelings of self-worth, poor relationships with family and friends, dropping out of school, depression, and drug abuse. It's important for parents to see the signs and symptoms of ADHD and to talk with their child's doctor if concerned.

Learn More

See tips for managing ADHD by establishing structure and consistency at home. Learn more about ADHD and how Children's Health can help you find a diagnosis and treatment plan.