

## ATTENTION DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD)

### WHAT IS ADHD?

- ADHD is a *medical* condition that affects how well a child can sit still, pay attention, focus, take turns, regulate behavior, and finish things in a timely manner.
- ADHD is a *developmental* disorder, meaning it lasts throughout a child's life, into adulthood. However, sometimes the symptoms lessen over time.
- ADHD is an *executive functioning* deficit, which means it affects motivation, planning ahead, mental flexibility, inhibition and organization.

### WHAT CAUSES ADHD?

Research is still exploring the causes of ADHD. What we know is that ADHD runs in families. There are also conditions which are associated with ADHD, including premature birth, smoking and/or using alcohol or nonprescription drugs during the pregnancy, and traumatic brain injury.

ADHD is comprised of deficits in the areas of inattentions and/or symptoms of hyperactivity and impulsivity. Some children will display primarily attentional deficits (ADHD, predominately inattentive types), others will exhibit more pronounced hyperactivity and impulsivity deficits (ADHD, predominately hyperactive/impulsive type), and some children experience a combination of both (ADHD, combined type).

#### Inattention:

- Difficulties sustaining organization, concentrating, and becoming easily distractible.
- Difficulties with organization, losing things, needing frequent reminders, and making careless errors.
- Difficulties following through, getting started on tasks, and finishing tasks.
- Daydreams

#### Hyperactivity:

- Described as constantly "on the go", busy, active, restless, and can't sit still.
- Leaves seat in the classroom when remaining seated is expected.
- Talks excessively

#### Impulsivity:

- Acts and talks without thinking.
- Has difficulties taking turns, blurts out, and interrupts others.

### HOW DO WE TREAT ADHD?

Research supports medication and therapeutic intervention as the most effective treatment options for children and adolescents with ADHD.

#### STRATEGIES FOR HELPING CHILDREN WITH ADHD AT HOME:

- Provide verbal and visual cues and reminders.
- Ensure that directives are short, clear, and simple. Allow your child time to comply with the requests.
- Focus on the positive behaviors (i.e., setting up reward systems, charts, etc).
- Provide a quiet, organized space for studying.
- Use checklists to remind children of daily tasks and responsibilities.

#### STRATEGIES FOR HELPING CHILDREN WITH ADHD AT SCHOOL:

- Preferential seating (in the front of the classroom away from distractions)
- Provide accommodations, allowing different formats, and use of computers for written tasks.
- Children with ADHD often struggle socially. Whenever possible, support social skills enhancement (i.e., assign buddies, adult monitoring during unstructured times, turn-taking).
- Do not penalize children by taking away recess and gym. Children with ADHD need the physical activity to help them refocus and attend.
- It is important to work closely with the child's parents throughout the school year. Sometimes, a daily behavior chart is effective.

#### ADHD IN GIRLS:

- ADHD affects girls differently than boys. Girls report more depression, anxiety, distress, and poor teacher relationships. They have more trouble with cognitive tasks and school achievement.
- In clinical practice, girls with ADHD often go undiagnosed because they are less disruptive at home and in the classroom. The challenge to parents, teachers, and clinicians is to recognize when a girl has ADHD, as early diagnosis is key to effective treatment outcomes.