



My son is in the 10th grade. During the past year he has become more impulsive and easily distractible. Can students this old, have ADHD?

Adolescents with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) may act impulsively, be easily distracted, and have difficulty focusing, but this is not necessarily specific to ADHD. Anxious kids may be hyper and restless, depressed kids may be inattentive and disorganized, and typical teens may display all of the above. How is a parent to know if their teen is experiencing turbulent times or engaging in developmentally appropriate activities?

Further confusing the situation is that ADHD behaviors can go unnoticed during the elementary years because these students are often extremely intelligent and develop self compensating strategies for their attention deficits. Additionally, grade school teachers are particularly talented at helping young children stay on task. Maturing students, however, face new challenges as they juggle the demands of a busier scholastic schedule, attempt more demanding academic tasks, and negotiate increased independence. Grades often drop and attention problems become more noticeable during the high school years.

An accurate assessment begins with a qualified professional. While a pediatrician's perspective may initially be helpful, their diagnostic process typically lacks the depth of one who specializes in ADHD diagnosis. A comprehensive evaluation is a multi-layered process that provides an accurate assessment that not only confirms the presence of ADHD, but also provides insight into how attention issues impact thinking and learning.

The first step toward a proper diagnosis is having an up-to-date medical physical, hearing test, and vision screening to ensure other potential problems have been ruled out. Next meet with a qualified diagnostician who will review academic records, interview the family, and consult with the school. This professional will also provide behavioral questionnaires for the teachers, parents, and student as well as administer a comprehensive set of intelligence, academic, and ADHD specific assessments. Parents should expect to receive a detailed diagnostic report soon after the process is completed.

ADHD students can be just as successful as their peers. Detailed testing will provide data that can assist families with providing the appropriate support and securing the necessary school accommodations. Testing is time consuming and can be expensive, but before one considers medication it is best to have all the facts.

And one more thing, multiple studies indicate that ADHD is typically genetic. The next time your teen makes an impulsively poor decision or does not pay attention to your comments, there is a good chance mom or dad is partly responsible—it's in the genes. Provide support, guidance, and empathy,