

Presentations of ADHD in Early Childhood

Common Presentations/Symptoms of ADHD in Early Childhood (Preschool)

While many behaviours such as: inattention, distractibility, being fidgety, tantrums and oppositional behaviour are common for preschool children these behaviours in a child with ADHD are more extreme. They are more frequent and more intense. Most often young children with ADHD will stand out in a group of children and appear to function as a younger child.

However, each child with ADHD will be unique; they will present with a different group of ADHD symptoms, on a spectrum from very mild to very severe. Symptom levels can vary throughout the day and from day to day but will always become more apparent when the environment and tasks before the child challenge their impaired skills.

Laurence Greenhill, M.D., of Columbia University/New York State Psychiatric Institute points to behavioural patterns that often predict an ADHD diagnosis later in life:

- ① preschool expulsion due to aggressive behaviour;
- ① refusal to participate in school activities;
- ① failure to respect other children's property or boundaries;
- ① peer rejection, since extreme behaviours are avoided by classmates and shunned on the playground.

Typical ADHD Red Flags Seen in Early Childhood

Attention Regulation

- ① being unable to focus on an activity, even when they would like to;
- ① the inability to focus for more than a few minutes without losing interest, unless the subject is of special interest;
- ① being very easily distracted, more so than others their age;
- ① better able to stay focused in a one on one situation;
- ① difficulty starting and completing work in a classroom setting;
- ① avoiding desk work;
- ① unable to stick with a game or conversation for a period of time;
- ① taking forever to get ready and out the door; and
- ① refusing to participate in an activity that requires their attention for more than a few minutes.



Hyperactivity

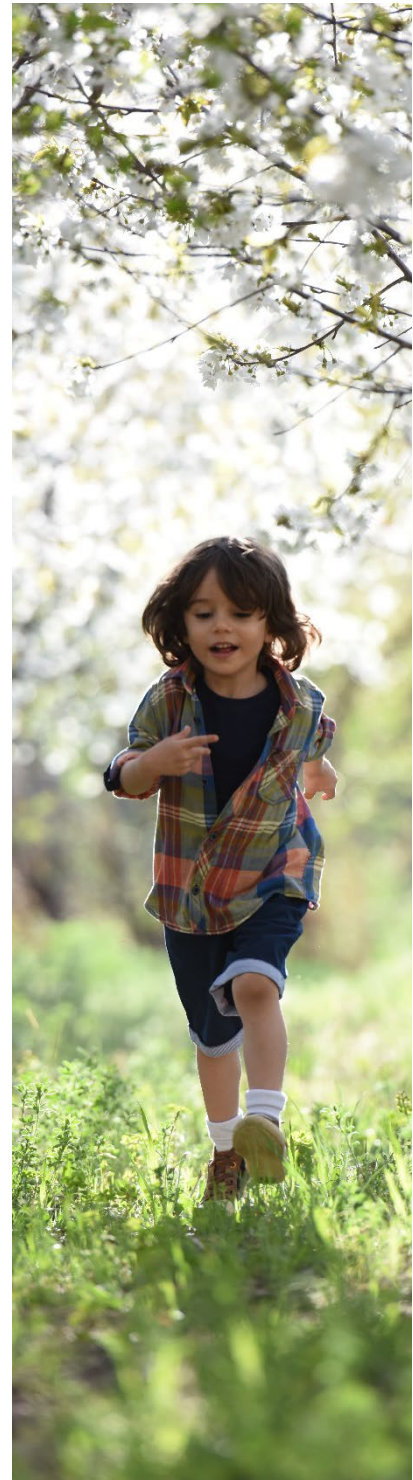
- ① continuously moving, bouncing a knee, jiggling their foot, tapping a pencil, and the inability to sit without squirming;
- ① frequently needing to get up and move around;
- ① being unable to stop for meals, naps and cuddles;
- ① being unable to stay on task when they must sit still;
- ① the inability to sit still for calm activities like eating and having books read to them;
- ① talking and making noise excessively;
- ① running from toy to toy;
- ① being unable to be still even for an activity they enjoy;
- ① constantly climbing, even when instructed not to do so; and
- ① running and moving so quickly that it results in injury, even after being cautioned.

Impulsivity

- ① displaying extreme impatience with others;
- ① grabbing toys and things from others;
- ① refusing to wait their turn when playing with other children;
- ① interrupting when others are talking;
- ① blurting out comments at inappropriate times;
- ① intruding when others are playing, rather than asking if they may join in;
- ① being aggressive in their play;
- ① lacking caution with strangers;
- ① displaying overly bold behaviour;
- ① showing unusually low fear in situations that can lead to dangerous consequences, potentially endangering self or others; and
- ① destroying toys and other things due to not thinking of the consequences.

Executive Functioning Impairment

- ① reacting to things as if they were a younger child;
- ① difficulty following directions, forgets what to do;
- ① unable to remember, or confuses the order of steps of a task;
- ① difficulty with starting and completing tasks;
- ① difficulty estimating how long it will take to do something;



Executive Functioning Impairment (cont)

- ① insisting that things are done in a certain way;
- ① acting out instead of expressing feelings;
- ① unable to keep track of belonging, frequently loses things;
- ① unable to manage or find things in their cubby;
- ① inability to organize and get things together at the beginning or end of the day;
- ① unable to remember what they were going to say or do;
- ① off-topic when speaking or answering questions;
- ① becoming agitated when the schedule or the occurrence of an expected activity changes; and
- ① needing consistent rules that they interpret as being fair.

Emotional Dysregulation

- ① more intense and unexpected tantrums than those of other children their age;
- ① difficulty controlling their emotions with displays longer and more intense;
- ① becoming easily frustrated and expressing their frustration in unacceptable ways;
- ① being prone to outbursts;
- ① feedback or expulsion from preschool due to aggressive and impulsive behaviour;
- ① being unable to play peacefully with others;
- ① the inability to settle down after being excited or active;
- ① displaying aggression, to the level of having to remove the child from a situation, due to the inability to regulate their emotions; and
- ① being louder and noisier than fellow playmates.

Physical Development

- ① delay in speech development,
- ① gross motor skill delay (inability to hop on one foot by age 4),
- ① fine motor skill delay, (difficulty with colouring, using scissors, tying shoes, printing),
- ① difficulty with sleep,
- ① sensory issues, and
- ① delayed toilet training.

Questions to Ask

- ✓ Are the child's behaviours similar to other children their age?
- ✓ Would their behaviours appear to mimic those of a younger child?
- ✓ Do the behaviours change in different settings? (symptoms will increase when placed in an environment that challenges their impairments)
- ✓ Is the expected behaviour that you are NOT seeing something that would be developmentally appropriate for their age?



Sources used for Presentations of ADHD in Early Childhood

- <https://www.additudemag.com/preschoolers-adhd/>
- <https://www.additudemag.com/can-preschool-children-have-adhd/>
- <https://www.healthline.com/health/adhd/toddlers#next-steps>
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- <https://study.com/academy/lesson/adhd-teaching-strategies-for-preschoolers.html>
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