

“ADHD” – “What’s That?”

"You're not paying attention." "Don't you know where you put your lunch money?" "Stop fidgeting!" "Don't interrupt."

Can you imagine what it would be like to hear people talk to you this way every single day? If you can imagine it, or if it sounds just like what you're used to hearing, then you know what it's like to have ADHD. Those letters stand for a condition called attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Kids who have ADHD are not bad, lazy, or stupid. They have a disorder that means they may have problems paying attention or sitting still in their seats. They can also act on impulse - this means doing things without thinking about them first. Kids with ADHD may spend a lot of time in the principal's office. Sometimes they do things that cause them to get hurt. They might change their friends a lot.

Who Gets ADHD?

About 9% of kids have ADHD. That means out of 100 kids, about 9 of them may have ADHD. So if your school has 300 kids, 24 to 30 of them may have ADHD. Kids who have ADHD usually start having problems in preschool. Boys have ADHD more often than girls. In fact, three times as many boys have ADHD, but no one knows why.

A kid might have a greater chance of developing ADHD if one of his or her relatives already has ADHD or another type of behavior problem. But no one is sure why anyone has ADHD, although scientists and doctors think that it probably has to do with differences in the way people's brains work. No one gets ADHD on purpose, so it isn't ever anyone's fault. And ADHD isn't contagious - you can't catch it from someone like the flu.

What Are the Signs of ADHD?

ADHD can cause kids to act in different ways, depending on who has it. Most kids with ADHD have problems concentrating and paying attention. Some kids with ADHD might also have trouble sitting still in class and waiting for their turn. They might yell out the answers before other kids have a chance to raise their hands.

Sometimes they can be disorganized, distracted, or forgetful. They might lose things and have trouble finishing assignments. They may wiggle around in their seats, move around a lot, talk too much, or interrupt other people's conversations.

It's important to remember that everybody does these things once in a while. It doesn't mean you have ADHD.

Checking It Out

When parents and teachers suspect that a child has ADHD, the first step is to visit the doctor. He or she may then refer the kid to a specialist like a psychologist, psychiatrist, or neurologist who knows about kids who have ADHD and other kinds of behavior problems. Part of the doctor's job is to check for other illnesses that look like ADHD but need different kinds of treatment.

If the Doctor Says It's ADHD

Once the doctor determines that a kid has ADHD, then the doctor, parents, and teachers begin to work together to find out the best way to help. Often this means starting one of the medicines used to treat ADHD, deciding how much medicine is needed, and when to give it. Children with ADHD usually only have to take their medicine once before school, but some may have to go to the nurse in the middle of the school day for medicine.

But children who have ADHD need more than just medicine. They also need help learning how to change the way they act. Some kids with ADHD can learn to do this by using relaxation therapy or behavioral therapy. In relaxation therapy, counselors teach kids how to relax and stay calm by doing deep-breathing exercises and relaxing different muscle groups.

Behaviour Therapy helps kids with ADHD by teaching them to set goals for themselves and by using rewards to help them reach those goals. Teachers can give a kid with ADHD a reward for sitting still in class, for example. And parents can do the same thing at home, by rewarding their children for paying attention, completing their chores, or keeping track of their things. Kids with ADHD may need extra help learning how to do things other kids find easy.

Kids who have ADHD can become depressed or anxious. So for many kids with ADHD, the key to success is not only following the treatment plan from the doctor, but working to build good friendships with other kids, too. Many kids with ADHD find that their symptoms get better as they get older. Adults with ADHD can have happy lives, and they can be very successful in whatever they decide to do.

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