

Pay attention

Young children often have problems paying attention or concentrating. When are these problems serious enough for parents and teachers to be concerned?

According to estimates from the CDC, 1 in 11 school-aged children are diagnosed with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), but research suggests that the warning signs often appear even before kids start school. As many as 40% of children have problems with attention by age 4. The most common mental health disorder diagnosed in the preschool years is ADHD.

Dr. Mark Mahone, director of the Department of Neuropsychology at the Kennedy Krieger Institute in Baltimore, encourages parents to pay attention to their young child's behavior.

In preschool-aged children (3–4 years), Dr. Mahone recommends that parents look for the following signs that are

linked with an ADHD diagnosis when children reach school age:

- Dislikes or avoids activities that require paying attention for more than 1 or 2 minutes
- Loses interest and starts doing something else after engaging in an activity for a few moments
- Talks a lot more and makes more noise than other children of the same age
- Climbs on things when instructed not to do so
- Cannot hop on one foot by age 4
- Warms up too quickly to strangers
- Nearly always restless—wants to constantly kick or jiggle feet or twist around when sitting. Insists on getting up after being seated for more than a few minutes

- Gets into dangerous situations because of fearlessness
- Frequently aggressive with playmates; has been removed from preschool/daycare for aggression
- Has been injured (received stitches) because of moving too fast or running when instructed not to do so

“If parents observe these symptoms and have concerns about their child's development, they should consult with their pediatrician or another developmental expert,” says Dr. Mahone. “There are safe and effective treatments that can help manage symptoms, increase coping skills, and change negative behaviors to improve academic and social success.”

