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# **THE PLUGGED-IN PARENT'S GUIDE TO ADHD**

**Tips, Strategies, Apps, and Activities  
for Helping Kids with ADHD**



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# The Plugged-In Parent's Guide to ADHD

*Tips, Strategies, Apps, and Activities for Helping Kids with ADHD*



## **What is ADHD**

*ADHD symptoms and signs, diagnostic criteria, and non-ADHD attentional problems.*

**Page 3**



## **ADHD and Executive Functions**

*Which Thinking Skills are most associated with ADHD.*

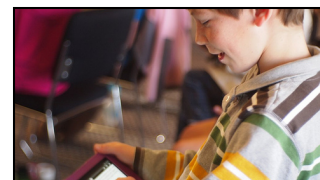
**Page 5**



## **Apps, Games, and ADHD**

*Why digital tools can help ADHD, and how to avoid potential problems.*

**Page 7**



## **Digital Strategies for ADHD**

*Tips for using digital media with your ADHD child.*

**Page 10**

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## INTRODUCTION

**Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder is a common psychiatric condition that affects between 5 and 11% of school-age children.**

Children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder are characterized by symptoms such as high levels of inattention, distractibility, hyperactivity, or impulsivity.

While these types of behavior are common in younger children, the symptoms are more severe for youngsters with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and can cause impairment in school, at home, or in social situations.

Many children who are not diagnosed with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder display some of the symptoms in a milder form or may experience symptoms but are not impaired by their level of activity or inattention. These children, who are sometimes referred to as having borderline or non-clinical levels of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, are often



helped by many of the same strategies used and recommendations given for youngsters who meet the criteria for a diagnosis of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.

This eBook will discuss the use of a number of innovative activities and digitally-based strategies to address the symptoms of ADHD and explore the rationale and cautions that accompany these new approaches to ADHD treatment.

# What is ADHD?

## Signs and Symptoms of ADHD

1. Difficulty with following through on instructions.
2. Problems organizing tasks and activities.
3. Difficulty sustaining attention during tasks.
4. Restlessness and excessive movement.
5. Unusually high levels of activity; the need for always being on the go.
6. Physical and verbal impulsivity.



ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) is a developmental disorder defined by a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity and impulsivity.

A child is diagnosed with ADHD when he displays attentional problems that

significantly impair his performance in school, at home, or in other situations.

Parents are often confused by the terminology that psychologists and mental health professionals use in describing attention disorders. Parents

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often ask about the differences between ADD and ADHD.

The reason for this confusion is due to certain changes in the system used for psychiatric diagnosis. Currently, there is no actual psychiatric disorder called ADD, or Attention Deficit Disorder. All individuals who are diagnosed with attention problems have one variety or another of ADHD, or Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.

The ADD, or Attention Deficit Disorder, diagnosis comes from a system known as the DSM-III, which was used during the 1980s. A system known as DSM-V published in 2013 and now refers to all attention problems as ADHD, or Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.

In the DSM-V, all varieties of attention problems have both the terms "Attention Deficit" and "Hyperactivity" in their titles.

There are three major varieties of ADHD; Combined presentation, in which both inattention and hyperactivity-impulsivity are present for at least 6

months; Predominantly inattentive presentation, in which only attentional problems are impairing; and Predominantly hyperactivity-impulsivity, in which only hyperactivity problems are impairing.

There are also two other minor ADHD diagnosis; "other Specified" ADHD and "unspecified" ADHD, in which the symptoms do not quite meet diagnostic criteria, but nonetheless cause clinically significant distress.

### **Attention Problems and Alternative Learners**

Many children who do not have diagnosable ADHD still experience mild difficulties paying attention, following directions, and staying on task. While these Alternative Learners may not need the same level of intervention that a child with ADHD does, many of the technological and academic strategies presented here can still be very helpful.



# ADHD and Executive Functions



**As children develop, they face increasing demands on executive functioning skills (thinking skills) like planning, flexibility, self-control, self-awareness, focus, organization, working memory, and time management.**

These executive-functioning skills are seen by many experts as the defining features of ADHD. Recent data from the National Institute of Mental Health indicate that in typically developing youth, the brain matures in a normal pattern, but in youth with ADHD brain development is delayed three years in some regions.

This delay is most prominent in the prefrontal cortex, which serves to control thinking, attention, planning, and other executive-functioning skills. Because they are skills that

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*“These executive-functioning skills are seen by many experts as the defining features of ADHD.”*

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can be measured, taught, and improved it can be extraordinarily helpful for young adults to recognize areas of executive weakness and have clearly articulated tools and strategies for improving them.

The following are the executive functioning skills that kids with ADHD often have the most difficulty with:

### **Focus:**

Kids with attention issues may have difficulty in the presence of distractions. They often experience problems sustaining attention and maintaining their effort-level during important tasks.

### **Working Memory:**

They often have difficulty following multi-step directions, trouble recalling information, and problems remembering material they read.

### **Flexibility:**

Kids with attentional difficulties may have problems in transitioning from one activity to another. Sometimes they simply cannot stop paying attention to something that is of great interest to them.

### **Time Management:**

Kids may waste time or rush through tasks and are often unaware of time constraints.

### **Planning:**

Kids with attention difficulties may not take the opportunity to think ahead. Instead of taking time to consider a strategic approach, they tend to “just wing it.”

### **Organization:**

Kids with attentional problems often do not keep track of where they put important items, like completed homework or their team uniforms.

### **Self Awareness:**

Kids with ADHD often do not “tune in” to the reactions of others, moving too fast to see how others experience their behaviors.

### **Self-Control:**

Kids with ADHD often have difficulty thinking before acting and can often be impulsive.

# GET YOUR CHILD BACK ON TRACK!

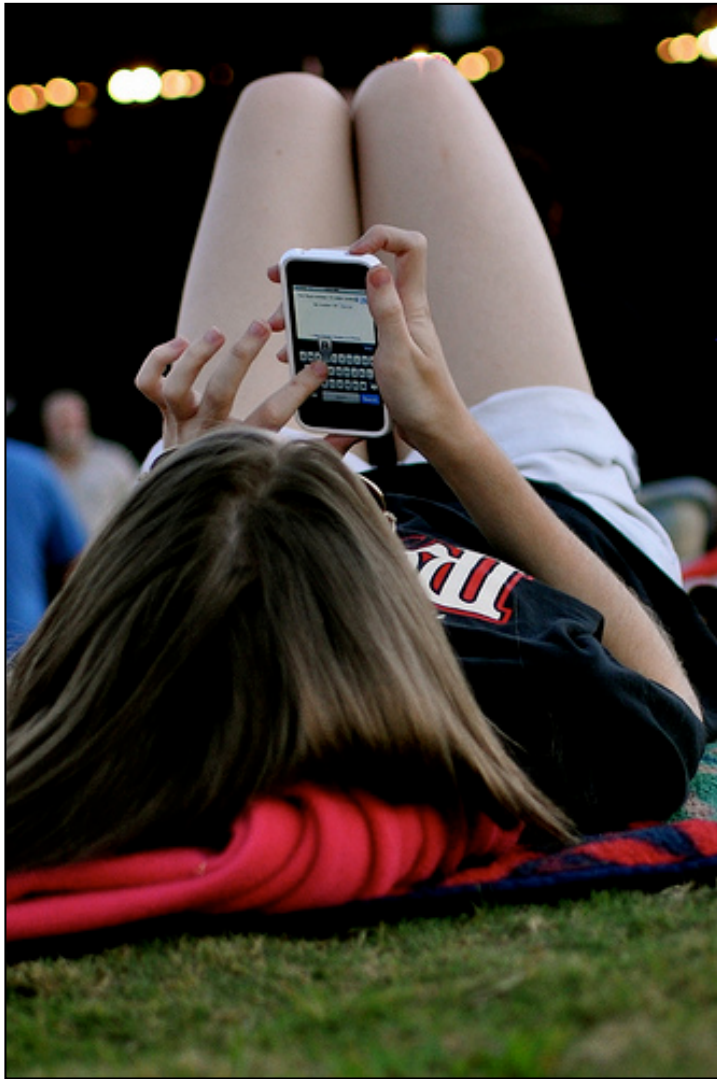
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# Apps, Games, and ADHD



If you have a child with diagnosed ADHD or even modest attentional problems, you've probably observed that he is quite capable of paying attention to video games and to other digital media.

Sometimes, this can be a problem, particularly for those children who use video games and the Internet as their go-to distraction devices. That said, the sustained effort and attention that children with ADHD have for these fun digital activities can be an asset for learning.

First and foremost, video games and other digital media display the capacity to capture the mind of children with attention problems. Parents and teachers of children with attention problems almost universally agree that these children can easily sustain their focus while playing video games,

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*The sustained effort and attention that children with ADHD have for these fun digital activities can be an asset for learning.*

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surfing the Internet, or using other digital media.

One common approach is using electronic media to directly teach content, such as software designed to teach math or reading skills. A less common, though perhaps even more effective, idea is to transform “fun” forms of digital media (video games, social networking sites, and other things that kids do on their own) into real-life teaching tools by using their inherent academic requirements to teach your child the skills she needs to improve.

Children with attention problems or ADHD are often highly engaged by video games and other digital media. As a result, they may tend to display less of the characteristic symptoms of attention problems or ADHD when involved with digital technologies. In part, this is due to how the features of digital media counterbalance their attentional, behavioral, and learning difficulties. The following chart demonstrates how and why video games and other digital media can be a powerful tool for learning in children with attention problems and ADHD.



### For Example:

- Sports-themed video games often require a child to think mathematically about player statistics in the midst of difficult distractions.
- Many video games, particularly those on mobile and handheld devices, require kids to focus on what they're reading for extended periods of time.
- Many technologies such as blogs, cloud-based tools, and Wikis encourage social engagement in the learning process; this is reinforcing in itself, but it also provides models and feedback for children with attentional problems

## Concerns and Cautions:

While video games and other digital media can be helpful in engaging kids' attention, there are a number of concerns about the use of these tools for children with ADHD.

As a result, we encourage parents to be very judicious and monitor the use of digital media for children with ADHD.

The following are some common concerns regarding the use of digital media with ADHD kids, and what you can do to mitigate them:

*Children with ADHD or attention problems may become “hyper-focused” on video games and other digital media, neglecting other important responsibilities.*

Require that your child complete all of her homework, chores, or other responsibilities before being allowed some digital play time. By making him put-off these fun activities until after her work is done, he won't be able to use digital play as a means of procrastination.

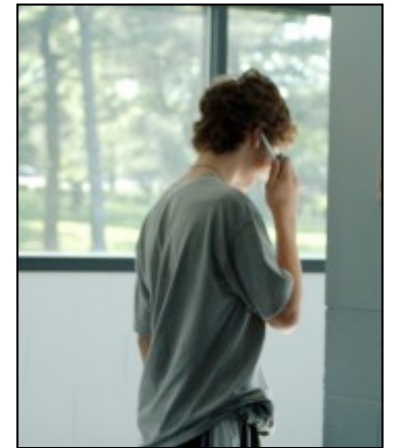
*Kids with ADHD or attention problems often become so absorbed with activities they find interesting, they may lose track of how much time they have spent on their digital play.*

Use a timer if you need to limit your child with ADHD.

Time management and having a sense of time are often significant deficits for children with attention problems.

You can use online timers such as [www.timer-tab.com](http://www.timer-tab.com) or even an everyday kitchen timer to keep your child on track.

*Kids with ADHD or attention problems may choose to engage with digital play instead of the physical activities that are part of a healthy treatment process.*



Exercise has been shown to improve Focus and learning in children with attentional problems. Tell your child to go out and run around before playing video games, and to play active games such as Wii Tennis or Kinect Adventures.

# Digital Strategies for ADHD



**One of my philosophies about how to treat ADHD is to steer children toward an interest that captures their attention.**

In particular, I encourage parents to find hands-on, physical activities that engage the brain and the body. The intense engagement that children with ADHD display while playing video games is a double-edged sword, fraught with both danger and great opportunity.

While over-use of technology, or playing inappropriate video games, can have many negative repercussions, there are many games and apps that help improve the skills that children with ADHD need the most.

Once kids become aware of the Thinking Skills they are using in their favorite games and apps, they have an opportunity to begin applying these skills to their daily activities. It behooves parents and teachers

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*“For children, the attraction of video games and technologies makes them an ideal teaching tool for practicing game-based skills”*

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to learn enough about how to use video games and other digital media so that they can also practice the skills that kids with ADHD need to master.

The following are some general strategies that can help you make decisions about how to use video games with a child who has modest attentional problems or who is diagnosed with ADHD.

**Watch out for “obsession.”** Do not allow your child with ADHD to become overly focused on video game play. While ADHD children may have difficulty sustaining their attention to school, chores, and many other activities, this is often not the case when it comes to video games and other digital technologies. If you notice your child neglecting other responsibilities, make them take a break until the other stuff is done.

**Set Limits.** Only let your child use digital media when it has an educational purpose, or as a reward for meeting other responsibilities. To do this, you may need to exert more control of your ADHD child's video game selection and use of video games than you would with a typically-developing child. Video games may need to be used as reinforcement for doing homework or chores

or only made available after more productive play and educational activities are completed.

**Don’t use the screen as a babysitter... often.** While we generally do not subscribe to using video games as a babysitter, there are certain occasions, (for instance, while taking a long car trip or while you’re trying to pay bills), when allowing your ADHD child a little extra screen time may be good for all. As long as it isn’t a regular occurrence, you shouldn’t feel bad about allowing your child some extra game-time when you need to carve out some important time for yourself.

**Get games and apps that practice Thinking Skills.** Many ADHD children struggle with these skills in particular. There are many games and apps that [LearningWorks for Kids](#) can recommend which help children practice these particular skills. Keep in mind, that playing video games that practice a thinking skill is the first step; getting your child to detect the thinking skills they are using, reflecting on how they might help them in games and the real world, and connecting the game-based skills to real world activities is what makes video games truly help your child with ADHD.