

What is ADHD?

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder is a neurobiological condition that affects about eight percent of school-age children. That means two students in every classroom of 25 may struggle with its classic symptoms: hyperactivity, impulsivity, and inattention. About four percent of adults wrestle with the traits of ADHD throughout their entire lives, some of them without knowing why. ADHD can be a hidden disorder.

Research clearly demonstrates that ADHD interferes with executive functioning, a set of skills that helps people get things done. These skills are managed by the brain's frontal lobe, its control center.

Most children, teens, and adults with ADHD struggle with distractions, procrastination, time management, disorganization, paper nightmares, emotional outbursts, poor planning, losing things, and unfinished projects. These difficulties with self-regulation can lead to problems at home, school, and work. Many also struggle with the belief that they can't reach their goals because of their ADHD.

The disorder can also delay social development. Individuals may experience up to a 30 percent developmental delay in age-appropriate skills and emotional development. For example, a 10-year-old may act more like a 7-year-old.

Up to 70 percent of children with ADHD have at least one other coexisting condition, such as a learning disability, anxiety, depression, or obsessive-compulsive disorder. Nearly all of them—a whopping 90 percent—will struggle academically. Up to 67 percent of children will carry ADHD into adulthood, and the family impact is often significant.

We know that ADHD is a *performance* deficit, not an *intelligence* deficit. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to maintain not only a strength-based approach, but a disability perspective. Having ADHD does not equal “being” ADHD! With early identification and treatment, children, adolescents, and adults with ADHD can be successful.

No single test diagnoses ADHD. A comprehensive evaluation by a mental health professional, such as a psychiatrist or psychologist, is necessary to establish the diagnosis and rule out other causes. A complete evaluation will include a comprehensive medical history, ADHD symptom checklists, a standard behavioral rating scale, screening for possible co-existing conditions, a review of past evaluations and school records, and possibly psychometric testing.

When speaking about the treatment of ADHD, the key word is multimodal. This means that the best outcome occurs when many interventions work together as part of a comprehensive treatment plan. A team approach may include medication, parent training, behavioral intervention, school and work supports, ADHD education, ADHD coaching, and community support.

CHADD, www.chadd.org, is the premier association for families and adults with ADHD. Membership includes the latest information on treatment, education, and rights for people with ADHD. It links one to others living with ADHD and engages in federal and state advocacy on behalf of all people with ADHD. Mental Health America of Northeast Indiana hosts a CHADD Adult Support Group that meets the first Thursday of each month. For details, contact Cheryl at (260) 415-3412.

The National Resource Center on ADHD: www.help4ADHD.org/NRC, is the national clearinghouse of information and resources on ADHD. A program of CHADD, the NRC is a nonprofit organization funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. Information found on its site is reliable, scientific, research- and evidence-based.

ADD Joy of Life Coaching, LLC, is a strength-based company dedicated to empowering young people and adults to experience success with ADHD through education, resources and community. You can find more information at www.addjoyoflife.com. For a complimentary session, call (260) 415-3412, or email Cheryl.Gigler@addjoyoflife.com.