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# Introduction for Parents and Teachers

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It's a fact: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is the most common of the five major behavioral disorders that affect children ages five to eighteen. It is also very interesting to note that something else major happens to all children between the ages of five and eighteen. What is it? Simple—they go to school. Suddenly, children who have been allowed to move freely and make choices about their play are required to conform to a classroom setting. They are asked to sit quietly, listen, learn, and memorize facts that are not always of interest to them. Some children make the transition with ease, others do not. It's not surprising that attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is first diagnosed in early primary grades.

When dealing with children, the old adage “talk is cheap” isn't exactly timely or correct. When a child has a problem, talking about the problem and listening to the child's feelings is the first step to help the child cope and become empowered. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is no exception. The less of a mystery it is, the better.

On the negative side of the disorder are characteristics such as:

- attention deficit, which makes it difficult to focus, and
- hyperactivity, which makes sitting still long enough to learn extremely difficult.

It is important to let the child know that ADHD is a disorder, not a disability. ADHD may be inconvenient, but it isn't an excuse for not learning. It is vital that children with ADHD understand all aspects of the disorder so they can acquire the skills and the support system to help them learn and master social skills.

Children with ADHD often have low self-esteem. It is especially sad that children with ADHD have the added burden of thinking they are in some way not as good, smart, or as acceptable as other children. Further, teens with ADHD sometimes demonstrate addictive behaviors and have trouble with the law. It is crucial that teachers and parents help young children with ADHD focus on the positive aspects of the disorder so they can establish strong, healthy relationships.

**Begin by teaching children that many ADHD traits are positive.** Children with ADHD often have above average I.Q's and are usually highly creative, artistic, intuitive, inventive, and humorous. Many display other positive characteristics that make them special individuals. Helping each child celebrate the positive traits of ADHD will give them the pride and courage needed to face each day and grow up to be happy, productive adults.

**Author's Special Note:** Not all children with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) are hyperactive. To avoid redundancy in this book, Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) will both be indicated by the acronym ADHD.

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# CHAPTER ONE

# ADHD—That's Me!

## What the Experts Say

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is the most common behavioral disorder in children.\*

## Introducing the Concept

Many children with ADHD find school difficult, which often leads to poor self-concepts. From the very beginning, let the child know that although ADHD might make life difficult at times, there are tools that can change all of that and that you are willing to champion her in her quest for empowerment.

## Let's Talk About It

1. Do you know what ADHD is?
2. If you are ADHD, when did you first find out?
3. Did a teacher, doctor, or parent tell you?
4. Do you know that lots of children and adults are ADHD?

## Empowering Activity

Explain that ADHD is a small part of who the child is and that she has many other characteristics that make her unique. Convey the important message that being ADHD is okay by having her create an "All About Me!" collage.

**You will need:** A sheet of poster board (11 x 17 inches), old magazines, newspapers, scissors, glue stick, markers, glitter and photographs.

**Directions:** Have the child cut out words and pictures from magazines and newspapers that describe her, then arrange them in a pleasing way. Help her attach the appropriate words and pictures to the poster board. Use markers and glitter to add pizzazz to the collage. As the child learns ways to deal with her ADHD, she can place additional messages on the poster.



## Empowering Messages

**Adult:** The most important thing that you will ever teach a child with ADHD is that every part of her is acceptable to you—including her ADHD traits.

**Child:** Having ADHD is only one small part of who I am.

# A is for Attention

## What the Experts Say

The A in ADHD stands for Attention. "It's generally accepted that children with ADHD, attention deficit disorder, lack the ability to focus attention . . . ." \*

## Introducing the Concept

It is never too early for children with ADHD to begin learning all they can about the disorder. The facts will help them understand themselves better so they can become responsible for their own behavior, learning, and socialization.

## Let's Talk About It

1. Do you know what the A in ADHD stands for?
2. What does attention mean?
3. How do you like your mother and father to pay attention to you?
4. Do you have a pet that you pay attention to? What do you do for the pet?

## Empowering Activity

Explain that in the days ahead, the child will be learning more about ADHD. Say, "It is good to learn all you can about ADHD." Ask, "What does the first A in ADHD stand for?" Review the definition of attention by playing a staring game called "Don't Blink." You only need two people to play the game.



**Directions:** Players sit facing each other with their heads about two feet apart. At a given signal, players look into each other's eyes. The object of the game is not to blink or break the stare. The person who can hold her gaze and pay attention to the opponent the longest is declared the winner. Encourage her to play the game with other students, siblings, and parents. Practicing focusing in this way will help her develop skills needed to pay attention in other situations.

## Empowering Messages

**Adult:** Focusing skills and broadening attention span are skills that you can help the child learn.

**Child:** Even though it may be difficult for me to pay attention, I am still an extraordinary kid.

# D is for Deficit

## What the Experts Say

The D in ADHD stands for deficit. Children with ADHD are sometimes said to have a deficit in attention. It may be more accurately called “attention difficulty,” because ADHD kids have difficulty paying attention to just one thing at a time. “ADHD symptoms . . . include: poor concentration and a brief attention span.” \*

## Introducing the Concept

Concentration is required for success in all areas of life. But a child can’t pay attention just because she is told to do so. Children with ADHD need tools to help them cope with their attention deficit disorder.

## Let’s Talk About It

1. Do you know what the first D in ADHD stands for?
2. What does deficit mean?
3. Have you ever been in a car with your dad when the car ran out of gas, or had a gas deficit?
4. Has your mother ever run out of bread while making your lunch, or had a bread deficit?
5. What do you think it means to have an attention deficit?

## Empowering Activity

Explain that everyone has trouble paying attention to things that don’t interest them. Ask, “What are some things that you find difficult to pay attention to?” Discuss some things the child enjoys doing and can concentrate on for extended periods of time, such as playing video games or using a computer. Convey that the child already knows how to stay focused on many things she likes.

**You will need:** An 11 x 17 inch sheet of paper folded vertically, pencil, crayons or markers.

**Directions:** On the upper left-hand side of the paper, write or help the child write: “Things That Hold My Attention.” On the upper right-hand side of the paper, write: “Things That Don’t Hold My Attention.” Encourage the child to illustrate or list many examples of each.

Things That Hold My Attention	Things That Don’t Hold My Attention
Computer	Reading
Video games	Sitting at desk
Art work	Homework
Playing outside	Waiting in line
Riding my bike	Boring movies

## Empowering Messages

**Adult:** Telling a child with ADHD to pay attention will not help her overcome her built-in attentional difference. Giving a child with ADHD opportunities to do high-interest activities will help increase her attention span.

**Child:** I can pay attention to things that interest me. I can learn how to focus on other things as well.

# H is for Hyperactivity

## What the Experts Say

The H in ADHD stands for hyperactivity. For many children, hyperactivity becomes less prominent as they age. "For some there is remission at puberty, but for others the condition, if untreated, continues into adulthood." \*

## Introducing the Concept

Hyperactive children rarely run in circles or up and down hallways. More often they fidget, squirm, and move in purposeless motions. Unable to stand or sit still very long, they can become disruptive to those around them. Usually the hyperactive child is unaware that she is exhibiting a disturbing behavior. It is helpful to name the disturbing behavior and give her a more acceptable energy outlet. Example: "Erica, you are drumming your pencil and the noise is disturbing those around you. I need you to stop. If you cannot hold your pencil still, please go outside and drum with your pencil."

## Let's Talk About It

1. Do you know what the H in ADHD stands for?
2. What does it mean to be hyperactive?
3. Do you have lots of energy to get up and go?
4. Do you like recess better than classroom study?

## Empowering Activity



Explain that there are many occupations, sports, and hobbies that require the participants to think fast and move quickly. For example, drummers have to move their hands at accelerated speeds. Say, "It isn't a bad thing to be able to move faster than most, but it can be disruptive to others when working in a group or family situation."

Play the following singing game to convey that excessive speed, when working in a group, can be disruptive.

**Directions:** Pick one child to be "it." While the others sing a familiar song like "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," "it" sings the song at an accelerated speed. Note how the person singing too fast disturbs the cadence of the other singers. Try with a variety of songs, and let everyone in the group have a chance to be "it." Follow with a discussion about what happens when one person isn't keeping pace.

## Empowering Messages

**Adult:** Telling a child with ADHD to sit still or stop fidgeting doesn't help her gain control. She needs to know the exact behavior that you are referring to and be given specific directions for changing the behavior.

**Child:** I may move faster than others, but when working in a group, I know that I should keep pace.

# D Stands for Disorder

## What the Experts Say

The last D in ADHD stands for disorder, not disease, and ADHD is a disorder not a disease. “A neurological disorder . . . is the result of a nervous system that has been wired a little differently. . . . it processes information in a different way.” \*

## Introducing the Concept

Children with ADHD actually perceive things differently than others do. The message for this lesson is that there is not always a right or a wrong way to see things. There are only different ways of perceiving them.

## Let’s Talk About It

1. What does the last D in ADHD stand for?
2. What is a disorder? Is a disorder the same thing as a disease?
3. Is there always a right and wrong way to see things?
4. Are there many different ways of seeing the same thing?
5. How does an ant see a grain of sugar? How do you see that same grain of sugar? Does the sugar change?

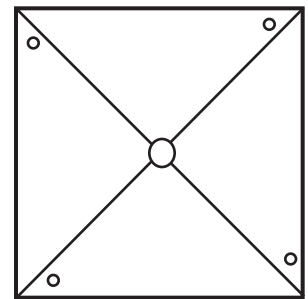
## Empowering Activity

To demonstrate that things may not always be as they appear, help the child make a pinwheel.

**You will need:** The pinwheel example on this page, paper, scissors, blue and red crayons, sharpened pencil, brad fastener, and a plastic drinking straw.

### Directions:

1. Enlarge and reproduce the pinwheel pattern and cut out on the solid lines.
2. Color one side of the pinwheel red and the other side blue.
3. Cut the diagonal lines from the corners to the center circle. Don’t cut into the circle.
4. Help the child use the sharpened pencil to poke a hole through the four tiny dark circles.
5. The pencil point also works well to poke a hole in the straw about 1/2-inch from the top.
6. Make the tiny holes on the four points overlap consecutively and meet at the center circle.
7. Push the ends of the paper fastener through the holes in the pinwheel. Then push the fastener through the center circle.
8. Place the straw on the back side of the pinwheel and push the ends of the fastener through the hole in the straw. Open up the fastener and flatten the ends.
9. Blow on the pinwheel. Is it blue? Red? Purple? Watch the colors change.



## Empowering Messages

**Adult:** Diverse perceptions make life interesting. Your child with ADHD may be a challenge, but life won’t be boring.

**Child:** ADHD isn’t an illness; it’s a personality type.