

Early Signs of ADHD in Children

The earliest signs of ADHD can appear as young as 3 or 4 years old. ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) can affect a child's ability to focus, regulate emotions, and manage impulsive behaviors. It is a lifelong condition that greatly benefits from early intervention, including therapy for skill building and parent support. Use this checklist to recognize common signs and help determine if further evaluation may be helpful.

AGES 3-4

- Dislikes activities that require paying attention for more than 1-2 minutes
- Nearly always restless - kicks/jiggles feet, twists around when seated
- Extreme difficulty with transitions - meltdowns when switching tasks
- More aggressive or impulsive than peers - grabs, hits, or climbs without thinking
- Delayed speech or talking a lot more/making more noise than peers
- Consistent difficulty following simple directions
- Tends to be very fearless and accident prone

AGES 5-9

- Easily frustrated, experiences frequent emotional outbursts
- Excessive fidgeting, squirming, or tapping when seated
- Frequently forgets instructions or loses items
- Struggles to complete tasks or schoolwork without getting distracted
- Acts impulsively (blurts out answers, interrupts conversations)
- Has trouble sitting still during meals or in class

AGES 10-12

- Difficulty staying organized with school assignments
- Procrastinates or struggles with time management
- Has difficulty waiting their turn in conversations or games
- Frequently daydreams or “zones out”
- Acts impulsively (blurts out answers, interrupts conversations)
- Has trouble transitioning between tasks or following multi-step directions



When to seek help

Early intervention makes a difference! Seeking support doesn't mean labeling your child—it means providing them with the tools and strategies to succeed.

If your child's symptoms persist for more than a few weeks or impact daily life, it's a good idea to talk to a child therapist or schedule an ADHD evaluation.



What You Can Do Next

If you checked multiple boxes in your child's age group and suspect ADHD may be impacting your child's life, consider taking these next steps:

1. Observe & take notes

- Write down behaviors, triggers, and patterns. Track when symptoms occur, how long they last, and what seems to help or make them worse. Ask your child's teacher what they've noticed. This info will be helpful if you decide to seek additional support.

2. Talk to your child

- Keep communication open and non-judgmental. Instead of asking, "What's wrong with you?" try, "I've noticed you've been feeling [anxious/sad/distracted] lately. Can you tell me more about that?"

3. Get expert support

- You don't have to navigate this alone. Consulting a therapist or psychiatrist who specializes in child therapy will help you quickly get to the bottom of your child's behaviors and emotions, and give you age-appropriate strategies to help them thrive.

 [Find child therapy and ADHD evals covered by your insurance here.](#)