

Attention-Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Symptoms and Diagnosis of ADHD

Deciding if a child has ADHD is a process with several steps. This page gives you an overview of how ADHD is diagnosed. There is no single test to diagnose ADHD, and many other problems, like sleep disorders, anxiety, depression, and certain types of learning disabilities, can have similar symptoms.

If you are concerned about whether a child might have ADHD, the first step is to talk with a healthcare provider to find out if the symptoms fit the diagnosis. [The diagnosis can be made by a mental health professional, like a psychologist or psychiatrist, or by a primary care provider, like a pediatrician.](#)

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that healthcare providers ask parents, teachers, and other adults who care for the child about the child's behavior in different settings, like at home, school, or with peers. [Read more about the recommendations.](#)

The healthcare provider should also determine whether the child has another condition that can either explain the symptoms better, or that occurs at the same time as ADHD. [Read more about other concerns and conditions.](#)



How is ADHD diagnosed?

Healthcare providers use the guidelines in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth edition (DSM-5)¹, to help diagnose ADHD. This diagnostic standard helps ensure that people are appropriately diagnosed and treated for ADHD. Using the same standard across communities can also help determine how many children have ADHD, and how public health is impacted by this condition.

Here are the criteria in shortened form. Please note that they are presented just for your information. Only trained healthcare providers can diagnose or treat ADHD.

Need help?

Get information and support from the [National Resource Center on ADHD external icon](#)

DSM-5 Criteria for ADHD

People with ADHD show a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity–impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development:

1. **Inattention: Six or more symptoms of inattention for children up to age 16 years, or five or more for adolescents age 17 years and older and adults; symptoms of inattention have been present for at least 6 months, and they are inappropriate for developmental level:**
 - o Often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, at work, or with other activities.
 - o Often has trouble holding attention on tasks or play activities.
 - o Often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly.
 - o Often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace (e.g., loses focus, side-tracked).

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/diagnosis.html>