

Does My Child Have ADHD?

Many parents worry about this question. The answer comes from children, families, teachers, and doctors working together as a team. Watching your child's behavior at home and in the community is very important to help answer this question. Your doctor will ask you to fill out rating scales about your child. Watching your child's behavior and talking with other adults in the child's life will be important for filling out the forms.

Here are a few tips about what you can do to help answer the question:

Watch your child closely during activities where he or she should pay attention.

- Doing homework
- Doing chores
- During storytelling or reading

Watch your child when you expect him or her to sit for a while or think before acting.

- Sitting through a family meal
- During a religious service
- Crossing the street
- Being frustrated
- With brothers or sisters
- While you are on the phone

Pay attention to how the environment affects your child's behavior. Make changes at home to improve your child's behavior.

- Ensure that your child understands what is expected. Speak slowly to your child. Have your child repeat the instructions.
- Turn off the TV or computer games during meals and homework. Also, close the curtains if it will help your child pay attention to what he or she needs to be doing.
- Provide structure to home life, such as regular mealtimes and bedtime. Write down the schedule and put it where the entire family can see it. Stick to the schedule.
- Provide your child with planned breaks during long assignments.
- Give rewards for paying attention and sitting, not just for getting things right and finishing. Some rewards might be: dessert for sitting through a meal, outdoor play for finishing homework, and praise for talking through problems.
- Try to find out what things set off problem behaviors. See if you can eliminate the triggers.

If your child spends time in 2 households, compare observations.

- Consult your child's other parent about behavior in that home. Cooperation between parents in this area really helps the child.
- If the child behaves differently, consider differences in the environment that may explain the difference in behavior. Differences are common and not a mark of good or bad parenting.

Talk to your child's teacher.

- Learn about your child's behavior at school. Talk about how your child does during academic lessons and also during play with other children.
- Compare your child's behavior in subjects he or she likes and those in which he or she has trouble with the work.
- Determine how the environment at school affects your child's behavior. When does your child perform well? What events trigger problem behaviors?
- Consider with the teacher whether your child's learning abilities should be evaluated at school. If he or she has poor grades in all subjects or in just a few subjects or requires extra time and effort to learn material, then a learning evaluation may be valuable.

Gather impressions from other adult caregivers who know your child well.

- Scout leaders or religious instructors who see your child during structured activities and during play with other children
- Relatives or neighbors who spend time with your child
- Determine how other environments affect your child's behavior. When does your child perform well? What events trigger problem behaviors?

Make an appointment to see your child's doctor.

- Let the receptionist know you are concerned that your child might have ADHD.
- If possible, arrange a visit when both parents can attend.

Adapted from materials by Heidi Feldman, MD, PhD

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

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