



# Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder



The definition of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) has been updated in the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) to more accurately characterize the experience of affected adults. This revision is based on nearly two decades of research showing that ADHD, although a disorder that begins in childhood, can continue through adulthood for some people. Previous editions of DSM did not provide appropriate guidance to clinicians in diagnosing adults with the condition. By adapting criteria for adults, DSM-5 aims to ensure that children with ADHD can continue to get care throughout their lives if needed.

## Changes to the Disorder

ADHD is characterized by a pattern of behavior, present in multiple settings (e.g., school and home), that can result in performance issues in social, educational, or work settings. As in DSM-IV, symptoms will be divided into two categories of inattention and hyperactivity and impulsivity that include behaviors like failure to pay close attention to details, difficulty organizing tasks and activities, excessive talking, fidgeting, or an inability to remain seated in appropriate situations.

Children must have at least six symptoms from either (or both) the inattention group of criteria and the hyperactivity and impulsivity criteria, while older adolescents and adults (over age 17 years) must present with five. While the criteria have not changed from DSM-IV, examples have been included to illustrate the types of behavior children, older adolescents, and adults with ADHD might exhibit. The descriptions will help clinicians better identify typical ADHD symptoms at each stage of patients' lives. Using DSM-5, several of the individual's ADHD symptoms must be present prior to age 12 years, compared to 7 years as the age of onset in DSM-IV. This change is supported by substantial research published since 1994 that found no clinical differences between children identified by 7 years versus later in terms of course, severity, outcome, or treatment response.

DSM-5 includes no exclusion criteria for people with autism spectrum disorder, since symptoms of both disorders co-occur. However, ADHD symptoms must not occur exclusively during the course of schizophrenia or another psychotic disorder and must not be better explained by another mental disorder, such as a depressive or bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder, dissociative disorder, personality disorder, or substance intoxication or withdrawal.

## Care Beyond Childhood

The ADHD diagnosis in previous editions of DSM was written to help clinicians identify the disorder in children. Almost two decades of research conclusively show that a significant number of individuals diagnosed with ADHD as children continue to experience the disorder as adults. Evidence of this came from studies in which individuals were tracked for years or even decades after their initial childhood diagnosis. The results showed that ADHD does not fade at a specific age.

Studies also showed that the DSM-IV criteria worked as well for adults as they did for children but that a lower threshold of symptoms (five instead of six) was sufficient for a reliable diagnosis.

In light of the research findings, DSM-5 makes a special effort to address adults affected by ADHD to ensure that they are able to get care when needed.

DSM is the manual used by clinicians and researchers to diagnose and classify mental disorders. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) will publish DSM-5 in 2013, culminating a 14-year revision process.

APA is a national medical specialty society whose more than 36,000 physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Visit the APA at [www.psychiatry.org](http://www.psychiatry.org). For more information, please contact Eve Herold at 703-907-8640 or [press@psych.org](mailto:press@psych.org).

© 2013 American Psychiatric Association

**DSM-5**  
COLLECTION

Pre-order DSM-5 and DSM-5 Collection  
at [www.appi.org](http://www.appi.org)