

Sit Still and Pay Attention

The American Psychiatric Association says that 5% of American children have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Centers for Disease Control says that 11% of American children ages 4-17 have the disorder.

We sometimes encourage parents to talk to their pediatrician about the symptoms of ADHD that they are seeing in their child. There are three types according to the the most recent Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM - 5). A professional diagnosing ADHD can offer a diagnosis as inattentive type, hyperactive-impulsive type or combined type. I am not advocating in this article for medical intervention - medication - this is something best discussed with a pediatrician.

Following are symptoms of inattentive type

- Often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, at work, or with other activities.
- Often has trouble holding attention on tasks or play activities.
- Often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly.
- Often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace (e.g., loses focus, side-tracked).
- Often has trouble organizing tasks and activities.
- Often avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to do tasks that require mental effort over a long period of time (such as schoolwork or homework).
- Often loses things necessary for tasks and activities (e.g. school materials, pencils, books, tools, wallets, keys, paperwork, eyeglasses, mobile telephones).
- Is often easily distracted
- Is often forgetful in daily activities.

Following are symptoms of hyperactivity and impulsivity

- Often fidgets with or taps hands or feet, or squirms in seat.
- Often leaves seat in situations when remaining seated is expected.
- Often runs about or climbs in situations where it is not appropriate (adolescents or adults may be limited to feeling restless).
- Often unable to play or take part in leisure activities quietly.
- Is often “on the go” acting as if “driven by a motor”.
- Often talks excessively.
- Often blurts out an answer before a question has been completed.
- Often has trouble waiting his/her turn.
- Often interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g., butts into conversations or games)

Most children with ADHD also struggle with Executive Functioning which is when brain functions impair a person's ability to analyze, plan, organize, schedule and complete tasks. There is a major overlap in symptoms and treatment between ADHD and EFD (Executive Functioning Disorder).

In Chapter 3 entitled *Strategies to Empower, Not Control, Kids Labeled ADD/ADHD* from [ADD/ADHD Alternatives in the Classroom](#), Thomas Armstrong, director of the Yale Clinic for Attention and Related Disorders writes about other interventions at home and school regardless of whether or not the pediatrician suggests the use of medication.

Stimulation - Armstrong cites Sydney Zentall at Purdue University. She and her colleagues have emphasized providing a stimulating learning environment. Her underlying premise is that many children who are identified as ADD or ADHD are under-stimulated, and require higher doses of stimulation than the "average" person.

Use of technology - Educators know that strategic use of technology can be helpful for students who have attention issues. The following attributes of computer technology are helpful for students with ADD/ADHD: instant feedback, ability to self-control stimuli, bright colors and sounds, and the interactive aspect.

Hold a positive image - As parents and teachers we sometimes need to remind ourselves of the positive traits of students with ADD/ADHD. Armstrong suggests that we make a list of the talents, interests, and competencies of each child to help our image of the child when we might be overwhelmed by some of the negative behaviors. And consider positive terms and descriptors such as *creative, exuberant, imaginative, spirited* to replace terms that tend to enter our brains when the child is dysregulated.

Other interventions from the ADHD and EFD literature include:

- Make information external and visual– using cards, signs, symbols, sticky notes, lists, journals, and apps.
- Make time external by using clocks, timers, computers, counters, and other devices that track time intervals.
- Use external motivation, like a points system, and daily school report cards shared with parents. Williston Central uses a system that we call CAT- tracks (Can Achieve Target) for keeping track of individual student behavior.

For more information regarding current thinking about ADHD see this article excerpted from Thomas Brown's book [A New Understanding of ADHD in Children and Adults](#) (2013).

Finally, we are fortunate to have skilled and experienced school psychologists who stay current on the literature and are happy to consult with teachers and parents about this and other student challenges.