

Attention Deficit & Hyperactivity Disorder

Understanding ADHD Part 1



ADHD

3 PRESENTATIONS OF ADHD

1 The Inattentive Type

Characteristics of the Inattentive type of ADHD include things such as having difficulty paying attention to details, struggling with maintaining attention and consistent focus in activities, being easily distracted, struggling to get started on tasks and being able to carry a task through to completion, trouble with organization and just difficulties with being forgetful in daily tasks.

2 Hyperactive & Impulsive Type

This presentation might include a constant feeling of restlessness manifesting in fidgeting, always being 'on the go', pacing or not being able to sit down or settle in at appropriate times (i.e. when watching a movie or at a restaurant). It may also include behaviours such as excessive talking, difficulty listening and taking turns in activities and/or conversation, being unable to engage in leisure activities quietly and so on.

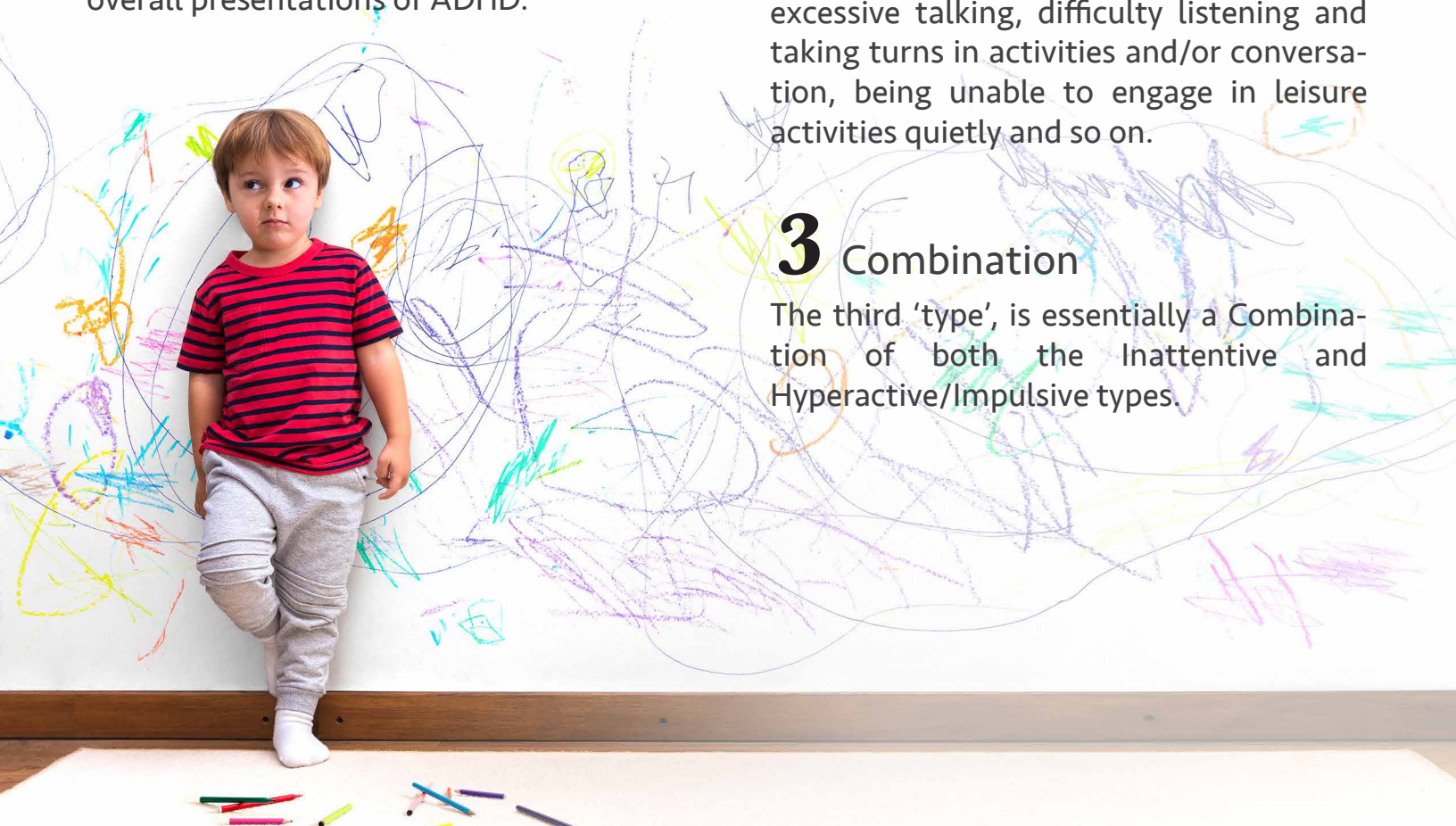
3 Combination

The third 'type', is essentially a Combination of both the Inattentive and Hyperactive/Impulsive types.

EARLY IN MY TEACHING CAREER I WAS IN MY HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM, WAITING FOR THE BELL TO RING SIGNALLING THE BEGINNING OF CLASS.

Most students were in their seats when all of a sudden the relative calm was punctuated by laughter and a screech at the back of the classroom as one of my more energetic students flopped down on the floor to do the 'worm'. It was oddly jarring, surprising and completely disruptive to the class that was about to start. To this day, even though I now have a much better and more complete understanding of ADHD, this is the image and experience that immediately comes to my mind when I think of ADHD!

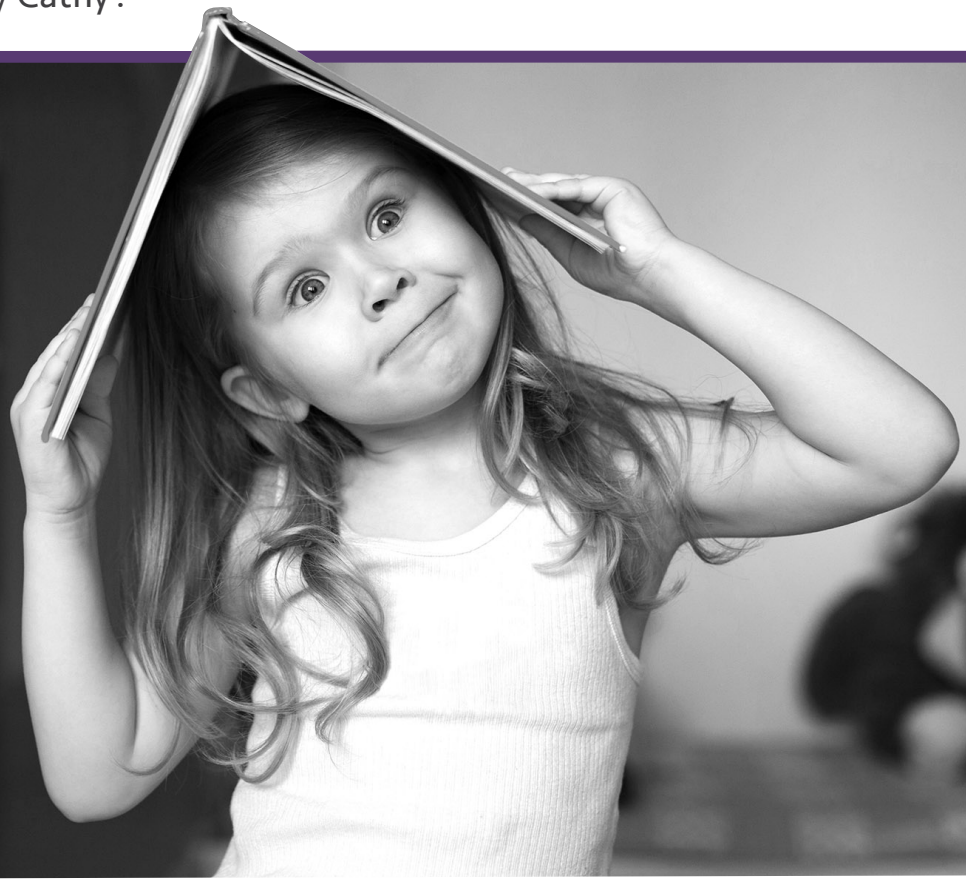
Though my student may represent a common stereotype of ADHD, the reality of those struggling with ADHD is much more complex. The DSM5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5th Edition), notes that there are three overall presentations of ADHD.



ADHD has typically tended to be more frequently diagnosed in boys, probably because of the stereotype in the story presented above. On the most practical of levels, it's difficult to ignore someone who is literally 'bouncing off the walls' in a classroom situation and so those children are most frequently recognized both at school and at home. More recently, there has been a recognition that ADHD is often underdiagnosed in girls. This may be because often girls will manifest with inattentive type behaviours. On a school level, they might be quiet but always seem to be "off in their own world" or "dreaming". Often even when girls manifest the hyperactive or impulsive behaviours, it can look quite different. It may be the young lady who is always chatting with those around her and who is on the move constantly around the classroom, perhaps overinvolved with other class members. While she may be distracted herself and distracting others regularly, she may just be seen as being overly social or a 'chatty Cathy'.

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Both boys and girls with ADHD are potentially at risk for accompanying difficulties such as learning disabilities. Children with ADHD can also be at a greater risk for issues such as anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. As time goes on, if the ADHD struggles go unaddressed, other issues can arise with relationships, risk taking behaviours and problems with alcohol and other substances. Unaddressed ADHD can leave children (and adults) with a sense of constant frustration, feelings of inadequacy and a sense of wondering why things just don't come together in the way that they do for other people.



WHILE ADHD CAN BE A CHALLENGE, IT CAN ALSO BE A UNIQUE BLESSING!

Individuals with ADHD often have an ability to think outside of the box and to exercise tremendous creativity. In the case of my student who decided that it would be a good idea to drop down to the floor and do an imitation of a break-dancing worm, while his actions that day were disruptive, on the whole he was an intelligent, funny and creative teenager. The darker side of his reality was that he tended to feel the need to be the class clown because, though intelligent, he often struggled significantly with aspects of academic work and had a diagnosed learning disability. His struggles ultimately really impacted his sense of confidence, self-esteem and his overall sense of self.

All too often the unique and creative gifts of those with ADHD are lost amidst the difficulties they face navigating day to day life. These abilities can get pushed into the background in the face of everyday challenges with executive functioning skills like impulsivity, flexibility, planning, organization, issues with working memory and task completion. Individuals with

ADHD are often bombarded with the message that if they just 'tried harder' or 'stick with it', things would be better. The reality of ADHD means that a child's brain just works differently. Medication can go a long way towards helping with ADHD but it is equally important to focus on helping children to develop the 'executive functioning' skills that might be lagging.

FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN STRUGGLING WITH ADHD, A KEY FOCUS IS ON THINKING ABOUT THE AREAS IN WHICH YOUR CHILD IS STRUGGLING.

For example, if organization is a challenge, it will be important to implement strategies that help him or her to begin to learn how to organize themselves. This often begins by parents deciding upon an organizational system and then helping a child get used to functioning in this structure. Eventually if parents can provide the context, children will begin to internalize the structure and habits to the point where they can implement it and apply it to new situations, themselves. It may be helpful, for example, to implement the habit of having your child empty her backpack as soon as she returns home from school, and putting her homework and planner in a specific place so that it is ready for later. Be sure there is a place for everything including a set place for any school forms or slips that need to be signed, a place to put any food that is coming home, a set place to put notebooks, textbooks, assignments and planners for homework time. Then after any homework is done, help your child to get into the habit of repacking his or her bag and setting it beside the door in preparation for the next day.



IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIES THAT HELP CHILDREN TO DEVELOP AREAS IN WHICH SKILLS ARE WEAK OR FINDING WAYS TO 'ACCOMMODATE' OR WORK WITH CHILDREN TO OVERCOME AREAS OF DIFFICULTY CAN BE EXTREMELY USEFUL.

Children with ADHD are then positioned to experience a greater level of calm and success in their daily life.

OTHER POSSIBLE STRATEGIES:

- * Establish a set space for homework time with all the tools needed for your child to complete an activity (pens, pencils, eraser, computer etc.)
- * Have a binder (and a three hole punch) available for any loose papers that your child brings home
- * Consider creating a visual schedule for a child so he or she can check off responsibilities
- * Do make use of the school planner to have your child make note of homework and for the teacher to write brief notes to communicate information
- * Do make use of the technology offered such as google docs that will facilitate communication between your child and teacher

- * For older children and teenagers who have cell phones, teach them to use the technology to aid their memory ie. Take a picture of home work written on the board rather than trying to write it down. Take a picture of key examples on the board/whiteboard that may help them to tackle a difficult math problem for homework. Teach them to organize assignment deadlines in the cellphone or in a planner.

Don't be afraid to reach out to professionals who can help with issues surrounding ADHD. Talk with a Psychologist if you are concerned about learning difficulties. Talk with a therapist or ADHD coach who is knowledgeable about ADHD if you are struggling to know how to help your child. The strategies above are just examples of ways to build skills and help your child to navigate the world in a way that allows their personality, unique gifts and abilities to shine!

This report contains general information only. A qualified healthcare professional should be consulted before making decisions about any treatment/assessments related to mental health concerns.

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