

What does Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) look like?

Why can't Jason sit still?

Jason is seven years old and on the go from early in the morning until late at night. He starts getting dressed at 6 am but he's still not ready when it's time to leave for school. Jason gets easily distracted, can never find his things, and forgets what he is supposed to do. At school he has trouble staying in his seat. He gets frustrated quickly and can't concentrate for very long on his work, so he is falling behind.

When friends come over to his place, he is excited at first but gets upset when they don't do things his way. He starts one game then suddenly wants to change to a different one. Lately he's been saying, "School is boring, the work is dumb," and that he doesn't want to go.

Does Jason have ADHD?

It is not easy to say. Many children have lots of energy and like to be involved in everything that is happening. All children have problems with attention in certain situations.

Some kids have lots of energy and enthusiasm. Once they learn how to manage that energy they can go on to do great things!

What you might see in a child with ADHD

A child with ADHD may...

- change activities often without finishing them
- lose or misplace belongings
- forget what he or she is told to do
- be restless in situations requiring calm
- be always on the go
- have difficulties with planning and organisation
- have difficulties in social situations (eg turn-taking).

Parents and carers might notice their child...

- gets out the soccer ball to have a kick and then goes away and does something else
- leaves their jumper at school regularly (and lunchbox, hat and shoes!)
- agrees to brush their teeth but gets distracted and ends up doing something else instead
- can't sit and finish a meal
- can't sit still on car trips
- runs everywhere; can't wait to do the next thing
- never seems to wear out
- can't keep track of tasks
- gets confused easily when asked to get ready
- constantly interrupts others' conversations
- can't wait for his or her turn.

How parents and carers can help

Children with behaviours like Jason's benefit from learning how to get organised. Set up a plan with your child and help him or her to practise.

For example, if your child has difficulty in getting ready for school in the morning, here are some suggestions:

- Write a short list of the tasks that need doing before leaving the house.
- Get your child to help with the list by suggesting the steps or drawing pictures.
- Use the list as a visual prompt.
- Check each morning how well your child has done and reward success.
- Gradually expect your child to do more by him or herself.

Children may need lots of praise to begin with but as their skills develop, noticing and commenting on the benefits of the new skills and an occasional "well done" will usually be enough to keep them motivated.

Getting ready for school list:

Get dressed

Eat breakfast

Brush teeth

Pack school bag

Tell me when you are ready

Are you worried that your child is a bit like Jason?

Here's how to get help

- Make a time to talk with your child's classroom teacher to share concerns and find out about how your child is managing at school and find out what resources the school can offer.
- Ask to speak to the school psychologist or counsellor.
- Talk to your doctor about the possibility of an assessment and referral to a children's mental health specialist.

A mental health professional may diagnose ADHD when

- 1 a child shows the above behaviours far more often than other children of the same age
- 2 these behaviours occur at home, at school and in the neighbourhood.
- 3 these behaviours cause difficulties for the child with his friends, his teachers and his family and are greatly impacting upon their everyday life.

A diagnosis of ADHD can only be made by a mental health professional after a thorough assessment.

For more, please refer to the KidsMatter Primary information sheets on recognising and getting help for children with mental health difficulties.

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

