

# Let's Talk: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

***Presenter – Ruth Laurito, Clinical Counselor***

Hi, my name is Ruth. Let's talk about attention deficit disorder, sometimes called ADD or ADHD. We hear a lot about attention deficit hyperactivity disorder these days, it's a term commonly thrown around when people feel like they can't concentrate, or that someone is hyperactive or easily distracted. This term is also heard more commonly in schools, and statistics are showing that more kids are being diagnosed with ADHD in recent years, compared to 10 or 20 years ago. In fact, your child's teacher or school counselor may have suggested that your child be evaluated for ADHD, well what does all of this mean? How do you know if your child's symptoms and behaviors are something to worry about, and more importantly, if you are concerned, how do you get help?

## **Inattentive ADHD**

There are three types of ADHD, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The first type is inattentive. Kids with inattentive type may have trouble finishing or following tasks and directions, and they tend to be sluggish and slow to respond and to process information. It's often difficult for them to sift through relevant and irrelevant information, and they may be easily distracted and appear forgetful or careless. Symptoms of inattentive type of ADHD are less noticeable compared to the symptoms of hyperactivity and impulsivity, and as a result, this means that some individuals with a predominantly inattentive subtype of ADHD are often overlooked.

## **Impulsive ADHD**

The second type is hyperactive impulsive type. Kids who have this type of ADHD have symptoms of hyperactivity and feel the need to move constantly. They may struggle with impulse control, and typically they don't have much trouble with inattention. It's often easier to spot signs of this type of ADHD, kids who have it may struggle to sit still in class and to manage their behavior.

## **Combined-type ADHD**

And finally, the third type is combined type. This is the most common type of ADHD. Kids who have it show significant problems with hyperactivity, impulsivity, and inattention. Generally kids with this

type of ADHD struggle with school work, social interaction and everyday activities like completing tasks, brushing their teeth, and even getting dressed.

## Signs of ADHD

Symptoms for ADHD can be varied between individuals and even age groups, but in general, kids with ADHD will often have difficulty with school performance, behavior issues at home and school, and difficulty completing tasks. Many parents say that they have trouble figuring out whether their child has attention problems, or if their child is just being stubborn and choosing not to follow directions. It can be very frustrating to tell your child to go brush his teeth and put on his pajamas, and then 15 minutes later you go to check on him, and you find him playing with toys and neither task is accomplished. It may seem as if kids with ADHD are tuning out their parents, but in reality, these kids are often listening intently to everything. They have difficulty completing tasks because they struggle to filter out the information that doesn't matter and they aren't able to focus on any one thing. While it's frustrating for parents and teachers, remember that this is equally as frustrating for your child, and it's often not something that he or she has control over.

## Common misconceptions

There are some common misconceptions about attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. First, a parent may notice that their child struggles to get a task done, or to even get a task started like homework or chores, but then they'll sit down and play video games or watch TV for hours without being distracted. Here's why, if a task isn't highly interesting, it's really hard for kids with ADHD to get started on it because they have trouble with executive functioning skills. These are the skills that most people use to get organized and to help them get things done. So for kids with ADHD, a low interest level really affects how their brain works. In addition, kids with ADHD may avoid tasks because they're difficult. Both the task and paying attention to it are hard. It's hard to remember that there's a task when you feel overwhelmed with everything because you can't filter out the information around you that you don't need, and let's face it, the past failure makes it hard for them to try again. Secondly, ADHD can be misdiagnosed. Sometimes symptoms from other diagnoses like post traumatic stress disorder, or anxiety can look a lot like ADHD. Though the symptoms may look and sound a lot like ADHD, the cause of them is actually very different. It can be very challenging in these circumstances to figure out which one it is, but it's very important to get an evaluation and an accurate diagnosis so that the child can be given appropriate treatment for the diagnosis and the symptoms.

## Help from your family doctor

Now that we know a little more about what ADHD is, you may be wondering how do you get help. A great place to start is the pediatrician. Talk to your doctor about behaviors and symptoms that you're seeing that are concerning to you. Often the first thing a pediatrician will ask for is a Vanderbilt rating scale. This is a tool commonly used by pediatricians and other clinicians to get a baseline understanding of what's going on with your child. There's a separate form for parents and teachers and they'll want a variety of different situations where you use several different forms over a couple of different days to get an understanding of how the child is doing in each situation. This tool's then used over time to help gauge progress, especially after treatment has started to see if they're responding okay. It's very important that you receive clarity on your child's diagnosis. It's important to know if there's multiple diagnoses going on and if there's more complexity than what it seems like might be going on initially with just a simple ADHD. A lot of pediatricians feel comfortable treating a child with a simple ADHD diagnosis, but when it becomes more complex, your pediatrician may recommend that you take your child to be evaluated by a psychologist, a psychiatrist, or both, and they may request or recommend that additional testing be done. Seeking this evaluation with a specialist is very important to ensure that you have the right diagnosis so that your child is getting the right kind of treatment.

## Find resources online

Once you receive a confirmation that your child has a diagnosis of ADHD, you may be wondering, well what's next? It's very important that you explore various tips and resources and information that are available for parents out there. We live in the information age, and we have the internet at our fingertips, what more could we ask for? Though we do need to be very cautious about the information that we find, there's still a lot of great resources like websites from national organizations to books available at the library. Explore these tips and resources that are available and consider using some of these strategies to support your child. You can find everything from ways to help your child get more organized to strategies for managing difficult behaviors. And remember, it's not only important to find strategies for your child to learn, but as a parent, you can boost your child's success by learning some new strategies for you as a parent to help support your child.

## Consider your options

Talk to your doctor about the various treatment options that are available. There's many options, so be sure to explore and consider as much as you need to feel comfortable making a decision about what's going to be best treatment for your child. There are things like social skills groups, cognitive

behavioral therapy, family therapy, and medications. Those are all commonly recommended treatments for ADHD. Each type of treatment will have unique benefits that are worth consideration.

## Work with your child's school and teachers

And finally, talk to your child's school. Ask them about what resources are available to support kids with ADHD. Educational assessments are often recommended to help identify if there are learning disabilities, which are common for kids with ADHD. The school counselor, social workers, psychologists, those are all typically professionals within the school system that are able to assist for accommodations for kids with ADHD. The principal and the teacher are also great resources, and a great place to start. Ask about individual education plans or IEPs, and 504 plans. These are tools that the school system uses to provide your child with support based on their unique needs. An assessment by a qualified professional at the school is sometimes also needed to initiate one of those specialized plans, and evaluations by private providers are also considered by the school, but not required to obtain services and support. To get more information and start the process, consult with your school, your doctor, or any specialized providers that are working with you and your child.

## Learn more to help

Coping with a child who has ADHD symptoms can feel complicated and very overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be. There are many resources and simple solutions available for families struggling with children who have ADHD symptoms. Knowing what to look for and how to respond can help set you and your child up for success.

*Visual cue: Find additional information online at CHADD: The National Resource on ADHD – [chadd.org](http://chadd.org).*

## Aetna

Reference: Brown, T., Ph.D. The Three Types of ADHD. Understood.com. Accessed September 2017.

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