

The Scoop On ADHD

By Kirsten Weir

Kids share what they know about attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder.



Image 100/Alamy

Maybe you've heard of ADHD. Perhaps your brother, your sister, or a friend has it. You might have received such a diagnosis yourself. But what exactly is ADHD? And what is it like to have it? *Current Health* talked to some experts—four students who live with ADHD. They give us the scoop and offer tips on how to be a helpful friend.

What Is It?

ADHD stands for *attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder*. (In the past, it was just called attention-deficit disorder—ADD for short.) Five percent to 10 percent of young people have ADHD, says Janet S. Reed, a neuropsychologist at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit. Reed studies the brain and its role in human behaviors.

The disorder shows itself in different ways. People with ADHD might have trouble paying attention, sitting still, staying focused, or following directions. They might say or do things without thinking.

"I daydream, and I don't really hear what people are saying," says Hannah S., 12. "If there's something on my desk, I play with it."

Shyanne D., also 12, sees the way her ADHD symptoms show up while she is at school. "I can't sit still. I always get hyper," she says.

Why Do Some Kids Have It?

Researchers aren't sure what causes ADHD, but they think genes play a big part. Genes carry the instructions that make us who we are and are passed down from parents to children. Often, ADHD is passed along from parent to child as well.

Having ADHD can sometimes make it hard for kids to do well in school. Kids with ADHD might have trouble listening to directions or forget to turn in homework. They might get out of their seats a lot, even when the teacher says to sit still. That doesn't mean that they are "bad kids" or aren't smart, Reed told *Current Health*. When kids with ADHD show those behaviors, she says, "It's not their fault."

Kids with ADHD say that having the disorder can be frustrating. "You don't get to choose if you want to pay attention or not. You can't control it," Hannah says.

Shyanne agrees. "Some people think it's an excuse. People sometimes think that you're lying about it. It's not an excuse—it's really something that you have."

Working Through ADHD

Luckily, strategies exist for dealing with ADHD. "There are things [kids] can do to work around it," Reed says. Young people with ADHD often take medications to help them stay focused. The medicines help many kids concentrate on their work and do better in school.

"I take medication in the morning," says Lauren K., 12. She says it helps her focus. "It's enough to get me through the school day, but when I get home I get kind of crazy and have a lot of energy."

If you have a friend with ADHD, you can be a help to him or her. Friends can gently give kids with ADHD reminders about what they're supposed to be doing and help keep them on track, Reed says. The kids *Current Health* spoke with have some helpful pals. "My friend sometimes wakes me up when I'm staring into space," Hannah says.

Everyone's Different

Each student can learn his or her own ways of dealing with symptoms that get in the way of everyday tasks.

"Sometimes I put things where they don't belong," says Lauren. "If you lose something [such as homework], you're going to get a bad grade."

Keeping things organized is a good strategy for staying on top of assignments. Reed recommends that when it's time to study, kids with ADHD find a clean, quiet workspace away from windows, TVs, and other distractions.

Sometimes, relaxing outside can help calm ADHD behaviors. Scientists recently reported that kids with ADHD concentrate better after taking walks in a park.

Counselors and therapists can help each person come up with strategies to calm down and focus.

"I used to not be able to hear what people were saying," says Robert F., 13. He would sometimes miss something important while he was daydreaming. "Then I taught my ears how to listen," he says.

Up to the Challenge

Living with ADHD can be a challenge. But people with the disorder can be just as successful as anyone else. What do Magic Johnson, Will Smith, and Michael Phelps all have in common? They're all superstars in their fields, and—you guessed it—all are reported to have ADHD.

The Right Moves

Vaughn Soso, a sixth grader from New York City, has ADHD. He's also a champion chess player. Vaughn started playing in second grade and has entered more than 50 tournaments. In 2009, he came in first at the SuperNationals, a huge tournament that happens only once every four years. Clearly, Vaughn has all the right moves!

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. What percent of young people have ADHD?

- A 0-1%
- B 5-10%
- C 10-20%
- D 25-35%

2. What is one thing that people with ADHD have trouble with?

- A following directions
- B running fast
- C watching TV
- D eating some foods

3. How might children with ADHD change once they are treated with medicine?

- A Their behavior will be the same, but they will get better grades.
- B It will be easier for them to sit still.
- C They will get frustrated more often.
- D They will become better actors.

4. "Counselors and therapists can help each person come up with strategies to calm down and focus." In the sentence, the word **strategies** most nearly means

- A special schools to study in
- B homework assignments
- C other types of disorders
- D plans of things to do

5. The passage "The Scoop on ADHD" is mostly about

- A differences between ice cream flavors
- B a disorder and how to deal with it
- C how ADHD is different in sisters and brothers
- D famous people with ADHD

6. What should kids with ADHD do when it is time to study?

7. What are some activities that might be very difficult for someone with ADHD?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word or phrase that best completes the sentence.

People can end up being very successful _____ they have ADHD.

- A even though
- B because
- C before
- D including

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Hannah's friends wake her up when she stares into space.

Who? _____

(do) What? _____

When? she stares into space

Directions: Read the vocabulary word and definition below to complete questions 10a, 10b, and 11.

Vocabulary Word: **frustrating** (frus · trat · ing): something that is frustrating annoys you or makes you angry because you cannot do anything about the problems it causes.

10a. Read the sentences below and underline all forms of the word **frustrating**.

1. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't open the cookie jar, and that was frustrating!
2. It was frustrating to get better and better at tennis, only to lose to the same person again and again.
3. When the bus did not come on time, she was late for school, which she found very frustrating.
4. I find it frustrating that I can't stay up as late as I want.
5. When I don't get something I want, I get frustrated.

10b. Which person appears to be dealing with something that is frustrating?



11. If you get annoyed when your friend is late to meet you, is that an example of something frustrating?

Teacher Guide and Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 820

Passage Text Structure: Descriptive – the writer explains, defines, or illustrates a concept or topic

Passage Summary: ADHD is a disorder that makes it hard for kids to concentrate. However, if treated correctly, people with ADHD can be as successful as anyone else.

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6. What should kids with ADHD do when it is time to study?

Suggested answer: When it is time to study, kids with ADHD should find a clean, quiet workspace away from windows, TVs, and other distractions. [paragraph 14]

7. What are some activities that might be very difficult for someone with ADHD?

Suggested answer: Some activities that might be very difficult for someone with ADHD are reading a long book, sitting through a long ceremony, and building something by using a set of instructions. Kids with ADHD have trouble paying attention, sitting still, staying focused, and following directions. [paragraph 3]

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word or phrase that best completes the sentence.

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Hannah's friends wake her up when she stares into space.

Who? **Hannah's friends**

(do) What? **wake her up**

When? when she stares into space

To the Teacher: ReadWorks recommends that you teach this vocabulary word to the whole class out loud using the four steps listed below.

Vocabulary Word: **frustrating** (frus • trat • ing): something that is frustrating annoys you or makes you angry because you cannot do anything about the problems it causes.

Step 1: Introduce the word

- a. Teacher writes the word on the board and divides it into syllables: (frus • trat • ing)
- b. Teacher says: "This word is frustrating. What is the word?" [All students reply together out loud: "frustrating."]

Step 2: Provide a child-friendly definition

- a. Teacher says: "Something that is frustrating annoys you or makes you angry because you cannot do anything about the problems it causes."
- b. Teacher says: "In the passage, the author writes that ADHD can be frustrating because, as one student explains, you can't choose if you want to pay attention or not, and you can't control the disorder."
- c. Teacher says: "What is the word?" [All students reply together out loud: "frustrating."]

Step 3: Practice the word

Teacher provides examples and additional opportunities to repeat the word. Read the first sentence out loud to your students. Begin reading it again and when you come to the vocabulary word, prompt students to say the vocabulary word out loud. Then, finish reading the sentence out loud to your students.

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5. When I don't get something I want, I get frustrated.

Step 4: Check for student understanding

To the Teacher: This step can be completed as a whole class activity or as an independent practice.

10b. Which person appears to be dealing with something that is frustrating?



11. If you get annoyed when your friend is late to meet you, is that an example of something frustrating?

Suggested answer: Yes, if something annoys you and is outside of your control, then it can be frustrating.

Suggested Additional Vocabulary: diagnosis