



# Early Childhood Identification

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**E**arly identification of children who are at risk for attention deficit disorders helps both the child and the parents because it can prevent many further difficulties. Early intervention will benefit the child's behavior and development. Parents will need to develop a variety of strategies to help the child between the ages of 2 and 4 years learn to manage his or her attention and activity.

## Help Your Child Within Your Home Environment

A child with attention disorders needs a well-managed, structured, consistent environment. Plan your daily schedule to include predictable times, transitions, routines, and rituals. Try to have meals at a regular time, and wind down play or activities as designated meal times approach.

Arrange your child's environment so that it is safe and well maintained. Place toys and belongings in drawers and boxes and on shelves. Circulate toys, and bring out only a few at a time to help maintain alertness and interests.

## Childproof Your Home

The impulsive behavior of children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) makes them prime candidates for accidents. It is important to create an environment for such children that is secure and predictable. Protect a young child from hurtful objects such as scissors, knives, and letter openers. Put away cherished glass items, statues, and expensive collections until your child has demonstrated personal control.

## Use Color to Help Organize Your Home

Use color coding, pictures, and words to label storage containers so the child begins to know where similar objects belong. Label and color code personal belongings such as clothes and toys. Find a color theme that will be easy for your child to remember. For example, the white box holds socks, the brown box holds shoes, the yellow box holds shirts. This consistent color-code system will help your child begin to organize his or her own personal belongings.

## Plan Your Day

Plan highly routine schedules with a regular time each day for such activities as nap time, lunch, story time, etc. Cue

your child that you are approaching specific times: "After we play this game, we will wash our hands and make lunch." Review several interesting or motivating aspects of what is coming next. Active children find it difficult to leave an exciting activity for one they find less interesting. Offer transition so the child can wind down from a very busy time. For example, if the child has been playing on a tricycle, do not announce quickly, "Time for your nap!" Rather, encourage the child to leave the bike to color with chalk on the sidewalk, followed by a story and then nap time. This provides a smooth transition and takes the child through a step-by-step process that often reduces conflict and reaction to change.

## Help Your Child Understand His or Her Challenges With Attention

Your child needs to be aware of his or her own personal challenges and learn acceptable ways to cope with these difficulties. One helpful technique is bibliotherapy, selecting a book to read to the child that tells a story about similar challenges. Books that deal specifically with problems the child might experience can help the child feel accepted and understood. Collect age-appropriate books that tell about personal triumphs over difficulties. There are a variety of books for younger children that help them better understand their attention deficit, such as *Shelley, the Hyperactive Turtle*, by D. M. Moss; *Otto Learns About His Medicine*, by M. Galvin; *The Don't Give Up Kid*, by Janet Gehart; and *Jumping Johnny, Get Back to Work*, by Michael Gordon.

## Help Your Child Understand Which Behaviors Are Allowed and Which Are Not

As a parent, you need rules in your home. When your child is impulsive and out of control, you need to maintain a calm but firm manner. Work with your child to establish the punishment for infractions ahead of time, before an incident. Time outs (removal from the area) often are helpful. Some doctors recommend that time out for an active child be less than a minute at a time. As the attention span increases, the time increases. If the child hurts another's property, he or she should be expected to make some repayment and attempt to clean up the property, fix it, or put it

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back together. If your child is 3 years or older, an apology is also in order.

Many 3- and 4-year-old children with ADHD respond well to a token, poker chip, or point system whereby good behaviors earn tokens the children redeem for special privileges. The parents post a menu of reinforcers, and the child "buys" the privileges with the designated amount of tokens (for example, with five tokens, the child may pick the video for the family's Friday night viewing).

If you are positive and consistent and use the methods suggested here, you can help your child with ADHD learn self-management from an early age. The time and guidance you spend now will make your life and your child's more successful as you age together. Finally, be good to yourself. You are invaluable in your child's life. Each intervention you employ is propelling your child toward success.

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