



# Attention Deficit Disorders Without Hyperactivity

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**I**f only he would pay attention to his schoolwork in the same way he concentrates on his sports and video games." "She knows the lyrics to all the top 40 songs, but she doesn't remember what she has learned in her homework from one day to the next." Many parents are frustrated and worried about their sons and daughters who can concentrate very well on activities in which they have a special interest but chronically seem unable to sustain attention and effort for their schoolwork or other assigned tasks.

Children and teenagers who chronically are very inconsistent in their ability to sustain attention and effort for work tasks might have Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). Typically, parents and teachers readily notice students whose problems with inattention are accompanied by hyperactive behavior. Such students tend to be disruptive in classrooms and relentlessly demanding at home. Hyperactive children and adolescents are difficult to overlook.

However, it is easy for parents and teachers to overlook inattentive children and adolescents who are not hyperactive. Often they are "spacey" and preoccupied with their own thoughts, but generally they are not disruptive. Their primary difficulties in school usually involve failure to complete homework, forgetting to prepare for tests, and not getting their assignments in on time. Teachers and parents often assume that these children are just unmotivated, lazy, or immature.

Sometimes these students get their work done well, but far more often they drift off into daydreaming or simply forget what they were supposed to be doing. They chronically lose track of their books and materials for homework; or they laboriously complete an assignment and then leave it in the backpack, forgetting to turn it in to the teacher for credit. These inattentive children who are not hyperactive can suffer from ADD impairments just as much as those who are "hyper."

Boys or girls can be inattentive or inconsistent in their studies for many reasons. Family stresses, emotional problems, learning disorders, inadequate teaching, and other factors can cause any child to have difficulty in sustaining attention and effort for schoolwork. Qualified professionals must assess carefully to determine whether a child's attentional difficulties result from ADD or some other factors. Evaluation for ADD should include careful assessment for learning disorders, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, etc.,

because individuals with ADD often have one or more other disorders as well.

## APA Guidelines

The American Psychiatric Association (1994) has developed guidelines for identifying children and adolescents whose chronic inattention problems might be due to an attention deficit disorder. These guidelines are as follows:

1. Often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, work, or other activities.
2. Often has difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play activities.
3. Often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly.
4. Often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork or chores.
5. Often has difficulty organizing tasks or activities.
6. Often avoids or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort (such as schoolwork or homework).
7. Often loses things necessary for tasks or activities (e.g., toys, school assignments, pencils, books)
8. Often is distracted easily by extraneous stimuli.
9. Is often forgetful in daily activities.

If a child or adolescent has six or more of these nine symptoms and is significantly and chronically impaired by them, there is a significant chance that the student has an attention deficit disorder. Although the current official diagnostic label for ADD without hyperactivity is "Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, predominantly inattentive type," it is not necessary for the child to have any hyperactive or impulsive symptoms to qualify for this diagnosis.

ADD without hyperactivity, as with ADD with hyperactivity, often appears to be a willpower problem. Actually, it is a neurochemical disorder that tends to run in families and often is inherited.

If untreated, ADD, even without hyperactivity, can contribute not only to chronic and serious school problems but also to substance abuse, low self-esteem, and chronic family stress.