

TEENAGERS AND ADHD



ADHD
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ARE ALL TEENAGERS WITH ADHD THE SAME?

Because most individuals with ADHD exhibit the same basic symptoms, people often assume that all teens with ADHD are alike and act the same. But like anyone else, teens with ADHD have different personalities, talents, and interests. They come from different backgrounds and do not always have the same opportunities in life. Some teens with relatively mild ADHD symptoms experience more serious secondary conditions, such as conduct disorder, than those with more severe ADHD symptoms. The reasons may be related to their personalities, abilities, or upbringing, but other factors may also play a role. The balance of risk factors and protective factors is key.



EVOLUTION OF ADHD SYMPTOMS

HYPERACTIVITY

Compared to children with ADHD, teenagers often exhibit fewer physical symptoms. However, they may still have a tendency to fidget. And while they may not squirm and bounce off the walls like younger children often do, they may still be excessively talkative and boisterous. Teenagers often experience inner restlessness, think about many things at once, and struggle to sit still for very long. These symptoms can be particularly problematic in school and other situations that demand concentration.

IMPULSIVITY

Teenagers with ADHD continue to exhibit impulsive behavior and tend to act before they think. They may react poorly to stimuli, becoming irritated or even enraged. They may also be impatient and grow angry when they have to wait. Impulsivity often becomes a significant problem during adolescence. Challenging behavior, limited self-control, and anger issues are not uncommon.

INATTENTION

Nearly all symptoms of inattention are present by the time kids with ADHD reach adolescence. It can be extremely difficult to determine whether a teenager's failure to follow instructions is due to disobedience or inattention. Attention deficits can cause significant problems, for instance in academic settings. Some specialists believe that those who struggle with severe inattention are more likely to have secondary conditions that primarily manifest internally. From this point of view, anxiety and depression are seen as secondary to inattention rather than hyperactivity.

HOW DO TEENAGERS WITH ADHD DIFFER FROM CHILDREN AND ADULTS WITH ADHD?

POWER AND CONTROL

Parents and families, as well as teachers and friends, are a child's most important social connections. Children usually make friends with kids in their immediate environments, often their classmates, and parents generally know their kids' friends. Teenagers, on the other hand, form connections with people outside the family, and these relationships – especially with peers – become very important to them. Because technological advances have all but eliminated geographical barriers, teens may have friends and acquaintances all over the country or even around the world. In that sense, teens with ADHD are just like their peers without ADHD; however, they are more vulnerable and require more supervision and direction. As a result, teens with ADHD often feel that their parents do not trust them, which can lead to conflict.

The power struggle between parent and child often intensifies during adolescence, as teenagers' natural desire for greater independence clashes with parents' need to guide them. Parents may worry that their kids will fall in with the wrong crowd, fail in school and/or not get an appropriate education, or even experiment with drugs. Unlike adults, teenagers are still maturing and have less experience to draw on, so they cannot be expected to take the same level of responsibility for themselves or others. Teenagers often act as though they are all-powerful and immortal. They do not always know their own limitations and may over- or underestimate their abilities and fail to recognize danger like adults. Teenagers also rely heavily on the opinions of their peers.

SHAPING IDENTITY

Adolescents' actions are shaped by their ideas about themselves. Their behavior reflects their concept of who they are or who they want to be. Difficult experiences may damage a teen's self-esteem. In school, self-esteem may suffer because of external circumstances, for example as academics become more demanding and individualized support decreases in the upper grades.

FACTORS THAT IMPACT IDENTITY FORMATION INCLUDE:

- ability to adapt and control behavior
- academic ability and performance
- appearance and personality traits
- sense of security
- popularity
- happiness and contentedness

Parents' self-image, which is manifested in the way they raise their kids, is also very important.



TEENAGERS WITH ADHD AND SCHOOL

School becomes more demanding during the teenage years, with students having more subjects and more teachers than before. Without the close supervision and support that characterized the earlier part of their school careers, students must assume more responsibility for their own learning. Students with ADHD, especially those with inattention, are often ill-equipped for the increased responsibility and start struggling more in school.

Negative messages, repeated mistakes, and poor academic performance can chip away at self-esteem, and a student who had bad experiences in primary school is more likely to drop out of secondary school. Students with ADHD may struggle academically not because they don't understand the material, but because they lack the organizational and study skills needed to succeed. Having a poor sense of time and being required to read lengthy texts, structure essays, and meet assignment deadlines can prove challenging. The student may understand the material but need help getting and staying organized, and it's important to acknowledge this and set realistic expectations. Supporting and empowering the student means making adjustments to suit their abilities and focusing on their strengths rather than their weaknesses. With the right support and resources, students with ADHD can maximize their academic success. When parents and the school unite to support the student, it not only goes a long way toward making the student's experience positive but also increases respect for students with ADHD and improves understanding of the challenges they face.

Because teens with ADHD often struggle in secondary school, it is critical to choose carefully and look for the school and program that suit the student best. Teens tend to want to pick the same programs as their friends without giving the decision any further thought, but it's important not to rush and to make sure that needs and expectations are balanced. In secondary school, academics become more demanding and social interactions more complicated. Often, teens with ADHD have not developed critical study skills and social skills, which inevitably impacts academic performance and well-being.

WHEN CONSIDERING FURTHER EDUCATION, KEEP THE FOLLOWING THINGS IN MIND:

- Which program is the best choice for this student?
- What are their interests?
- What are the student's strengths and weaknesses?
- What are the greatest obstacles?
- It's important to set realistic expectations.
- Does the student need academic support?
- Imagine the future, set goals, and make a plan.





BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS IN ADOLESCENCE

DEFIANCE

Defiance is common and is generally considered a behavioral issue, as it frequently leads to difficulties in interacting with others, such as arguments, angry outbursts, and power struggles. Teens may be defiant simply because they don't want to do what they're supposed to. They may just want to make their own decisions, they may be seeking revenge, or they may not trust themselves to do what they're supposed to do. To address defiance, it's best to start by assuming that the reason behind the student's behavior is that they don't trust themselves to do what they're supposed to do but are unable to communicate their feelings about it.

OPPOSITIONAL DEFIANT DISORDER (ODD)

Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) is characterized by challenging behavior or disobedience as well as insolence and spitefulness. ODD symptoms are less severe than symptoms of conduct disorder (CD) but are nevertheless serious and should be taken as such. There is greater awareness of ODD these days than there used to be.

SYMPTOMS INCLUDE:

- anger and irritability
- combative and defiant behavior
- spitefulness and vindictiveness



CONDUCT DISORDER (CD)

Teens with ODD cope poorly with negative emotions, frequently violate rules, and get into arguments, most often with parents or teachers. Teens with conduct disorder (CD) go further by defying societal norms and moral rules and even breaking the law. Age of onset matters when it comes to prognosis; the outlook is considered worse for those who display symptoms by ten years of age than for those who develop CD as teens. Similarly, the situation is more serious if an individual shows no remorse or has no empathy for those they have wronged. When someone is diagnosed with CD, the condition is also classified as mild, moderate, or severe.

SYMPTOMS INCLUDE:

- Aggression toward people and animals
- Destruction of property
- Deception and/or theft
- Serious violation of rules

Not all teens with ADHD will get caught up in crime or drugs. Although many will get in some kind of trouble, that does not mean that they cannot get back on track.

THERE IS A REASON BEHIND EVERY BEHAVIOR WHAT IS THE ROOT CAUSE OF RISKY BEHAVIOR?

To address challenging behavior, it's important to understand what's behind it. As already mentioned, if there's conflict with a parent or someone else, risky behavior may be a teen's way of trying to assert control. If the teen doesn't trust themselves to do what they're supposed to, the behavior could also be a result of anxiety. Reacting correctly to high-risk behavior requires knowing the individual child or teenager.

Many different factors affect teenagers' health and well-being. Issues related to poor health, disabilities, illness, or death are known as risk factors. Risk factors are also at the root of antisocial behavior and may be individual or environmental. They rarely exist in a vacuum; rather, they depend on and interact with other factors.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS AGAINST ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR

Parents who present a united front, set clear boundaries, and are firm and consistent are protective factors. They take care to cultivate a good relationship with their teen, set realistic expectations, and encourage the teen to actively participate in solving problems. Good role models are another protective factor and play a large part in helping the teen to develop their talents, both at home and school.

ADHD AND DRUG USE

REASONS FOR DRUG USE

Teens often start using drugs because they're experimenting and trying to figure out who they are. Peers or role models may also have an influence. The teenager may be looking for approval or hanging out with people who use drugs and trying to fit in. Teens with ADHD are ill equipped to resist drugs; because of their impulsiveness, they struggle to say no. Curiosity may also be a factor. For some teens, such as those who have anxiety, drug use becomes a coping mechanism.

It has been shown that teens with ADHD are at higher risk for using drugs, especially those with both ADHD and conduct disorder. The risk is even greater for teens who are also dealing with depression.



WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

Warm, authoritative parenting strengthens protective factors and reduces risk factors. While authoritative parents set boundaries, they also listen to and respect their teenagers and look for solutions to problems that may arise.

It's a good idea for parents to set certain non-negotiable ground rules but be willing to negotiate about other things. It's important for parents to work as a team and adhere to the same parenting philosophy.

Although ADHD is rooted in biology, social and environmental factors can determine whether symptoms are mild or severe. Living in a structured environment, enjoying good familial relationships, and having opportunities to cultivate their interests all make a big difference for teens. Adolescents' lives are much more complicated than children's lives, so it is important to be understanding and supportive.



CAN PARENT-TEEN COMMUNICATION BE IMPROVED?

PARENT-TEEN CONVERSATIONS

It's important to have casual chats, for example about the teen's or parents' interests, how everyone's day went, what's new with the teen's friends, what's on the calendar, current events, or whatever else is on everyone's minds. The dinner table is the perfect place to engage the whole family in conversation.

PARENTS SHOULD KEEP IN MIND THE FOLLOWING:

- Are conversations with your teen more focused on what's going wrong than what's going well?
- Are you stirring up bad feelings by trying to talk about problems in happy moments?
- Are you listening to your teen, that is, to their opinions and point of view?
- Does the teen listen to you? If not, how can you get them to listen?

Parents often wonder when they should bring up difficult subjects. The best time to address things is as soon as they come up. It's important to remain calm, focus on the topic at hand, and ask the teen to tell their side of things. A distinction must be made between the individual and their actions. When discussing the issue, make it clear that you are unhappy with your teen's actions without tearing them down with negative comments like, "What's wrong with you? You're always getting into trouble." When a teen has made a mistake, you can ask, "How are you going to deal with this?" Stick to the topic at hand. It's important to look for solutions that everyone can agree to and be satisfied with.



BENEFITS OF ADHD

There are several positive aspects of having ADHD. Just like anyone else, teens with ADHD have a variety of personalities and talents. Everyone has their strengths, and it's important to find ways to let those strengths shine while also addressing the special challenges that ADHD brings.

TEENS WITH ADHD CAN BE:

Creative: Full of ideas and need opportunities to develop them. Many can be very successful in creative fields if given a chance to use their talents.

Powerful: Can have great success in sports, which is the perfect outlet for high energy levels.

Hyperfocused: Can become completely engrossed in a task and even tackle more than one project at a time if they have enough interest.

Kind and gentle: Often fond of children and animals and unafraid to show it.

Energetic and fun: Open and curious, get to know new people easily.

Humorous: Often see the funny side of things and can laugh at their own mistakes.

Inventive: Able to think outside the box, solve problems in new ways, and come up with ideas that no one else has thought of.

Loyal friends: Go to great lengths for people they care about.

Sincere: Unafraid to voice their opinions and be themselves.

Unafraid to try new things: With the combination of curiosity and impulsiveness, they dare to try new and exciting things.

Above all, it's important that teens with ADHD have the chance to do things they are good at and get the recognition that they deserve.



DID YOU KNOW

that ADHD presents differently in teens than in children and adults?

that an authoritative parenting style bolsters protective factors and reduces risk factors?

that negative experiences in primary school increase the chances of dropping out of secondary school?

that it's important to focus on strengths rather than weaknesses?



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