

*Maryland State Bar Association Lawyer Assistance Program*  
*Wellness Tip Sheet*

**Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) affects approximately 2 million children in the United States, making it the number one diagnosed behavior disorder of childhood. In a classroom of 25 to 30 children at least one child will have ADHD. Usually ADHD becomes apparent during the preschool and school-age years. These children have developmentally inappropriate levels of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. ADHD is not a Learning Disability. It is a neurological disorder that makes it more difficult for the individual to learn because of their activity level, inattention and/or impulsivity. ADHD varies greatly among individuals. This disorder is persistent and typically causes problems in one or more life areas: school, home, and/or social relations.

**Inattention**

Being able to pay attention is a process. Children with ADHD are able to pay attention. The problems that ADHD children have are paying attention to the appropriate things, sustaining their attention, and knowing under what circumstances they need to pay attention.

Areas of difficulty when paying attention:

- Being able to pay attention long enough to accomplish a goal, especially with boring and repetitive tasks.
- Being able to focus and avoid distractions, especially when they become uninterested in the task.
- Being unorganized and unable to pay attention to details.

These difficulties can lead to inconsistent, messy and often incomplete school work. In social situations they have difficulty listening, often losing track of conversations and not following directions.

**Hyperactivity**

It's very important before you label a child as hyperactive to take into consideration what is developmentally appropriate for the child's age. Children at different developmental stages exhibit different levels of activity.

Symptoms of hyperactivity include:

- Difficulty remaining seated
- Fidgets or squirms in seat
- Is "on the go" all the time
- Difficulty playing quietly
- Restlessness in adults
- Talks excessively

## **Impulsivity**

Children with ADHD often act without thinking about the consequences of their behavior. They may appear to be risk takers, but actually their behavior is driven by not fully being able to understand the outcome of their behavior.

Impulsive Behavior Includes:

- Speaking out of turn
- Difficulty waiting their turn
- Interrupting others
- Behavior that appears to be risk-taking behavior

## **ADHD and Executive Function**

Executive function is the ability to plan, organize, follow through, direct and manage our thoughts and activities. Executive function also helps inhibit impulsive behavior. When someone has ADHD it is as if they have a lot of workers but no boss to keep on task. They are more distracted by their own thoughts, impulsive, and find it hard to refocus on their work. They often make decisions without fully thinking them through. The ability to be our own executor or boss is learned as our brain develops.

Can you grow out of ADHD?

In most cases the difficulties with ADHD shift in the adolescent or adult years, but in a small number of cases children do outgrow ADHD. Someone might find it easier to sit still, but harder to stay on task. Often what you see is more difficulty with executive function.

## **Diagnosing ADHD**

ADHD is a mental health disorder and needs to be diagnosed by a licensed professional who specializes in ADHD, such as a psychiatrist, pediatrician, psychologist, neurologist or a clinical social worker. There are no tests to determine if a child has ADHD. The child has to meet specific diagnostic criteria.

***If you would like more information on ADHD please call the Lawyer Assistance Program for free, confidential assistance and speak to a counselor at 410-685-7878 x3041 or toll free at 800-492-1964***