



Talking to Kids about ADHD

Parent/ caregiver guide

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder causing disabilities that can have lifelong effects on health, educational and vocational outcomes, and relationships. Talking to kids about ADHD using age-appropriate language can equip them not only with understanding but with the self-awareness and self-confidence they will need to advocate for themselves now and into adulthood.

Talking with Preschoolers (4-6):

Introduce ADHD with examples:

- “ADHD describes some of the challenges we have. You’re good at (running fast, building with blocks, etc.), but I’ve noticed it’s harder for you to (wait your turn, pay attention to your teacher, etc.). We call those struggles ADHD.”
- “It’s important to tell me when you’re struggling so I can help. If I’m driving or talking with someone else, we need a signal so I know it’s important to talk very soon. We’ll check in with your doctors a few times a year so they can help us.”

School-age (6-12):

- Ask how ADHD feels to them, and let them know this is common. “A lot of other kids and adults have ADHD, too. Some people say having ADHD is like having a sports-car brain with bicycle brakes, because they think or do things fast, but it’s harder to stop or change directions. What’s it like for you?”
- When your thoughts are racing, what seems to help? What makes it worse?

Adolescents (12-18):

- Ask deeper questions. Use phrases that increasingly suggest support rather than providing all the answers. “We learned from your doctor that you have ADHD. It’s pretty common, so you probably know people who also have it. ADHD can make some things easier for you and some things harder. But it’s different for everyone. What does it mean to you?”
- What have you heard other kids say about it? Is it that way for you, too, or does it feel different?
- How can we support you best when you get overwhelmed?
- Let’s talk about other things that are going on. Drugs and alcohol, mental health conditions like anxiety, and other factors can complicate ADHD. How do you think about all that?



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