



Testing for AD/HD

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If your son's teacher tells you that she thinks your child may have AD/HD, you may want to consider getting him diagnosed. A diagnosis of AD/HD is not made until a thorough evaluation is conducted by a qualified professional. At times, teachers give feedback that is difficult to hear. Although this may be difficult to hear, it's important to focus on the message that's being conveyed: your son is having some problems that are interfering with learning. Your job is to find out what is getting in the way of his school success. Ask the teacher to describe in detail the behaviors your son is displaying in school that make her think of a diagnosis of AD/HD. Often times, when a teacher is suspicious of AD/HD, she may be witnessing the following signs of the disorder:

- Working below academic potential
- Lack of focus
- Disorganization
- Interrupting conversations and/or activities
- Restlessness
- Difficulty finishing projects
- Losing things

It is very important to know that AD/HD symptoms sometimes mimic characteristics of other problems, such as depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, and certain medical conditions. For example, concentration difficulties are seen in both AD/HD and depression. Also, it is not uncommon for a child with AD/HD to also have learning disabilities. Thus, prior to proceeding with a plan of action, a thorough evaluation is needed to increase the likelihood that AD/HD is appropriately diagnosed.

Diagnosing AD/HD properly is not an easy task. Many tests are used. The process can be lengthy, sometimes requiring 6 to 8 hours of testing and interviews. Further, additional time is required for scoring tests, making interpretations, and writing reports. For a comprehensive evaluation, I recommend the following:

Thorough Interviews With Parent(s), Teacher(s), and Student - Often interviews with parents are crucial for obtaining timelines for behavior issues. Further, the child or adolescent is sometimes reluctant or unable to provide accurate information. Teachers can provide information about how the child responds to structure in an academic environment.

Completion of Behavioral Questionnaires by Parent(s), Teacher(s), and Child -

These questionnaires were developed to identify children with AD/HD symptoms as well as other potential disorders.

Computerized Continuous Performance Tests - These tests are administered to see if the child can sustain attention during a repetitive, effortful, boring task. The tests are sensitive to impulsivity, inattention, and vigilance.

Tests of Intellectual and Academic Functioning - These tests are needed to determine whether the child is performing at an academic level consistent with their potential. Research indicates that approximately 30% of children with AD/HD have Learning Disabilities as well. Thus, intellectual and academic testing will assist with making that determination.

Personality Tests - These tests are used to differentiate AD/HD from other psychological disorders as well as to identify other social and emotional factors that interfere with successful functioning.

If you suspect AD/HD and/or social/emotional/behavior issues that are interfering with your child's quality of life, I encourage you to schedule an initial evaluation appointment with a qualified professional. Successful interventions often are dependent on an accurate and comprehensive diagnosis. If your son is AD/HD, a multimodal approach including medication, academic accommodations, behavior management, and social skills training is recommended. In most communities, there are a number of excellent professionals who can help you insure your son's future success at school. The first step, however, is getting him properly tested.