

The Scoop On ADHD

by Kirsten Weir



Image 100/Alamy

Maybe you've heard of ADHD. Perhaps your brother, your sister, or a friend has it. You might have received such a diagnosis yourself. But what exactly is ADHD? And what is it like to have it? *Current Health* talked to four students with ADHD. They give us the scoop and offer tips on how to be a helpful friend.

What Is It?

ADHD stands for *attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder*. (In the past, it was just called attention deficit disorder-ADD for short.) In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association reported that 5% of children had ADHD.

The disorder shows itself in different ways. People with ADHD might have trouble paying attention, sitting still, staying focused, or following directions. They might say or do things without thinking.

"I daydream, and I don't really hear what people are saying," said Hannah S. when she was 12 years old. "If there's something on my desk, I play with it."

Shyanne D. could see the way her ADHD symptoms showed up while she was at school in the seventh grade. "I can't sit still. I always get hyper," she said.

Why Do Some Kids Have It?

Researchers aren't sure what causes ADHD, but they think genes play a big part. Genes carry the instructions that make us who we are, and they are passed down from a father and mother to their child. Often, ADHD is passed along from parent to child as well.

Having ADHD can sometimes make it hard for kids to do well in school. Kids with ADHD might have trouble listening to directions or forget to turn in homework. They might get out of their seats a lot, even when the teacher says to sit still. That doesn't mean that they are "bad kids" or aren't smart, Janet S. Reed, a neuropsychologist, told *Current Health*. When kids with ADHD show those behaviors, she said, "It's not their fault."

Kids with ADHD say that having the disorder can be frustrating. "You don't get to choose if you want to pay attention or not. You can't control it," Hannah said.

Shyanne agreed. "Some people think it's an excuse. People sometimes think that you're lying about it. It's not an excuse-it's really something that you have."

Working through ADHD

Luckily, strategies exist for dealing with ADHD. "There are things [kids] can do to work around it," Reed said. Young people with ADHD often take medications to help them stay focused. For many kids, the medicines help them concentrate on their work and do better in school.

"I take medication in the morning," said Lauren K. She said that it helped her focus. "It's enough to get me through the school day, but when I get home I get kind of crazy and have a lot of energy."

If you have a friend with ADHD, you can be a help to him or her. Friends can gently give kids with ADHD reminders about what they're supposed to be doing and help keep them on track, Reed said. The kids *Current Health* spoke with have some helpful pals. "My friend sometimes wakes me up when I'm staring into space," Hannah said.

Everyone's Different

Each student can learn his or her own ways of dealing with symptoms that get in the way of everyday tasks.

"Sometimes I put things where they don't belong," said Lauren. "If you lose something [such as homework], you're going to get a bad grade."

Keeping things organized is a good strategy for staying on top of assignments. Reed recommended that when it's time to study, kids with ADHD find a clean, quiet workspace away from windows, TVs, and other distractions.

Sometimes, relaxing outside can help calm ADHD behaviors. Scientists recently reported that kids with ADHD concentrate better after taking walks in a park.

Counselors and therapists can help each person come up with strategies to calm down and focus.

"I used to not be able to hear what people were saying," said Robert F. at the age of 13. He would sometimes miss something important while he was daydreaming. "Then I taught my ears how to listen," he said.

Up to the Challenge

What do Magic Johnson, Will Smith, and Justin Timberlake all have in common? They're all superstars in their fields, and-you guessed it-all are reported to have ADHD.

Vaughn Soso, from New York City, also has ADHD. He's a champion chess player. Vaughn started playing in second grade and has entered more than 50 tournaments. In 2009, he came in first at the SuperNationals, a huge tournament that happens only once every four years.

Living with ADHD can be a challenge. But people with the disorder can be just as successful as anyone else.