

Attention, Girls!



**A Guide to Learn
All About Your
AD/HD**

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Chapter One

What Is AD/HD Anyway?

Maddie was confused. She didn't see why her teacher had asked her parents to come to school for a meeting with the school counselor. Yes, she sometimes forgot her homework, and she did daydream in class, but did that mean she had AD/HD? She certainly wasn't always getting into trouble and bothering other kids like Michael who had AD/HD. Could she have AD/HD? And what did that mean? Was there something wrong with her or her brain? Yikes!

If you are like Maddie and someone has told you that you have AD/HD, I'll bet you have lots of questions, too. But before I answer those questions, let's spend a few minutes talking about what AD/HD is and what it is not.

What Is AD/HD?

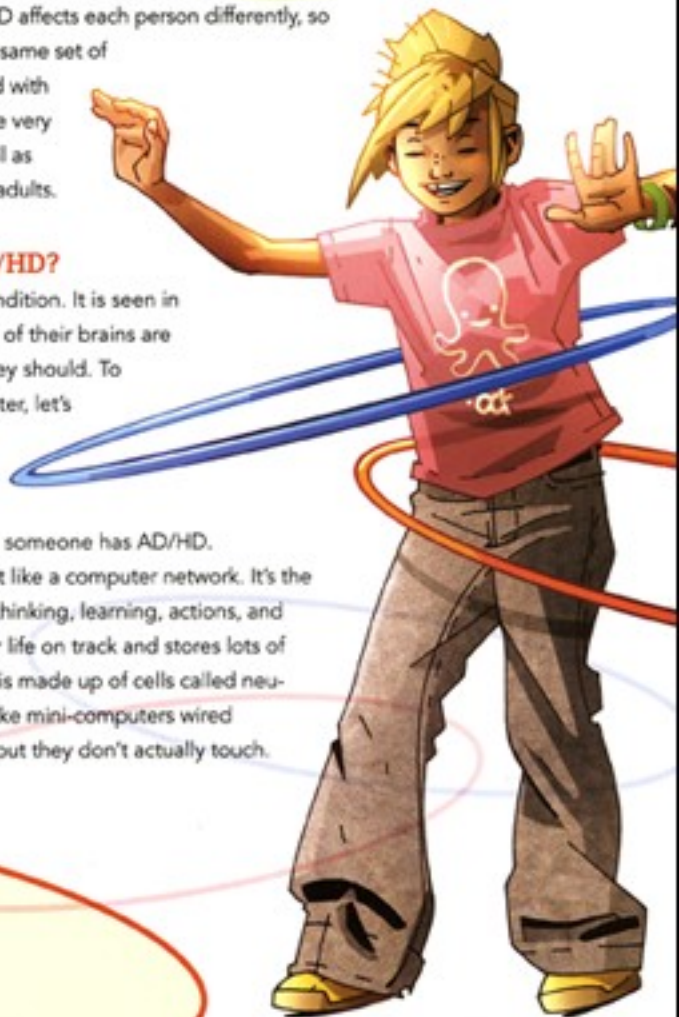
AD/HD or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a real disorder that is thought to be present from birth. It is best understood as a set of behaviors that lead to difficulty paying attention and focusing. These behaviors can include distractibility, impulsivity, hyperactivity,

disorganization, carelessness, and poor time management. (I'll talk about these behaviors later in this chapter.) Having AD/HD can definitely make it harder for you to control yourself and pay attention. School may be difficult, or you may feel that you're always in trouble. AD/HD affects each person differently, so you might not have the same set of behaviors as another kid with AD/HD. And that can be very confusing for you as well as your parents and other adults.

What Causes AD/HD?

AD/HD is a medical condition. It is seen in kids when certain areas of their brains are not working the way they should. To understand AD/HD better, let's take a look at how the brain works and what scientists think goes wrong when someone has AD/HD.

Your brain works a lot like a computer network. It's the control center for your thinking, learning, actions, and behaviors. It keeps your life on track and stores lots of information. Your brain is made up of cells called neurons. These cells work like mini-computers wired together in your brain, but they don't actually touch.





Attention, Attention!

Your brain has several layers that play a role in controlling both your attention and activity levels.

- The **cortex** is for thinking, learning, problem-solving, and planning ahead.
- The **subcortex** controls your emotions and contains the reward center that allows us to enjoy things that you like. It also connects the outer cortex to the lower levels or brain stem.
- The **brain stem** is where automatic functions like breathing and digestion are controlled.

They're separated by tiny spaces called synapses. Neurons communicate with each other by sending messages across synapses using chemicals (neurotransmitters). This process is kind of like when you send an e-mail to your friend from your computer. In order to send that e-mail (message) from your computer (neuron) to another computer (neuron), it has to travel across cyberspace (synapse) using the Internet (neurotransmitter). Scientists think that AD/HD is caused when there are problems with these neurotransmitters. If the Internet is down, e-mail won't go through!

Now, many kids with AD/HD worry when they hear that there is something wrong with their brain. (That's understandable!) Trouble with getting messages to the right areas explain what is going on in your brain and why you have problems paying attention, getting organized, or remembering things. But these areas are not damaged! There are

lots of ways that will get them working again. Better yet, these areas have nothing to do with how smart, talented, or athletic you are. Kids with AD/HD are as smart, funny, and creative as other kids!

What Behaviors Do Kids With AD/HD Have?

The following behaviors are often seen in kids with AD/HD and are usually the reasons they have problems or get into trouble:

- Inattentiveness
- Distractibility
- Carelessness
- Disorganization
- Hyperactivity
- Impulsivity

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Let's talk about each of these behaviors a little more.

INATTENTIVENESS

Inattentiveness is difficulty focusing on one thing or having a short attention span. This makes it difficult to concentrate and stay focused. Because you are not paying attention, you have problems following directions or you might forget what you are supposed to be doing.

Sometimes it's difficult for adults to understand that kids with AD/HD have problems paying attention because kids with AD/HD can pay attention, sometimes for a very long time, especially when they are interested in an activity. For example, you may be able to watch TV, play computer games, or read your favorite book for hours, but you can't seem to concentrate and stay focused to read three chapters of a book assigned for homework or to complete 60 math problems. It may be hard for you to sit and concentrate on your work

in class, complete a puzzle, or play a board game for very long, but you could play outdoors or at the pool forever.

DISTRACTIBILITY

Distractibility means that your attention is easily drawn away from what you are doing. If you have AD/HD, you may be easily distracted by other things going on around you or by noises in or outside the room you are in. Because of the problem you have concentrating on just one thing, it becomes hard for you to stay on track and get your work done. You may find that you are always switching what you are doing and that you don't finish many of the projects that you start.

Kids with AD/HD also find that they are not only distracted by things going on around them, but that they can be distracted by thoughts going on inside their own heads. We call this daydreaming. If you find yourself frequently thinking about other things or going on adventures in your head, you're probably a daydreamer. Daydreaming

Sara's Daydreaming Problems

Daydreaming always gets me into trouble! I know I'm daydreaming at school when . . .

- I think about the toys in my bedroom and imagine that I'm playing with them instead of paying attention to the lesson.
- I get confused about where I am because I daydream I'm somewhere else.
- I sometimes don't hear someone calling my name. When I finally do, I look up and all of the girls are staring at me. They start laughing and I get really embarrassed.



may be fun and may be more interesting than what your teacher is talking about, but it can also cause problems for you. When you stop daydreaming, you may feel lost or confused. Because you missed the directions for an assignment you might not know what to do next or when the assignment is due. If you miss part of a conversation going on around you, you might not be sure of what your friends are talking about and you won't know what to say. You can miss out on a lot of important information if you daydream too much or are very distracted.

CARELESSNESS

Carelessness refers to making mistakes and forgetting things. When you don't pay careful attention, begin your work without reading or waiting for the directions, or work too quickly, you can make mistakes on your homework and tests. How many times has your teacher asked you if you've read the directions? Do you have problems finding your clothes, jackets, shoes, or toys because you can't remember where you put them? If you are careless, you may frequently lose or misplace your belongings or important papers, like your homework, a signed permission slip, or a note for your parents from your teacher.

DISORGANIZATION

Disorganization means having trouble getting and staying organized. It can cause you to have problems keeping track of your things or your time. You can imagine how all of these problems with paying attention to details and following directions can cause someone with AD/HD to look disorganized. And chances are you probably are disorganized if you often look that way! Your room, desk, or backpack may be messy, making it more difficult for you to find your things.

If you are disorganized, you may also not be very good at making decisions, choosing what you want to or should do next, or managing your time. You may find yourself starting and stopping projects or games as you change your mind or get bored. A project with too many steps that need to be done in a certain order may cause you to lose track of what you are supposed to be doing next. When you have several things to do at once, prioritizing what to do first to get started can also be difficult. Some kids with AD/HD say they have so many ideas that it is hard for them to choose just one to work on. You may also lose track of time or misjudge how long it will take you to complete a project. If you are disorganized, you may always be late or rushing to get something done.

HYPERACTIVITY

Hyperactivity is defined as excessive body movements that are usually without a purpose and greater than normally seen at a certain age. Basically, it's when you move around a lot. If you are hyperactive, you might have difficulty sitting still or staying in one place for very long. You may feel restless, have lots of energy, and prefer to be "on the go" or playing, running, and jumping. When you are asked to stop moving, you might be able to do it for a little while, but it's really hard for you.

Hyperactivity does not look the same in everyone. Instead of running around, you may be fidgety and feel you need to move your hands and feet a lot. You may twirl your hair, play with a small toy, or doodle with your pencil. Doodling on papers or books is common for kids with AD/HD. Sometimes doodling helps them to stay focused and to listen better, but sometimes it keeps them from paying attention. Remember that even though the word "hyperactivity" is in the name AD/HD, not all kids with AD/HD are hyperactive.

IMPULSIVITY

Impulsivity is doing or saying something without thinking about it first. If you have AD/HD, you may be impulsive and act or say things without thinking of the consequences. For example, you know that you are not supposed to ride your bike in the park without telling your mom or dad where you are going. But if you really want to get to the playground on the other side, you may forget the rule and ride in the park anyway. Acting impulsively can get you into trouble and cause you to do things that you regret afterwards, like saying something to a friend that you wish you hadn't or leaving your field trip group at the zoo to look at the lion cubs.

Acting
impulsively
can get you
into trouble.

Are There Different Kinds of AD/HD?

There is only one AD/HD, but experts have divided AD/HD into three types depending on the behaviors seen together most often. The three types are called:

- Inattentive-distractible type
- Hyperactive-impulsive type
- Combined type

Combined type is the most common type. Kids with this type of AD/HD usually have all of the behaviors seen in AD/HD that we've talked about above. In general, girls most often have the inattentive-distractible type of AD/HD where problems with attention and distractibility are the most common complaints. The hyperactive-impulsive type is the least common of all of the types of AD/HD in both boys and girls and occurs only in about 3% of boys and 1% of girls with AD/HD.