

How GREAT Is Your Child's ATTENTION?

by Dr. Anthony Tanona

It is common for many children to become fidgety, to not want to complete their homework, or to lose focus on occasion. For some, however, this is not due to simply being bored or tired and the symptoms can be so pervasive that it affects their school, home, and social environments. As a parent, you may notice that your child:

- Is displaying poor study skills, struggling academically, or having difficulty getting organized.
- Is labeled as "lazy," "unintelligent," or an "under achiever."
- Tells you they cannot complete tasks or focus at school.
- Struggles to make good decisions or does not appear to think about consequences prior to acting.
- Experiences feelings of anger, powerlessness, or low self-worth or esteem.
- Has difficulty initiating and/or maintaining friendships.

If any of these characteristics sound like your child, then you may notice additional details of his/her lack of awareness.

There are two types of attention to focus on at this point, the Predominately Inattentive and the Hyperactive/Impulsive.

In the Predominately Inattentive type, a child will:

- Fail to give close attention to details and/or make careless mistakes during school, homework, or other activities
- Have difficulty sustaining attention
- Not appear to be listening when spoken to directly
- Struggle to follow through on instructions and does not complete schoolwork and/or chores
- Have difficulty with organization
- Avoid or dislike tasks that require sustained mental effort
- Be easily distracted
- Be forgetful in daily activities

In the Predominately Hyperactive/Impulsive Type, a child will:

- Fidget with hands or feet and/or constantly squirm when sitting
- Have difficulty remaining seated
- Often run around or climbs excessively
- Have difficulty engaging in activities quietly

- Act as if driven by a motor
- Talk excessively
- Blur out answers before questions are completed
- Have difficulty waiting his or her turn
- Often interrupt or intrude on others

If some of the indicators sound like your child, and they demonstrate at least 7 of the Inattentive or 7 of the Hyperactive/Impulsive characteristics they may meet the criteria for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD).

ADHD is a neurobiological disability that affects an individual's concentration, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. Studies have shown that ADHD affects 3 to 5 % of children and adults in the United States. ADHD symptoms arise in early childhood, occurring before the age of seven. The behaviors are long lasting and evident for at least six months.

ADHD diagnoses fall in one of three categories: Predominately Inattentive Type (difficulty focusing and paying attention) often times referred to as ADD, Predominately Hyperactive-Impulsive Type (difficulty staying still and acting without thinking), or Combined Type (symptoms of both Inattentive and Hyperactive-Impulsive Type).

Through the evaluation process, it is important to note that the symptoms must be more frequent or severe than in other children, so it may be helpful to view your child's behavior in comparison to that of others of the same age and gender. For example, it would be considered to be developmentally appropriate for a four-year old to have a shorter attention span and frequently switch tasks, whereas this would be abnormal for an adolescent. Additionally, girls and boys attention and activity levels are different, so what may be developmentally appropriate for a boy may not be for a girl.

When considering the symptoms, it is important to know that they must be present in at least two different settings. If, for example, your child only struggles to focus and displays behavioral problems in math class, it may be due to other causes such as a Learning Disability. Your child may also be able to

focus on certain activities, such as video games, for extended period of times. This is common for both children that have been diagnosed with ADHD and those that have not. Being able to concentrate on a significantly pleasurable task does not necessarily rule-out a diagnosis of ADHD.

If you feel your child may meet criteria for ADHD, reviewing your concerns with



a Licensed Psychologist, Psychiatrist, Neurologist, or Pediatrician will be an important next step.

Individuals with ADHD can be very successful in life. Appropriate assessment and treatment are needed or they may face significant difficulties such as academic struggles and failure, feelings of depression and lowered self esteem, anxiety, poor social relationships, and even substance use. Because of this, it is imperative to assess for ADHD and other potentially co-morbid conditions to help guide academic, psychological, and/or psychiatric treatment.

A full evaluation will lead to an understanding of your child's difficulties and effective treatment planning. The ideal treatment plan should have proactive interventions and strategies. ■

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The Parent Notebook is looking for an Occupational Therapist who specializes in oral motor, early intervention or works as a school specialist to participate on the advisory panel. Please inquire at info@thenbmagazine.com