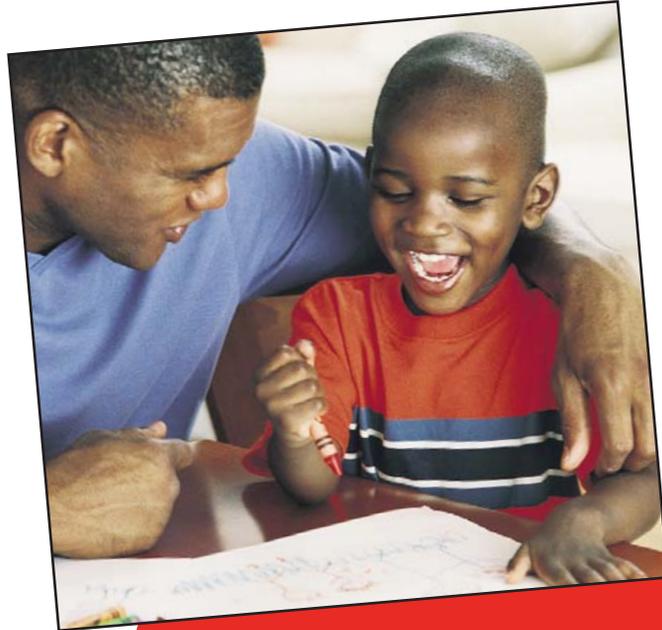


Livingston Parish Public Schools  
Livingston, Louisiana



**What to Do  
If Your Child Has  
ADD/ADHD**

One of a series of Parent Guides from



# Livingston Parish Public Schools Livingston, Louisiana

## **Parent Guide**

What to Do  
If Your Child Has  
**ADD/ADHD**

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## Introduction

Parenting any child is a challenging job. But parenting a child with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)\* takes those challenges to new heights. It takes more planning, it takes more involvement and it takes more patience. If you are new to this process, it can feel like stepping into a maze.

ADHD, the most commonly diagnosed neurological childhood disorder, affects three to five percent of children. In part because ADHD has become so well known, a vast amount of information is available—so much that it can be overwhelming. Everyone seems to have an opinion on ADHD, so separating myth and opinion from fact can be confusing.



For parents, it adds one more challenge to an already full plate. ADHD is highly treatable, but even with the best treatment, it requires extra effort from the whole family. You need solid information and guidance, not another sensational story in the media or Aunt Nellie's well-meaning (but very wrong) advice.

That's where this Parent Guide comes in. Following, you will learn:

- **What ADHD is (and what it isn't).**
- **How to get a proper diagnosis.**
- **What is known about its cause.**
- **How ADHD can affect your child at home, with friends and at school.**
- **What you can do at home to help.**
- **What you can do to get outside help.**
- **Where you can learn more—further resources.**

With this knowledge, you will be well on your way to helping your child achieve his\*\* maximum potential.

\* You may have heard of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), a condition that represents a subset of ADHD, and which will be addressed on page 5 of this Parent Guide.

\*\* Each child is unique, so this publication alternates using masculine and feminine pronouns.

## What is ADHD?

ADHD is a disorder with three main attributes. They are:

- **Inattention**—A child with ADHD may find it extremely difficult to pay attention to things that she finds neither stimulating nor highly interesting. Homework, unfortunately, often stands out as a prime example of something that children with ADHD struggle to focus their attention on.
- **Hyperactivity**—A child with ADHD may not be able to sit still in situations, such as classroom “circle time,” where sitting still is appropriate and expected. After a few minutes he may get up, walk (or run) around the room, poke his neighbor in the ribs, or do other things almost certain to get him into trouble. “He acts as if he’s driven by a motor,” is a commonly heard refrain about hyperactive children.
- **Impulsivity**—A child with ADHD may not always be able to stop herself from saying or doing something she knows is inappropriate. This is different from the ability to distinguish right from wrong. A child with ADHD, when she thinks about it, usually knows the proper thing to say or do. The problem is that very often, children with ADHD act first, and think later.



## How is ADHD Diagnosed?

Nearly everyone at some point exhibits inattention, hyperactivity or impulsivity—or all three. But not everyone who does this has ADHD. What sets ADHD apart is that these symptoms:

- **Are pervasive**—they don’t just happen once in awhile, they happen daily.
- **Happen in at least two settings in the person’s life.** For children, these settings are usually home and school.
- **Are inappropriate for the child’s age.** For example, a two-year-old who cannot sit still probably does not have ADHD. That behavior is normal. But it’s not normal for a nine-year-old. If a nine-year-old is unable to sit still, ADHD may be the reason why.
- **Begin before the age of seven.**
- **Are long-term.** ADHD cannot be diagnosed unless symptoms have been present for at least six months. And while researchers once believed that ADHD disappeared during the teen years, we now know that ADHD is a life-long disorder. However, symptoms may greatly improve as a person gets older.

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page 3 ...*

• **Cannot be better explained** by another reason or another disorder.

This last point illustrates why it is necessary to get what professionals call a differential diagnosis before deciding that a child has ADHD. This simply means that because many other problems look like or “mimic” ADHD, these must be ruled out as the cause of symptoms before an ADHD diagnosis can be confirmed.



To perform a differential diagnosis, a doctor or mental health professional will look closely at a child’s history, and at everything that is now going on in her life. He or she will also consult closely with parents, teachers, other doctors and anyone else who knows the child well.

Some conditions that mimic ADHD include:

- **A trauma in the child’s life**—such as a death in the family, or parents’ divorce.
- **Absence seizures**—in which a person seems to “blank out” for a few seconds or minutes.
- **Autistic spectrum disorders**, such as Asperger Syndrome.
- **Anxiety.**
- **Depression.**
- **An undiagnosed learning disability.** (ADHD usually has a serious effect on a child’s learning. However, it is not, under legal definition, considered to be a specific learning disability.)

It is possible for a child to have any of these conditions in addition to having ADHD. In fact, about 40 to 60 percent of children with ADHD must cope with another disorder as well. In those cases, the other disorders will produce entirely separate sets of symptoms.

## How Can I Get a Professional Diagnosis for My Child?

ADHD may first be noticed when a child enters school. Teachers have a responsibility to notify parents that something seems amiss, but they are not qualified to diagnose ADHD.

That job belongs to a doctor or to certain mental health professionals.

Parents often take their children first to their family doctor or to a pediatrician when ADHD is suspected. Sometimes this doctor has the knowledge and expertise to diagnose and treat ADHD. Or he or she may refer parents to one of the following specialists:

- **Developmental pediatricians** focus only on child development and behavior, not on the variety of childhood illnesses that most pediatricians treat. Developmental pediatricians are medical doctors and can prescribe medication. They do not usually offer therapy.

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- **Psychiatrists** focus only on mental health problems. Psychiatrists are medical doctors and can prescribe medication. They can also provide therapy.
- **Psychologists** also focus only on mental health problems. Psychologists are not medical doctors and cannot prescribe medication. They provide therapy, and usually work closely with medical doctors.
- **Neurologists** specialize in treating the brain. They are medical doctors and can prescribe medication. They usually do not offer therapy.
- **Clinical social workers** specialize in treating a variety of mental health and relationship problems. They are not medical doctors and cannot prescribe medication. They offer therapy, and usually work closely with medical doctors or psychologists.

These professionals will consider the standards already mentioned in this guide when making a diagnosis. They may also refer to the Diagnostic & Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR), which lists specific criteria for diagnosis. Ask if you can review the criteria with your physician. The Centers for Disease Control has also made the criteria available online. You can find the information at [www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/symptom.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/symptom.htm).

If the doctor determines your child has ADHD, she will be diagnosed with one of three types. These are:

- **ADHD, Predominantly Inattentive Type.** Children with this type of ADHD have significant difficulty focusing and paying attention. They are not especially hyperactive or impulsive.
- **ADHD, Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Type.** Children with this type of ADHD have significant difficulty sitting still and thinking before they speak or act. They can focus when these problems are under control.
- **ADHD, Combined Type.** Children with this type of ADHD are inattentive, hyperactive and impulsive—all three main ADHD traits.

You may hear the term Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) especially in reference to Predominantly Inattentive Type ADHD. This term is not incorrect. However, in 1994, the official name of the disorder became ADHD, according to the American Psychiatric Association (APA). APA sets the standards for diagnosing ADHD and other mental health disorders.



## What Causes ADHD?

ADHD is enough to deal with on its own, but parents of children with ADHD frequently battle guilt as well. They worry that they did something wrong—and the result is a child who cannot pay attention or control his behavior. Unfortunately many so-called “experts” are always ready to reinforce this guilt. Ignoring the thousands of scientific studies that have shown ADHD to be a real disorder, they argue loudly that it does not exist. Instead, they say, it’s an excuse parents make to cover the fact that they are too lazy to discipline their children.

As a parent, you can feel secure that you have science and research on your side. Here are just a few of the preeminent medical and scientific institutions that have firmly concluded ADHD is real:

- **Harvard University Medical School.**
- **The Centers for Disease Control.**
- **National Institute of Mental Health.**
- **The Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.**



Research from these and many other organizations strongly points to biology, not bad parenting, as the main cause of ADHD. A poor environment may certainly make symptoms seem worse, researchers have found, but it is not the cause of the disorder. Instead, studies show that ADHD is related to genetics—it tends to run in families. Newer studies have also shown very specific differences between the brains of people with and without ADHD. However, scientists are not yet ready to use this type of brain research to diagnose ADHD.

## Why Is It Important to Treat ADHD?

Research has shown us that ADHD usually affects every part of a child’s life. Sadly, children with untreated ADHD are at risk for school failure. They are able to learn, and many are highly intelligent. But their disability interferes so strongly that they don’t learn, or don’t learn enough. They may also have behavior problems, winding up in the principal’s office on a regular basis.

ADHD can also wreak havoc with family life. A child with ADHD may seem to be ignoring her parents on purpose, when in reality she is not able to pay attention to what they are saying. Or she may repeat the same misbehavior again and again, because she can’t stop herself. This may lead to a lot of yelling, and punishment after punishment, with no positive results. There are only frustrated parents and a child who feels helpless and hopeless.

Making friends is difficult for many children with ADHD. Children who are inattentive can lose track of the back-and-forth of social conversation. They also may fail to pick up on social cues, such as the body language children use to say “Join us,” or “You’re standing too close.” Children who are hyperactive or impulsive may have trouble controlling their behavior if they get upset. They may respond with aggression to mild or even good-natured teasing.

Proper treatment can lessen the severity of the symptoms of ADHD and give your child a more normal life—and lessen the stress of dealing with the disorder for the whole family.

Helping a child with ADHD takes intense, involved, hands-on parenting. You may have to restructure the way you manage your home and rethink your strategies for discipline and communication with your child. The good news is that your efforts stand a favorable chance of working, and working well. Experts in treating ADHD recommend these steps:

- **Join a support group.**

No one will understand you and your child the way another parent of an ADHD child will. You may be able to find a group by checking with your child's school or a local hospital. You can also contact Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD) at 1-800-233-4050 or [www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org).

- **Be clear and specific.** "Clean your room" is too vague a direction for most children with ADHD. You will get best results when you tell your child exactly what you want him to do, and break it down into steps. "Pick up the shirts from the floor. Hang them in your closet." Give another direction only after he completes the first task. Also focus on behavior you want to see, rather than behavior you want to stop. "Please put your hands in your lap and keep them there," works better than "Don't touch anything on the coffee table."

*Continued on page 8 ...*

- **Get informed.** The more you know about ADHD, the more you will be prepared for your child's needs. It's especially important to be able to tell between disability-related behavior and conscious behavior, because you'll need different strategies for dealing with each. You will find some resources at the end of this guide.
- **Give rewards.** Children with ADHD need more tangible rewards for proper behavior than most other children do. They also need them sooner and more often. Consider giving your child points or tokens for finishing tasks or showing good behaviors. Let her spend her points to earn rewards. On the other hand, she'll lose points for negative behaviors.

Children with ADHD often do not deal well with surprises and inconsistencies, especially in a discipline system. Agree with your child in advance about everything—the tasks you want done, the behaviors you expect, the rewards and the consequences. Write these down and post them in a visible place.



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- **Stick to a schedule.** Children with ADHD usually thrive on structure and routine. Have regular times for meals, homework, play and sleep. Try to let your child know ahead of time if there is going to be a change.
- **Get organized.** It's essential for a child with ADHD to have a set place to put things like books, homework papers and notes from school. For best results, he should clean up every day at the same time.
- **Encourage strengths.** Allow your child plenty of time to do the things she enjoys and is good at. This may boost her self-esteem.

- **Help your child make friends.** Set up play-dates—children with ADHD often do better one-on-one than they do in large groups. Involve your child in structured activities, such as Scouts. These allow your child to practice social skills in a supervised environment.
- **Give unconditional love.** You won't always like your child's behavior, but make sure he knows you love him no matter what. The world can be a confusing and scary place, especially to a child with ADHD. He needs your guidance as he navigates it.

### Can My Child Get Help at School?

Having ADHD does not automatically qualify your child for extra help at school. But if the ADHD is hurting your child's academic work, her relationships with teachers and classmates, or both, your child may qualify for specialized school programs and assistance, so be sure to talk with school officials about help that may be available.



## What About Outside Help?

If your child has a diagnosis of ADHD, you have already begun to get outside help through the care of a doctor or mental health professional. This professional can help you determine if other services would be right for your child as well. Every child is different, but the following are some services that have been helpful to many children with ADHD:

- **Individual therapy.** Therapy can help a child deal with feelings, improve behavior, or both.
- **Social skills training.** This can happen either one-on-one, between your child and a therapist, or in a small group that includes your child, a therapist and a few other children. Your child will learn skills ranging from how to join in a game to how to consider another person's feelings and point of view.
- **Family therapy.** ADHD is an issue for everyone in the household. Each person may benefit from the coping and cooperation techniques learned in family therapy.



## Do I Have to Medicate My Child?

Medication is part of the treatment package for many children with ADHD. Much research has demonstrated that medication is a highly effective way to treat ADHD symptoms. In addition, behavior therapy and other interventions usually work better when combined with medication.

Your child's doctor is an excellent source of information about ADHD medications and whether they are right for your child. Medications have been used to treat ADHD in children for more than 60 years, but their use remains controversial. You will no doubt read and hear many opinions. With the guidance of a trusted doctor, you can make the best decision for your child.

## What is My Child's Prognosis?

No one knows exactly what the future holds. Still, you have every reason to believe your child is bright. ADHD may be an obstacle in your child's path. But with proper treatment and your loving support, your child can push the obstacle aside and follow the path to happiness and success.

## For More Information

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

1-800-311-3435

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

### Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

1-800-233-4050

[www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org)

### Mayo Clinic

Rochester, MN

507/284-2511

[www.mayoclinic.org/rochester](http://www.mayoclinic.org/rochester)

### Dr. Sam Goldstein

801/532-1484

[www.samgoldstein.com](http://www.samgoldstein.com)

### Harvard University Medical School

617/432-1000

<http://hms.harvard.edu/hms/>

### National Institute of Mental Health

1-866-615-6464

[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

### National Resource Center on AD/HD

1-800-233-4050

[www.help4adhd.org](http://www.help4adhd.org)

### Schwab Learning

650/655-2410

[www.schwablearning.org](http://www.schwablearning.org)

## Other Parent Guides Available From The Parent Institute®

### **Family & Home Set**

*10 Great Ways to Teach Children Responsibility*

*25 Ways You Can Put the Power of Routines to Work for You and Your Child*

*52 Great Ways Families Can Spend Time Together*

### **School Readiness—Set 1**

*Developmental Milestones for Preschool Children—Is My Child on Track?*

*Preparing Your Child for Reading Success—Birth to Age Five*

*How to Choose the Best Preschool or Day Care for Your Child*

### **School Readiness—Set 2**

*Common Discipline Problems of Preschoolers and How to Deal With Them*

*37 Experiences Every Child Should Have Before Starting School*

*Getting Your Child Ready for Kindergarten*

### **School Success—Set 1**

*The Road to Reading Success—Elementary School Years*

*Common Discipline Problems of Elementary School Children and How to Solve Them*

*31 Alternatives to TV and Video Games for Your Elementary School Child*

### **School Success—Set 2**

*Give Your Child the Edge: Teachers' Top 10 Learning Secrets Parents Can Use*

*How to Help Children Do Their Best on Tests*

*Helping Children Get Organized for Homework and Schoolwork*

### **School Success—Set 3**

*Help Your Child Develop Good Learning Styles*

*How to Instill the Character Traits of Success in Your Child*

*Seven Proven Ways to Motivate Children to Do Better in School*

### **When There is a Problem—Set 1**

*Help Your Child Deal With Bullies and Bullying*

*Help Your Child Deal With Peer Pressure*

*How to Help Your Struggling Student*

### **Other Important Titles**

*Common Discipline Problems of Teenagers and How to Solve Them*

*What to Do If Your Child Has ADD/ADHD*

*Common Discipline Problems of Middle School Children and How to Solve Them*

*Making a Smooth Transition to Middle School*

*For more information about these and other materials for  
parents to encourage learning in their children:*

**1-800-756-5525**  
**www.parent-institute.com**

