

Calming the Active/Hyperactive Child

Active children can wear on your patience and your nerves, causing you to snap or nag. Just one hyperactive child in a group of children can take the focus away from the task at hand, and cause all of the children to feel antsy and out of control. Understanding and supporting the child can ease the frustration of dealing with the high-spirited behavior.

Active or Hyperactive?

- Active children are more intense, more energetic, and more persistent than average. They live life bolder than other kids. They are enthusiastic and determined, but can fall apart over little things. They do not have differences in brain chemistry; they are simply more active than other children.
- Hyperactive children have a problem with their brain chemistry that causes them to be constantly on the go, both physically and mentally. They have racing thoughts and cannot shut off their minds. They have a disorder known as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and exhibit some or all of the following symptoms:

Inattention and Hyperactivity/Impulsivity

- makes careless mistakes
- difficulty waiting their turn
- trouble with organization
- avoids tasks requiring sustained mental effort
- often loses things
- easily distracted
- forgetful in daily activities
- fidgets, squirms
- has trouble staying seated
- excessive running, climbing or restlessness
- trouble with quiet activities
- needs to be “on the go”
- often talks too much
- blurts out answers

Having some of these symptoms does not necessarily mean the child has ADHD. Only a qualified professional can accurately diagnose ADHD.

- To be diagnosed, the child must have at least 6 “Inattentive” symptoms and/or 6 “Hyper/Impulsive” symptoms.
- Only about 10% of children in India and the US have ADHD – that’s 1 out of 10 children – so we cannot assume that all active children have ADHD. Many are simply very active and lack self-control.

Understanding the Hyperactive Child

- Hyperactivity (ADHD) is not the same as misbehaving – it is similar to feeling an intense itch and being told not to scratch it. Even if you don't scratch it, you are so distracted by wanting to that you cannot focus on anything else.
- Children with ADHD have the overwhelming urge to be active, both physically and mentally. They can't just stop because they are told to do so.
- Acting-out behaviors could be a cry for help. Don't give up on the child. Teach him/her to develop self-control and to direct his/her energies towards constructive activities.

The important thing is not to fight hyperactivity by telling the child to stop fidgeting, be still, or stay seated. In fact, simply saying "sit still" can be invalidating and can lead to self-esteem problems in kids with ADHD. Instead, help the child channel their excess energy. ADHD is just as frustrating for the child as it is for you.

Helping Calm the Active/Hyperactive Child

Whether Active or ADHD, the child is not naughty or bad...they just need a little more attention, patience, and an outlet for their energy. The following tips will help them learn to gain self-control:

- Take time out from your routine to give the child the attention he/she craves. Give the child a hug and make sure they know that you love them unconditionally.
- Maintain order and organization in the home. Keep the child on a routine schedule. It will help the child remain focused.
- If you tell the child to stop a particular unwanted behavior, also tell him – in detail- what behavior you would like to see instead. For example, don't just say "Stop jumping in here," but add "Go outside and jump out there."
- Minimize distractions. Give the child a quiet place to work, but make sure they know they are not being punished.
- Break down complex instructions. It's hard for a child to remember a long list of instructions. Break the task into smaller chunks.
- Make sure the child looks you in the eye when you are explaining things. This will help to ensure that their focus is on you. Have the child repeat back each step. Writing down instructions can help the child follow directions.

- Help the child create a To-Do List. It helps keep them on task and remember what they need to do.
- Provide plenty of time to run and play. It will help release their energy.
- Try yoga, meditation, or breathing exercises to calm the child. Deep breathing sends more oxygen to the brain and is calming.
- Over active children usually have really short attention spans. Offer the child to switch to something else before they become restless. If they are getting overwhelmed, invite them to take a break for a few minutes. Don't expect them to sit for long periods of time.
- Fidgeting can help kids focus – allow them to hold something small like a stress ball, as long as they are not disruptive.
- Use positive reinforcement. Completing a task is a big accomplishment for a hyperactive child. Children with ADHD often find themselves scolded or punished much more than they are praised. Give praise often.
- The child still needs consequences for shouting, throwing, screaming, etc., but consequences don't always have to be negative. Suggest that they go to their “quiet place” until they calm down.
- Listen to the child. Ask him how he feels about his hyperactivity and for ideas to deal with it. Children are more likely to stick to methods they thought of themselves rather than ones adults tell them they must do.

Medication can help some children with the symptoms of ADHD, but don't be too quick with medications as they carry side effects. They should be the last resort, not the first

