

ADHD in Young Children

Use recommended treatment first

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a biological disorder that causes hyperactivity, impulsiveness, and attention problems. Parents do not cause ADHD, but parents can play a key role in treatment. Behavior therapy is an effective treatment that improves ADHD symptoms without the side effects of medicine. It is an important first step for young children with ADHD and most effective when delivered by parents. With the support of healthcare providers and therapists, parents can learn specific ways to improve their child's behavior and keep their relationships strong. Clinical guidelines for ADHD treatment recommend that healthcare providers first refer parents of young children for training in behavior therapy before prescribing ADHD medicine. However, more young children are taking medicine for ADHD than receiving psychological services, which may include behavior therapy. Most families will benefit from behavior therapy and there are instances where medicine may be appropriate. Healthcare providers and families can work together to make sure children with ADHD are receiving the most appropriate treatment.

Healthcare providers can:

- Follow the clinical guidelines for diagnosis and treatment of ADHD in young children.
<http://bit.ly/1nCUjenn>, <http://bit.ly/1UYugZ8>
- Discuss with parents the benefits of behavior therapy and why they should consider getting training.
- Identify parent training providers in their area and refer parents of young children with ADHD for training in behavior therapy before prescribing medicine.

Want to learn more?

www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/adhd

2 Million

About 2 million of the more than 6 million children with ADHD were diagnosed as young children aged 2-5 years.

3 in 4

About 75% of young children with ADHD received medicine as treatment.

1 in 2

Only about 50% of young children with ADHD in Medicaid and 40% with employer-sponsored insurance got psychological services, which may have included behavior therapy, the recommended first-line treatment.



Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention
National Center on Birth Defects
and Developmental Disabilities

Refer parents of young children with ADHD for training in behavior therapy before prescribing medicine.

Steps for healthcare providers

- 1. Assess** a young child with ADHD symptoms using clinical practice guidelines.*
- 2. Talk** with parents about ADHD treatment and explain the benefits of behavior therapy.
 - Improved behavior, self-control, and self-esteem for children.
 - Better relationships and reduced stress for families.
 - Benefits are lifelong for children and families.
- 3. Refer** parents to a therapist before prescribing medicine.** Find a therapist who:
 - Teaches parents to better manage their child's behavior and strengthen the parent-child relationship.
 - Encourages parents to practice between sessions, regularly monitors progress, and adjusts strategies as needed.
- 4. Follow up** with the family during and after treatment to confirm progress.

What parents can expect in behavior therapy

With the support of healthcare providers and therapists, parents can learn skills to help improve their child's behavior, leading to improved functioning at school, home and in relationships. Parents typically attend 8 or more sessions with a therapist. Sessions may involve groups or individual families. Learning and practicing behavior therapy requires time and effort, but it has lasting benefits for the child.



For more information about behavior therapy, go to: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/behavior-therapy.html>

What parents learn when trained in behavior therapy



Positive Communication



Positive Reinforcement



Structure and Discipline

*Clinical practice guidelines for primary care: <http://bit.ly/1nCUenn>; Clinical practice guidelines for child psychiatry: <http://bit.ly/1UYuqZ8>

**In areas where behavioral treatments proven to work are not available, the healthcare provider should weigh the risks of starting medicine at an early age against the harm of delaying diagnosis and treatment, as recommended in the American Academy of Pediatrics practice guidelines.