

AD/HD and your Child: Straight Talk

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AD/HD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and children suffering from it are eligible for special education services.

When AD/HD affects a child's ability to learn and participate and complete classroom tasks and assignments, parents and educators should discuss the possibility of special education services. Symptoms of AD/HD include hyperactivity, impulsiveness and/or an ability to concentrate or focus on the task at hand. This can make it extremely difficult for children to sit in a normal classroom, to pay attention to instructors and/or follow directions.

A professional or a clinician is the best person to test your child for AD/HD because generally they have more experience in making a diagnosis. You can also ask your child's school if your school district has someone who is qualified to test your child. You should make sure to find out what kind of training and experience the person testing your child has. You want to make sure he/she will be able to help you find the best treatment options for your child.

A support group for parents of AD/HD children might be a good place to find people who can recommend a clinician. Your child's doctor, a mental health professional or even your local hospital should be able to help you find someone to test your child.

Schools are supposed to test a child between the ages of 3 to 21 if a member of the staff believes that the child has AD/HD or any other disability that is harming their ability to perform in school. Usually this means that the child is having trouble in class. Often he/she will have trouble learning, but other signs are being disruptive in the classroom, bothering other students or not listening to their teacher.

If the school feels a test is necessary, the school is supposed to provide this testing free of charge and must give the student more than one standardized test to be sure of the results. This is the law and you must insist on it.

If you think that the school should be testing your child, ask them to do an evaluation. Make sure to ask in writing and keep a copy. In the letter, include the date, your name, your child's name, and why you are asking for an evaluation. You should also include any problems your child is having in completing his/her work and behaving in class.

If your child is under 3-years old and you think that he/she has AD/HD, there are services for testing available. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act provides services in your area that help you become involved in helping your child at an early age. If you want your toddler tested, ask your child's doctor or your hospital's pediatric or mental health wards who to contact and what phone number to call.

The person in charge of the testing must be careful in diagnosing a toddler with AD/HD. Generally, children under 3 don't pay attention for long amounts of time and like to go from activity to activity when they are playing. They also can tend to get frustrated at times. It is important for the evaluator to keep this in mind and know how children usually develop so they know what types of behavior are normal and what types of behavior might indicate AD/HD.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act also makes services available for children between the age of 3 and five. To find out what services are available, you can call the state Department of Education, your local school district or your child's doctor.

If your child is 6 or older and you think that he/she has AD/HD, you can go to your school district for testing. It can be done by someone on the staff as long as one person on the evaluation group knows about AD/HD and is able to recognize the condition. If there is not someone qualified to test your child, the school needs to hire someone who is trained to do the assessment. This person should be able to observe the child, know how to have an interview with the parents, teacher, and child, and know how to use behavior rating scales.

Once you have found someone to ask for an evaluation, the next step (getting the school system to test your child) can be difficult.

Some schools are not helpful in providing services to children who need special education. However, they are required to give your child these services. It is a law. AD/HD is listed under the regulations section in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as a disability.

If the school insists that the disability does not affect their ability to learn and perform in the classroom, they may refuse to do the evaluation. You have options though. You can ask for a private evaluation by someone who is not in the district, or hire an advocate to help you to try and make the school give you an evaluation.

To find an advocate, you can call the Parent Training and Information center or the Protection and Advocacy Agency. North Dakota Protection and Advocacy has a 24-hour hotline 800-642-6694 (24 H. Line) \ 800-366-6888 TDD or you can **E-Mail:** tlarsen@state.nd.us These people will be able to give you information on your rights and tell you what to do next. Another idea is to get a special education attorney to help you out.

Once your child gets tested, the results will show whether or not he/she has AD/HD or a related learning disability and if your child will be able receive special education services, depending upon the rules in your state.

Sometimes parents have problems with getting those service for their children. However, just like with getting your child tested, there are other places and organizations you can go to help you get those services.