

Are ADD & ADHD Truly Learning Disabilities?

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are often referred to in the same breath by the general public as learning disabilities. However, they actually belong to a separate group of disorders. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) puts ADD and ADHD in the "Other Health Impaired" category. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) estimates that about 20 to 30% of children with ADD or ADHD also have a learning disability, which further complicates the process of distinguishing between the two. Both types of disorders share a similar host of symptoms, but should be regarded individually. Some of the possible signs of ADD and ADHD include:

1. Problems with memory

These include disorganization and forgetfulness. Those with organization issues may constantly lose important personal items, such as their textbooks or house keys. Others who have trouble recalling or retrieving information may often forget to finish their tasks, like chores or homework. In both cases, the short-term memory is the area that is most affected. Using additional cues-sound or pictures, for example-may help children to remember things more easily. This explains why people often have an easier time remembering the plots of movies that they've seen than those of books that they've read.

2. Problems with impulse control

This is demonstrated by what may seem to at first to be behavioral problems, such as restlessness, impatience, and talking out of turn. However, these are in fact cognitive issues that have little to do with a child's character and everything to do with how their brains interpret information. Giving children with impulse control problems tasks that work with their natures, rather than against them-like allowing them to move to different parts of the house while studying-can help them to maximize their educational opportunities.

3. Problems with maintaining focus

Some common indications of this are lack of attention to detail and making frequent, unnecessary errors. Most children with ADD or ADHD are just as intelligent as those without such disabilities, but simply don't have the skills necessary to concentrate on one task for a sustained period of time. Varying the volume and pitch of your voice may aid in keeping a child with ADD or ADHD focused.

ADD and ADHD are two of the most common childhood disorders in the United States. In order to make an accurate diagnosis, a child must meet with a psychiatrist who specializes in ADD and ADHD. The psychiatrist then makes an assessment and talks with the child's parents and teachers, who must complete a behavioral inventory. All other possibilities must be ruled out before diagnosing a child with ADD or ADHD.

If a child is diagnosed as having ADD or ADHD, there are a variety of treatment options available, including medicine, therapy, and a combination of the two. Parents of children with ADD and ADHD must be willing to work closely with their child's psychiatrist to find a system of treatment that suits their child. They should also keep their child as informed as possible every step of the way, no matter how young they may be.

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