

ATTENTION AND BEHAVIOR DISORDERS

This chapter focuses on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). The two disorders are discussed together here because they may be confused with each other at times—indeed, they appear under the same classification in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. The information here is intended to help readers distinguish between the two.

ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

The fundamental features of ADHD are chronic inattentiveness and/or hyperactivity or impulsivity that is more severe compared to that of other people at the same age and stage of development.¹ ADHD is classified one of three ways: inattentive type, hyperactive-impulsive type, or combined type.

Behaviors and attitudes that are typical of *inattention* include failure to pay attention to details in schoolwork or work, difficulties paying attention while doing tasks and play, and not paying attention when being spoken to. Inattentive behaviors also include not following through with instructions, failing to finish tasks, and difficulties with organizing tasks. Teens with ADHD may have no interest in doing homework or other tasks that require a lot of attention, may forget about everyday things, and may be easily distracted by outside stimuli (for

example, a noise in the hallway or another student shuffling papers).²

Behaviors that can be described as *hyperactive* include fidgeting or squirming in place or leaving a chair when it is time to sit, and talking excessively. A child with hyperactive behaviors may climb or run around excessively and act as if she is driven by a motor; in adolescents and adults the outward behaviors may not be there, but they may experience feelings of restlessness.³ *Impulsive* behaviors include difficulties waiting turns, blurting out answers out of turn or before questions have even been finished, and interrupting or butting in on others’ conversations or activities.

Who Has ADHD?

It is estimated that 3 to 7 percent of school-age youth have ADHD.⁴ Sometimes symptoms of ADHD are most visible in childhood and gradually lessen in adolescence and adulthood. ADHD seems to run in families, but any youth is at risk for developing ADHD. School factors, social factors, and family support all play a role in the extent to which ADHD negatively affects a person. A supportive environment can go a long way toward helping someone with ADHD succeed.

Diagnosing ADHD

It can be difficult to diagnose ADHD, and it is often misdiagnosed. Children at different developmental stages exhibit different levels of activity, and it’s important to consider their stages of development