

# AN OVERVIEW OF ADHD CARE

## What is attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD\*)?

ADHD is a developmental delay in a wide range of life management skills including planning and organizing, affecting far more than just attention. ADHD may impact social relations, emotional well-being, academic success, and almost any other area of life, even physical health and self-esteem. Understanding its full impact in this way allows for practical solutions to ensure that both children and adults living with it thrive.

## What causes ADHD?

ADHD is a chronic medical disorder largely determined by genetics. The genetic basis of ADHD is almost as strong as that for height. ADHD has also been related to brain regions responsible for “executive function,” meaning those mental abilities used to coordinate and manage our lives. In fact, most researchers now define ADHD as a disorder of executive function rather than of attention or behavior. Therefore, understanding executive function is the foundation for planning.

## What are the components of executive function?

Executive function gives us our ability to manage, coordinate, plan and anticipate, like the conductor of an orchestra, or the CEO of a business. Executive function is sometimes described as having six components:

### Action Management

The ability to control, self-monitor and learn from mistakes. Difficulties can lead to frustrating, unintentional misbehavior. They also can cause children with ADHD to learn more slowly from behavioral interventions than others or to be careless in their work.

### Attention Management

The ability to sustain focus when challenged, shift attention, and avoid hyperfocus (become too absorbed) when engaged in an enjoyable task. Difficulties with attention management occur most often when demands are high – but may not for easy, enjoyable tasks. Trouble shifting attention may seem like defiance or ignoring requests, and can lead to challenges that appear oppositional or struggles with transitions and starting new tasks.

### Task Management

The ability to organize, plan, prioritize, and manage time. Task management is required for daily routines and responsibilities, and academics such as homework, studying and managing long term projects. These skills are also needed for the self-advocacy and self-management of ADHD. In other words, plans to manage ADHD are often undermined by having ADHD.

### Effort Management

The ability to persevere when activities are challenging, to sustain focus and work efficiently. Difficulty with effort management often gets labeled as poor motivation, but frequently stems from ADHD-related issues.

### Information Management

The ability to remember, organize and retrieve information. Children with ADHD may have trouble organizing their thoughts for speaking and writing, taking notes in school, or keeping track of requests (“Go to your room, get dressed and brush your teeth, please.”)

### Emotional Management

The ability to experience emotions without impulsively acting on them. Common ADHD related behaviors include poor frustration tolerance, tantrums, over-reaction and irritability, all of which may impact family and social relations.

\*The term “ADHD with predominantly inattentive symptoms” has replaced “ADD (attention deficit disorder)”