

Is it just kid stuff, or is it ADHD? When to seek help

By Aaron Warnick

As a parent or caregiver, you'll probably be the first one to notice if your child has problems paying attention. And if it happens often enough, you may wonder if it's something more.

All kids can be energetic or distracted, and most of them forget about chores or homework once in awhile. But if that type of behavior becomes a pattern, you should talk to your doctor about attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

ADHD is a common medical condition involving chemicals in the brain. Kids who have it can have trouble concentrating or seem hyperactive and unable to sit still. Around 9% of children between 2 and 17 years old have ADHD.

If ADHD is untreated, it can lead to difficulties in school and in maintaining healthy friendships and relationships. Some kids with ADHD can even experience physical injury, as they may be impulsive

and take more unnecessary risks.

"A child with ADHD finds themselves acting in ways they are unable to control," says Merriam Saunders, MS, LMFT, a family therapist and adjunct faculty in counseling psychology at Dominican University of California. "They may not even know they're doing something wrong and they will get in trouble for it."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a child with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder might:

- ◆ daydream a lot;
- ◆ frequently forget or lose things;
- ◆ squirm or fidget;
- ◆ talk too much, even when it's inappropriate;
- ◆ make careless mistakes or take unnecessary risks; or
- ◆ have trouble taking turns or getting along with others.

Those symptoms aren't really a checklist, however. Some children with ADHD may exhibit all of those behaviors, while other may only show a few.

While boys are three times more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD than girls, the condition is found in all genders. ADHD in girls can be overlooked because of stereotypes of how people think girls should behave.

For example, impulsive talking can be perceived as being chatty, while difficulty controlling emotions might be perceived as being over-emotional.

Parents should look for problematic behavior in three main areas: inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity. With ADHD, a child isn't going to be able to clearly tell you that they're having uncontrollable problems with inattention or hyperactivity, Saunders notes.

"They move through their little world, often getting in trouble — and that creates a secondary problem. They become anxious because they're getting in trouble and not knowing why," Saunders says.

If you suspect your child may have ADHD, the first



>> For more information on ADHD, visit www.cdc.gov/adhd

place to start is with your family doctor. Your physician can rule out other medical reasons your child may be struggling. For example, a child with an undiagnosed vision problem might have difficulty in class because they're not able to read the board.

If your child is diagnosed with ADHD, your health provider will recommend treatment options. Those can range from lifestyle interventions — such as behavioral therapy or making accommodations with your child's school — to medications. ADHD can be managed with the right treatment, CDC says.

It's not just kids who need help managing their ADHD, though. Parents can also benefit from education and therapy so they can learn how to support their children. Among its tips, CDC recommends that parents work to create a routine for their child with ADHD and limit distractions such as noise and TV. You can help your child feel less overwhelmed by limiting their everyday choices and helping them plan ahead for tasks. Praising positive behavior and promoting a healthy lifestyle can also be advantageous, CDC says.

ADHD: It's not just in kids

For many people with ADHD, the condition wanes as they reach their teens. But for others, it does not: Approximately 10 million adults have ADHD, often because it was missed in childhood.

Adults with ADHD may have difficulty consistently performing at work. Day-to-day responsibilities and relationships may be challenging.

According to the Mayo Clinic, adult ADHD symptoms can include disorganization and problems prioritizing, poor time management skills, excessive activity or restlessness, frequent mood swings, and problems completing tasks. Everyone can sometimes experience these symptoms. But if they're disrupting your life, talk to your doctor about ADHD.

