

ADHD STARTER KIT

A guide to helping parents understand Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), how to get your child evaluated, what happens after a diagnosis, and how to request support in the schools.



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About the Author

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How to Get Your Child Evaluated for ADHD

Think your child is exhibiting signs of ADHD? You're not alone. ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) is one of the most common neurodevelopment disorders in the United States.

With over 6 million cases, it's understandable that parents are concerned. But how do you tell the difference between a child who is easily distracted and one who needs treatment?

The short answer is—it's not easy. That's why it's best to get your child evaluated for ADHD by a healthcare professional.

In this post, I'm going to show you how to get your child tested by your pediatrician, school, and a trained psychologist. Remember, each approach has its pros and cons. So, make sure to pick the one that's right for your situation.

1. **Talk to Your Pediatrician**

Contacting your pediatrician is the easiest way to start the process. They know your child well and can help you determine the best path forward.

However, it's important to note that only some pediatricians are qualified to diagnose ADHD.

Even if your pediatrician does not have the proper training, they can still provide you with recommendations for other doctors or psychologists in your area.

If your pediatrician is qualified, they will likely have you complete a ratings scale. This questionnaire asks you to rate the frequency of certain ADHD symptoms on a scale of 0-3 or 4.

Rating scales are a simple process, but they do have their drawbacks. A ratings scale does not give the full picture of how ADHD may be impacting behavior, school performance, and cognition.

Pediatrician

- + Easy to contact
- + Knows your child well
- May not have qualifications to diagnose
- Limited picture of how ADHD is affecting your child



2. Request an ADHD Evaluation at School

You can also request a meeting with your school to consider an evaluation. It's important to remember that schools do not diagnose ADHD. However, they can create a helpful report to determine if your child meets certain criteria that warrant accommodations in school, including extra test time, allowing for breaks, and changes in environment to minimize distraction.

School

- + Can provide learning accommodations
- Cannot diagnose ADHD



3. Contact a Psychologist

Getting a psychological evaluation is the most comprehensive way to test your child for ADHD.

Unlike a pediatrician or a school, a psychologist can look at a child's cognitive and social, emotional functioning. This will help them rule out other causes, determine co-existing conditions, and give you the most accurate diagnosis.

Though this is the most thorough approach, it can also be the most expensive. Some practices do accept insurance for ADHD testing and others are private pay only. For instance, Think Happy Live Healthy offers testing and accepts most major insurances. To find out if psychologists near you accept insurance, ask for a list of evaluators from your insurance company.

Another great way to find a psychologist is to ask people you know who may have gotten their kids evaluated. Word of mouth is still the best way to find a good evaluator. But if you're not getting any results from your social circle, look on a trusted website like CHADD, they have local organizations you can reach out to for more support in finding an ADHD specialist.

Psychologist



- + Most comprehensive ADHD diagnosis
- + Can determine other or co-existing conditions
- + Provides therapy and treatment
- Can be costly if they do not accept insurance

An ADHD Evaluation Can Change Your Child's Life for the Better.

I know you may be hesitant to have your child tested for ADHD. I've had many parents tell me that they're worried about their child being "labelled." While that's a normal reaction, a diagnosis will likely improve your child's quality of life—now and in the long term.

ADHD is a highly manageable condition. Effective treatment can improve concentration, behavior, and executive functioning—giving your child the tools they need to succeed in school and in life.

Many famous and successful CEOs have ADHD. ADHD involves a difference in the way the brain solves problems, and when children understand that difference, they can use their problem-solving skills in phenomenal ways.

So if you suspect your child may be exhibiting signs of ADHD, please follow one of the three approaches above and have them evaluated as soon as possible. It can make a world of difference in their lives.

Need more info? If you have any questions about getting children tested for ADHD, please contact us.

For more tips on ADHD and general child wellness, sign up for our [monthly newsletter](#).

My Child Was Diagnosed with ADHD, Now What?

If your child was recently diagnosed with ADHD, you're probably feeling a bit overwhelmed right now. From finding the right treatment to navigating school accommodations, it's a lot to take in.

But don't worry. Lots of parents have been in your shoes. And with a little work, you'll have a solid grasp on your child's ADHD and the many resources available to them.

In this post, I'm going to walk you through the first 5 things you should do when your child is diagnosed with ADHD. Following these simple steps will help you put the systems in place to manage their ADHD effectively.

1. Learn Everything You Can

You don't need to become an expert on ADHD, but the more you know, the better you can advocate for your child. The easiest place to start is by talking to your pediatrician or therapist. I also recommend reaching out to friends or family who also have children with ADHD. Learning from their experiences can help you avoid mistakes and better understand your options.

You can also find a lot of reliable (and not so reliable) information online. Because there is no cure for ADHD, you should avoid any sources that promise one. CHADD is a great place to start because it is one of the most respected sources in the field.

I also recommend picking up a book or two on the subject. Here are a few of my personal favorites:

1. Smart but Scattered by Peg Dawson & Richard Guare
2. Smart but Scattered Teens by Richard Guare & Peg Dawson
3. Late, Lost, and Unprepared by Joyce Cooper-Kahn
4. Taking Charge of ADHD by Russell Barkley

2. Explore Your Treatment Options

According to the latest research, the most effective treatment for ADHD is a combination of medication and therapy. Medication is often prescribed and managed by a pediatrician—but if your child doesn't already have a therapist, you're often left to find therapy on your own.

So what should you look for in a therapist? I recommend finding someone who offers behavioral therapy, parent training, or both.

Behavioral Therapy

While ADHD medication decreases symptoms like impulsivity and distractibility, it does not change behavior. With behavior therapy, you will set clear expectations for your child's behavior by praising and rewarding positive behavior and discouraging negative behavior.

The 4 Principles of Behavior Therapy

- Use a reward system.
- Discourage negative behavior by ignoring it.
- Take away privileges when the negative behavior is too serious to ignore.
- Remove common triggers of bad behavior.

Parent Training

Several children with ADHD have increased interpersonal conflicts with their family, friends, and teachers. Parent training will teach you the skills you need to encourage positive behavior, reduce conflict, and communicate more effectively.

Think Happy Live Healthy offers both behavioral therapy and parent training. Contact us now to learn more.

3. Begin Medication Immediately When It Is Prescribed

Some parents may be hesitant to medicate their child. But the results speak for themselves: medication can improve ADHD symptoms in 70 to 80% of children shortly after starting treatment.

Taking the right drug can have many benefits: reduced fidgeting, interrupting, and other hyperactive symptoms, as well as improved task completion and home relationships.

The two most common medications to treat ADHD in children are stimulants and non-stimulants. A pediatrician or psychiatrist will be able to help you determine which is right for your child.

As with any drug, there may be side effects, including reduced appetite or weight loss. But working with your physician or psychiatrist to find the right dosage is key to reducing these effects. And often the benefits of medication often outweigh the negatives.

4. Talk to the School About Your Child's ADHD Diagnosis

Before I started Think Happy Live Healthy, I worked as a school psychologist. I treated many children with ADHD and saw firsthand how a good relationship between parents and school staff can positively impact a child's academic success.

That's why I recommend setting up a meeting with your school right away. Or, at the very least, talk to your child's teacher about how ADHD may be impacting them in the classroom. Your child may qualify for accommodations or special education services that can make learning and testing more manageable.

5. **Make Small Lifestyle Changes**

I know that making changes to your family's routine isn't easy—but building new habits and getting used to them now can have a big impact during the early stages of treatment. Two of the most important things you should focus on are diet and exercise. It may not seem obvious at first, but physical activity and eating healthy can help reduce ADHD symptoms.

Just one short workout can have a similar effect to stimulant medication. Not to get too scientific, but physical activity boosts neurotransmitter levels and increases dopamine levels in the brain which can help children with ADHD feel less confused and more focused. While there is limited research on how diet affects ADHD, we know that eating nutritious foods can help reduce symptoms and improve overall health. While diet alone is not a stand-alone treatment, it can be an important part of your overall plan.

It Gets Easier from Here.

When your child is first diagnosed, there are a lot of new ideas and terminology being thrown at you. It can be hard to wrap your head around it all. But by completing the steps above and doing your homework, you'll become well-versed in ADHD in no time.

Once you understand your child's condition and have an effective treatment plan in place, you'll have all the tools you need to manage their symptoms and advocate on their behalf. It may seem hard now, but it gets easier—I promise.

If you'd like more info on ADHD or child wellness, make sure to sign up for our [monthly newsletter](#).

How to Get My Child Testing Accommodations for ADHD

One of the most common questions parents ask after their child is diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder is, "How do I get testing accommodations in school?" It may seem complicated with terms like 504 and IEP being thrown around, but the process is straightforward and can make a world of difference for your child. So I'm going to break it down into 5 simple steps that you can start following right now.

1. **Obtain a letter stating the diagnosis of ADHD.**

Request a letter from the therapist, pediatrician or counselor who made the ADHD diagnosis. It's important to note that a full psychological evaluation is not necessary to obtain this letter. A diagnosis of ADHD can be made by your doctor or therapist. A full evaluation may be warranted if you are interested in understanding the cognitive or academic impact of ADHD or ruling out other conditions.

2. **Contact the school to schedule a 504 meeting.**

A 504 Plan is a plan developed by the school to ensure a child is receiving the support they need. It is also the quickest and lowest tier intervention for acquiring testing accommodations in the classroom.

You can obtain a 504 plan by emailing or calling your child's teacher, counselor, or other contact person at the school and requesting a 504 meeting to discuss accommodations for your child. It is important to say "504 meeting" because then the clock starts. According to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the school generally has 10 calendar days to hold the meeting.

3. **Gather documentation.**

Next you will need to collect some documents for your meeting. Bring any reports from the teacher regarding your child, any emails, or test grades to prove a general pattern of how the ADHD has impacted their school performance. The goal is to show that your child requires testing accommodations to perform at their highest potential. Accommodations may include extra time, breaks, or testing in a smaller room.

4. **Attend the meeting.**

In this first meeting, you will discuss if your child qualifies for a 504. Go in with all the information gathered and be prepared to hear from an entire team of experts. This meeting can feel overwhelming, but it is important to trust the process. Typically, the principal or vice principal, teacher, counselor, school psychologist or school social worker attends. Sometimes the student may even be present if they are old enough. Stay calm and ask questions if something is unclear.

5. **Assess the Decision.**

At the end of the meeting, the school team will come to one of three decisions. They will either move forward with the 504 plan, request additional information through a school evaluation, or determine that the student does not require a 504 plan. If you do not agree with the decision or are unsure, you do not need to sign any documents at the meeting. If you need more time, take the documents home and think it over.

Next steps...

If the school decides that a 504 plan is required, the accommodations will be drafted at the following meeting, typically within 30 –60 days. Accommodations may include additional time, testing in a smaller environment, ability to write on the test, test blocks broken down into smaller parts, testing on separate days, etc. These options should be carefully considered and only those absolute necessary should be chosen. Then each year, or sooner if requested, you and the school team will meet to determine if the accommodations are working.

Remember, there are many supports for children with ADHD. The key is knowing what to ask for and staying in communication with the school and other support people. Your child is lucky to have you. The fact that you are reading this means you are doing the best for them. While it may be a long road ahead, getting the supports in place now can mean a more successful and less stressed child in the future.

If you are interested in more information regarding this topic, please reach out to info@thinkhappy.livehealthy.com to schedule a parent consultation with one of our school psychologists.