

Adolescents with ADHD and ADD

Mother says, “Show me your agenda with your homework assignments.” Mom does spot checks on the school website to double check her adolescent’s agenda, look for teacher notations regarding missing homework assignments, and to monitor grades.

“What would be the most logical homework assignment to start with,” mother coaches. “It looks like you are losing focus. Why don’t you shoot a few hoops for ten minutes outside. Then come back.”

Working with ADHD/ADD adolescents can involve a variety of treatment strategies: parental coaching, individual and family therapy, psychological testing to confirm diagnoses and to rule out other learning disorders and symptoms, medication, coordination with the school to assist the student with accommodations.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Attention Deficit Disorder involve difficulty concentrating and focusing, problems staying on task, poor organizational skills, and poor impulse control and hyperactivity for the “H” in ADHD.

These disorders are not oppositional-defiant in origin—though it may appear that your adolescent is being lazy, defiant, and deceitful. ADHD and ADD are brain disorders that involve structural differences in the Executive Functioning part of the brain and chemical differences (dopamine levels). Oppositional-defiant behaviors can grow out of ADHD/ADD when adolescents develop low self esteem related to their difficulties focusing and organizing.

ADHD/ADD do not reflect IQ, though grades can be low due to poor organization with writing down homework, handing in homework, packing a book bag, and sustaining attention in the classroom and while studying. ADHD/ADD does not guarantee job/career failure. A job that is stimulating has variety, and opportunities for multi-tasking can enhance success.

Therapy can assist parents in helping their adolescents break homework and household tasks down into manageable “chunks” that will not overwhelm. “First pick up the dirty clothes in your room and bring them downstairs to me. Now take a trash bag and pick up all the trash on the floor.” Therapy can also assist with organizational and time management skills, the use of calendars and agendas to plot out tests and projects, memory aids, study skills, and finding that annoying alarm clock to get them up in the morning. Therapy can help the hyperactive adolescent with impulse control skills, anger management, and relaxations skills to slow them down so they can “think” before they “react.”

Therapists can help parents confirm that their adolescent truly has ADHD/ADD vs. other disorders to avoid misdiagnosis or over-diagnosis. Therapy can turn what seemed like an “impossible” situation into something more “doable.”