

Widening the Circle

Celebrating Neurodiversity in Faith Based Schools

Focus Strategy:

Understanding ADHD

We all have students who seem to have boundless energy, struggle to focus, or forget assignments. Understanding ADHD can equip us to better support these amazing learners!

What is ADHD?

Imagine your brain is like a symphony orchestra. Different sections work together to create beautiful music –processing information, controlling impulses, and staying focused. In students with ADHD, some sections might be a little louder or quieter than usual, making it harder for the orchestra to play in harmony. This can lead to challenges with focus, hyperactivity, or impulsivity. However, it's important to remember that ADHD is a spectrum, and every child experiences it differently.

The Three Subtypes of ADHD:

There are three main subtypes of ADHD, each with its own unique presentation:

- *Predominantly Inattentive Presentation:* These students might daydream a lot, have trouble following instructions, or lose track of belongings. They may appear calm, but their minds are busy elsewhere.
- *Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Presentation:* These students have a lot of energy, might fidget or talk excessively, and struggle to wait their turn. They might seem restless and have difficulty sitting still for long periods.
- *Combined Presentation:* This is the most common type, where students experience symptoms from both inattentive and hyperactive-impulsive presentations.

Differential Diagnosis: Ruling Out Other Possibilities

Before concluding a student has ADHD, it's important to consider other factors that might be causing similar symptoms, such as:

- **Anxiety:** Anxiety can manifest as difficulty focusing and fidgeting.
- **Learning Disabilities:** Some learning disabilities can mimic ADHD symptoms.
- **Vision or Hearing Issues:** Unaddressed vision or hearing problems can make it hard to focus in class.

ADHD looks different with boys and girls. Girls often are misdiagnosed or not diagnosed until later because the symptoms can be attributed to anxiety, shyness, or emotions. Identification of ADHD may not occur until high school or later in a girl's life.



Working Together: Creating a Supportive Classroom

If you suspect a student might have ADHD, the best course of action is to communicate with their parents and encourage them to seek a professional evaluation. In the meantime, there are many things we can do in the classroom:

- *Structure and Routines:* Clear routines and consistent expectations can help students know the rules and follow them.
- *Movement Breaks:* Include movement within instruction to assist with self-regulation.
- *Chunking Information:* Break down tasks and instructions into smaller steps.
- *Visual Aids:* Anchor charts, diagrams, and graphic organizers help organization and memory.
- *Positive Reinforcement:* Authentic and meaningful feedback to encourage consistency.

The Academic Impact

ADHD is diagnosed when educational assessments indicate poor working memory and slow processing speed. Students struggle with all academic content areas, especially when required to recall dates, apply steps to solve an equation, analyze details in a novel or chapter of a text book, and manage time to complete tasks. “Time blindness” has a significant impact on prioritization of tasks, completion in a given time frame, and getting started on assignments. Specific difficulties may be evident in high school math courses that rely upon years of foundational learning.

Students with ADHD typically have average to above average IQ and may be described as lazy and simply need to “try harder.” The behaviors associated with ADHD are not choices and these inaccurate labels result in low confidence and self-esteem.

Parent Connection:

Partnering with parents is essential when a student has ADHD!

- Include the student in frequent communication with the parent (when age appropriate) to set expectations across the home and school settings.
- Accountability checks in middle and high school build the self-advocacy skills necessary in adulthood. Partner with parents and the student to ensure there are clear expectations for accountability.

Resources:

[CHADD \(Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder\)](#)

[Learning and Attention Difficulties](#)

[ADDitude](#)

