

Understanding

By Manish Saran, MD

The start of the school is not only another year of learning, but also for many another year of difficulty learning. When your child enters school for the first time or moves to a higher grade, you may get a note or a phone call because he or she is disruptive in class or will not pay attention. Although there are many causes for this that your doctor needs to rule out, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is by far the most common.

ADHD comes in a few varieties: inattentive type, hyperactive type and combined type that will have features of both.

Inattentive

The inattentive type seems to be more common in girls and often will go unnoticed. The child is sitting quietly in class and may even be looking at the teacher, yet she isn't learning. Instead, she will daydream or be easily distracted by everything else going on around her. When she does homework or tests, she will make careless mistakes because she didn't read the question carefully, causing her to lose points even if she knew the answer. At home you should have noticed some problems also, like when you call her she won't respond right away, or she may be really forgetful. For example, you will tell her to feed the dog and a few minutes later she doesn't



remember you telling her. It can be very frustrating for you and your child.

Hyperactive

What tends to be more frustrating for teachers and parents alike is the hyperactive child. Most kids, particularly young kids, have loads of energy. They will run around, climb things, do silly things they should know better not to do — basically act first and think later. (or not at all). However, when they

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are at school they will behave appropriately and save all that energy for home, but will eventually tucker out. When they are unable to calm themselves down appropriately, then they may have ADHD. These children may squirm in their seats, talk during class and interrupt others while they are talking. The impulsivity can also be dangerous — they may climb too high or run in the street. These are the kids you have to watch all the time, and they really need to be treated.

Yes, many kids (and adults, too) who do not have ADHD will do some of what I describe, but it depends on how many of the symptoms they have, if they have it at both school and home, and how much it impairs them. Your doctor will use reports by you and the teacher to diagnose ADHD and if your child does have it, then you and your doctor can decide if it should be treated with medication.

Treatment

There are a variety of medicines that work differently and the treatment has to be tailored to the individual child. All medicines have side effects and

you need to discuss them with your doctor. There are some behavioral techniques that can help with impulsivity, simple games like red light/green light or martial arts. Poor attention will generally need to be treated with medicine, however.

Other more serious conditions that cause ADHD symptoms or is associated with it should also be considered, such as depression and anxiety or a specific learning disorder. You should consider seeing a specialist if your child isn't getting better or getting worse with medicine, if they are younger than 5, or if you just feel there is something else wrong. With proper diagnosis and treatment, your child will be happier, the teacher will be happier, and you will be happier making for a great school year.

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