

Understanding Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)



About 3% of all school-aged children are estimated to have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), a disorder in which children are unable to pay attention, control their activity, and restrain impulsive behavior. These problems may interfere with a child's ability to hear or read instructions, complete school assignments, participate in games, and perform tasks at home. A diagnosis of ADHD is determined by a health professional based on observation of the child's behavior by parents, educators, and health professionals. Children with ADHD may have difficulty learning and participating successfully at school.

With the help of occupational therapy, a child can learn to master day-to-day skills and be engaged at school and at home. In the school system, occupational therapy is a related service under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and is designed to help a student with a disability benefit from special education. A child must be eligible for special education under IDEA before being considered for occupational therapy in the schools.

What can an occupational therapist do?

- **Evaluate** a child at home and at school to determine how ADHD is affecting the child's ability to perform assignments and participate at home.
- **Recommend** a program that addresses the physical, behavioral, and emotional effects of ADHD and identifies goals to help the child succeed.
- **Use** the intervention of sensory integration to modify the environment to decrease noise and distractions caused by visual, auditory, and tactile stimulation.

What can parents of children with ADHD do?

- **Learn** about ADHD and how it affects a child's ability to manage daily life.
- **Seek** professional help in providing the resources a child needs to learn to manage his or her own behavior.
- **Join** a support group for families with children with ADHD.

- **Use** charts and checklists as a guide for children to complete daily tasks.
- **Break** school assignments and home chores into a two-step process: listening to and understanding instructions, and accomplishing the task.
- **Offer** minimal, low-key feedback for success and failure to reduce anxiety, frustration, and perfectionism.
- **Be** consistent. Establish rules for the child and maintain them throughout his or her schooling.
- **Provide** the child with activities outside the school environment. Consider noncompetitive physical activity, such as martial arts, swimming, and horseback riding.
- **Focus** on the child's strengths and abilities. Do not overpraise or overcriticize.

Need more information?

ADHD is a serious problem that should not go untreated. If you would like to consult an occupational therapist about your child's condition, practitioners are available through most hospitals, community clinics, and medical centers.

with a broad range of physical, developmental, and psychological conditions. Practitioners also help clients and their caregivers with strategies that can prevent injury and secondary complications, and support health and well-being. Contact your local health organizations for more information.

Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants are trained in helping both adults and children