

# Children with ADHD In Child Care? Yes!



Most child care providers feel they have cared for a child with an attention deficit at one time or another. They are the children providers describe as easily distracted, especially active, impulsive or even disruptive.

Years ago, specialists recognized a pattern of behavior common to these children. Over the years, various terms have been used to describe this disability— terms like hyperactive and attention deficit disorder. Although the term may change again, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is the term most commonly used today. The label is not as important as understanding how and why this diagnosis is made and how you

can create responsive environments for young children with ADHD.

ADHD is not simply a descriptive term— it is a diagnosis. It can only be made by a clinician-physician, pediatrician or psychologist— who specializes in childhood disorders. A number of professionals may be involved in diagnosing ADHD. A thorough medical and family history is required. Children are given physical examinations as well as medical, psychological, and educational tests. ADHD is a developmental disorder with characteristic behaviors. Diagnosis of ADHD is made only when:


- Six or more symptoms persist for at least six months and are inconsistent with expectations for the child's developmental level (difficulty remaining seated means different behavior for a six-year-old than for a two-year-old)
- Symptoms are present prior to age 12 years
- Symptoms are present in two or more settings (such as child care, social situations, home)
- There is clear evidence of significant impairment in social, academic, or occupational functioning
- Symptoms are not better explained by another disorder

It is possible some children may display these behaviors in reaction to situations like a divorce or a family move; however, in these cases, the behavior is typically short-term and clearly related to the event. Here is what early childhood professionals can do to create a positive learning environment for a young child with ADHD:

- **Learn about ADHD and about the child with ADHD** in your program. Question parents and professionals.
- **Provide experiences appropriate for the child's interests** and abilities— not too challenging or too easy. Children may enjoy and participate in particular activities; build upon their successes.
- **Establish a steady and predictable routine.** Plan transitions between activities; talk about change— even minor change, like visitors— before it happens.
- **Be clear and calm about expectations.** Be sure the

child knows program rules; talk about expectations in a way that assumes the child will behave accordingly. Say firmly *it's time to go inside* now rather than threaten *if you don't come inside right now...*

- **Give the child feedback about social interactions.** Children may not accurately assess the impact of their behavior. Use short phrases to describe the feelings of other children/adults rather than saying *stop doing that!* Provide alternative options. You might say *you're making it hard for Ben and Jonna to play; I think that makes them sad.* Continue by suggesting an appropriate activity within Ben and Jonna's play or a separate activity.
- **Provide choices.** Find alternative activities that are responsive to the child's needs and rewarding for the child. A cozy space with earphones and story recordings may provide welcome relief for a child when group activities get too demanding. Large muscle equipment set up indoors may provide an alternative for a very active child.
- **Encourage and nurture the child's self-esteem.** Children with ADHD frequently hear negative messages about their behavior and may seldom receive positive messages fill with warmth and encouragement. Make it a point to verbally and physically tell the child about the wonderful things he or she adds to your program!

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## A Child Care Providers Question:

*I have a four-year-old child with ADHD in my child care program. He's a really bright, creative thinker but he often says things like "no one likes me," "I wish I would just disappear," and "I know I'm not going to be able to do that." Am I doing something wrong?*

It may not be that you are doing anything wrong. It may be that you are not doing the right things often enough. Does this little guy get frequent messages from caregivers that he is successful, effective, and competent?

Even though you may regularly have warm and positive interactions with the child, it is not uncommon for children with ADHD to have low self-esteem. This comes from their getting many more negative than positive messages from their environment. Your job is to try to balance these negative reminders with more constructive messages— both verbal and physical— to help the child understand and believe in his own value and importance.



Look for times during your day when you can add some of these positive messages. Perhaps you can give him an important role like feeding a pet.

Make sure:

- It is a job the child can do
- That the job is important enough to be noticed
- That his success is recognized.

Or try taking a moment or two at the end of the day to talk privately with the child about his day. Identify at least one terrific accomplishment that you and the child can proudly tell the child's parents. It may be an activity— he fed the fish or built a snow man— or an example of positively managing his own behavior— he held your hand on the neighborhood walk today. Follow through by telling the parents about this accomplishment (and showing them the happy fish or snow man) when they come to pick him up.

## RESOURCES

- **Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning** <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>
- **Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards** <http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/wmels-about.php>
- **Division for Early Childhood Recommended Practices** <http://www.dec-spced.org/recommendedpractices>

## TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

- **The Registry Training Calendar** <https://www.the-registry.org>
- **WI Early Care Association (WECA) Training Calendar** <http://wisconsinearlychildhood.org/>
- **MECA Special Needs Support Program (SNSP)** <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/meca/disability>

This document was modified for use by the State of Wisconsin from the **Children with AD/HD in Child Care? tip sheet** created by **Montana Child Care plus+**, <http://www.ccplus.org/Products.html> and the **Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-Edition 5**.

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