



## CHAPTER ONE

# UNDERSTANDING AND GETTING TO KNOW MY ADHD

A lot of people don't understand what ADHD is. I want to educate you, and then you can educate others! Again, ADHD is not your fault or something you chose to have. The great news is that once you understand ADHD a little bit more, you will be more aware of how it affects you and what you can do about it. Can I look to you to be my investigator of ADHD? Then you can share what you know with others who don't understand it!

# What Is ADHD?

Like we talked about previously, ADHD is a condition in the brain. Brains are extremely complicated. Have you ever heard someone joke that “you don’t have to be a brain surgeon to figure that out”? This means that brain surgery is very difficult and not an easy job. Why? Because there is so much to learn about the brain and its functions. It takes years to learn about the brain and how it works. So, let’s learn a little bit today that will help you understand yourself better (and make you smarter in the process).

There is something in the front of our brains called the frontal cortex. This is the area where the brain gets organized and motivated and manages emotions. It’s also called our executive functioning area. Is there a boss in your family? Well, the executive functioning area is the boss of your brain! But people with ADHD have a delay in the prefrontal cortex or executive functions.<sup>2</sup> Your mental boss is smart; it just moves at its own pace!

What does this mean for you? I’ll explain: Have you ever traveled on an airplane and your flight was delayed? You probably still got to your destination, but later than you expected. It is the same with ADHD. You can get organized or manage your emotions, but maybe not as quickly as you would like. Interestingly, when you have ADHD, your brain may process things slower, but your thoughts can actually be faster—this is part of what makes your mind race and gives you so many great ideas!

## EVERYONE’S DIFFERENT

Most people feel they are different in some way. Some children have parents who are divorced, and so they feel different from their friends. Some kids have braces, others develop very early or very late, and some might have a parent or sibling who died. Some have medical conditions like diabetes. Some may feel like their red hair makes them different. Try not to look at ADHD as something that makes you less than awesome. It just makes you *you*, and you’re already awesome just the way you are.

# DIFFERENT TYPES

Did you know there are three different types of ADHD? They are called: primarily hyperactive-impulsive, primarily inattentive, and combined type.<sup>3</sup> If you are diagnosed with ADHD, you have one of these three types. Why does this matter? Well, if you know what type you are, you can find out exactly how your ADHD affects you and your life. This way you can learn which tools you need to succeed. We'll explore each type later in a little more detail.

A doctor can help you find out what type of ADHD you have and how much your ADHD is impacting your life—whether it's a little bit, somewhat, or a lot. You may not know those answers yet, and that's okay. It's for a doctor and/or your parents to determine.

I like to think of the different types of ADHD as animals. Can you relate to one of the following types?

## ADHD, PRIMARILY HYPERACTIVE-IMPULSIVE TYPE “HIGH-SPIRITED HUMMINGBIRD”

This is the most common type of ADHD in children. People with hyperactive-impulsive type ADHD love to be on the move! They like to stand rather than sit. They tend to fidget and squirm. Their teacher may say, “Do you have ants in your pants?” They talk a lot, sometimes fast, and run around a ton. They are also super curious. People with primarily hyperactive-impulsive type have so much to say, they might interrupt others, blurt out answers, and have trouble controlling themselves.

### **People with primarily hyperactive-impulsive type ADHD may:**

- Like to stand rather than sit
- Fidget and squirm
- Talk a lot
- Speak fast
- Be very curious
- Interrupt
- Blurt out answers
- Have trouble controlling themselves

## ADHD, PRIMARILY INATTENTIVE TYPE “DRIFTING DUCK”

Kids with primarily inattentive type ADHD have trouble following directions and staying on task. Doctors call this inattentive ADHD. These people make mistakes because they have difficulty concentrating and organizing their activities and tasks. They don't mean to, but these kids often lose things like their jackets or homework. Dory from *Finding Nemo* said it best when she said, “My thoughts, they leave my head.”

### People with primarily inattentive type ADHD may:

- Have trouble following directions
- Have difficulty staying on task
- Have trouble concentrating
- Be disorganized
- Lose things
- Be forgetful

### ADHD, COMBINED TYPE “GOING, GOING, GONE GAZELLE”

Kids with combined type ADHD tend to be very creative, smart, and fast. But they may have trouble in school and forget to turn in homework. They’re often dreaming about other things and jumping from task to task. And they’re always on the move! People with combined type ADHD have both the hyperactive-impulsive type and inattentive type. This means they have a certain number of symptoms of inattention as well as hyperactivity and impulsivity.

### People with combined type ADHD may:

- Like to stand rather than sit
- Fidget and squirm
- Talk a lot
- Speak fast
- Be very curious
- Interrupt
- Blurt out answers
- Have trouble controlling themselves
- Have trouble following directions
- Have difficulty staying on task
- Have trouble concentrating
- Be disorganized
- Lose things
- Be forgetful

Which characteristics do you relate to most? Look back at the descriptions we just went over, and go ahead and circle those that maybe you can see a little bit of yourself in. This is just one fun way to determine which type of ADHD you might have.

## MORE BOYS OR GIRLS?

Do you think there is a difference in the number of girls and boys who have ADHD? If you guessed no, you are correct. Although boys may be diagnosed more often than girls when they are younger, studies show that girls are often diagnosed later as adults, so it evens out. But ADHD can appear very differently from one person to the next, no matter if you’re a boy or girl.

## MEDICATION



Some children take medication prescribed by doctors or psychiatrists to help them with their ADHD symptoms. I don't make medication recommendations in this book. Instead, we take a behavioral approach to ADHD. This means we focus on activities that can help your behaviors and actions. Behavior and medication approaches do work together, but it is up to your parents and your doctor to find the right combination for you. Your doctor and parents can give you more information. It's important to know that medication isn't a cure for ADHD, but it may help reduce symptoms.

# What Are My Symptoms?

Have you ever gotten a blood test? The doctors inspect your blood and can check to see your cholesterol levels, iron level, and all that kind of stuff. It's pretty amazing what they can discover.

Well, there is no blood test to see if you have ADHD. The diagnosis is mainly based on ADHD symptoms like those I mentioned before. If you have a certain number of symptoms and it's causing you any difficulty, a doctor can diagnose you.

## Check off if you feel any of these symptoms:

- Wanting to run, jump, and play a lot of the time
- Having a hard time sitting still
- Discovering you have an amazing imagination
- Feeling like you could be more organized
- Having difficulty with homework or class assignments
- Feeling slow or having trouble starting something new
- Having trouble listening
- Shifting attention quickly from one activity to another
- Feeling stressed or overwhelmed a lot of the time
- Being able to focus for long periods only with activities that interest you
- Getting frustrated, angry, or upset easily, especially if something is hard
- Having a difficult time not shouting out answers in class

You may feel you relate to all of these symptoms or only a few of them. That's perfectly okay. Learning more about you is the first step to understanding more about you!

### HOW TO TALK ABOUT MY ADHD TO OTHERS

If you have difficulty explaining what ADHD is to classmates or adults, you can just say, "I have difficulty paying attention for long amounts of time" and/or "I need to move my body a lot."

## ACTIVITY 2

# ADHD: True or False?

It's exciting that you are now going to be my investigator in learning more about ADHD. This way, you can be a leader and teach others what you know. Let's start with a little guessing game about ADHD: Are the following statements true or false? You'll know soon!

**Circle *True* or *False* after each statement.**

1. ADHD isn't a real medical issue. **True/False**
2. Most kids who have ADHD will not have it as an adult. **True/False**
3. Having strict parents will prevent you from getting ADHD. **True/False**
4. If you eat a lot of sugar, you will get ADHD. **True/False**
5. ADHD is something you are born with. **True/False**
6. ADHD is just kids not wanting to do things. **True/False**
7. The United States of America is the only place where ADHD is found. **True/False**
8. If someone with ADHD sneezes on you, you can catch it. **True/False**
9. All kids with ADHD are hyper. **True/False**
10. Children with ADHD are smart. **True/False**

Answers:

1. False. ADHD is a real medical condition diagnosed by doctors or professionals.
2. False. About 75% of kids who have ADHD will have it as adults.
3. False. ADHD is biological and part of your DNA. It doesn't matter about your outside environments, like whether you have strict or relaxed parents.
4. False. Sugar may cause someone to be more hyper or active for a bit, but it won't cause anyone to "get" ADHD.
5. True. ADHD is something you have at birth.
6. False. It might look to other people like you are unmotivated or don't want to do things, but ADHD is a brain condition that sometimes makes things harder to do.
7. False. There are kids who have ADHD in countries around the world.
8. False. ADHD is not contagious, and you can't pass it on to someone else.
9. False. There are three types of ADHD, and one type has no effect on activity level.
10. True. Many kids with ADHD are gifted in intelligence.

# ADHD: What Does It Stand For?

Even though we know *ADHD* stands for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, those words don't define who you are. In fact, let's have some fun with *your* unique qualities. What words can you think of that describe you with the letters *ADHD*? Here's an example:

**A**ctive

**D**reamer

**H**appy

**D**azzling

Now you try!

**A**

**D**

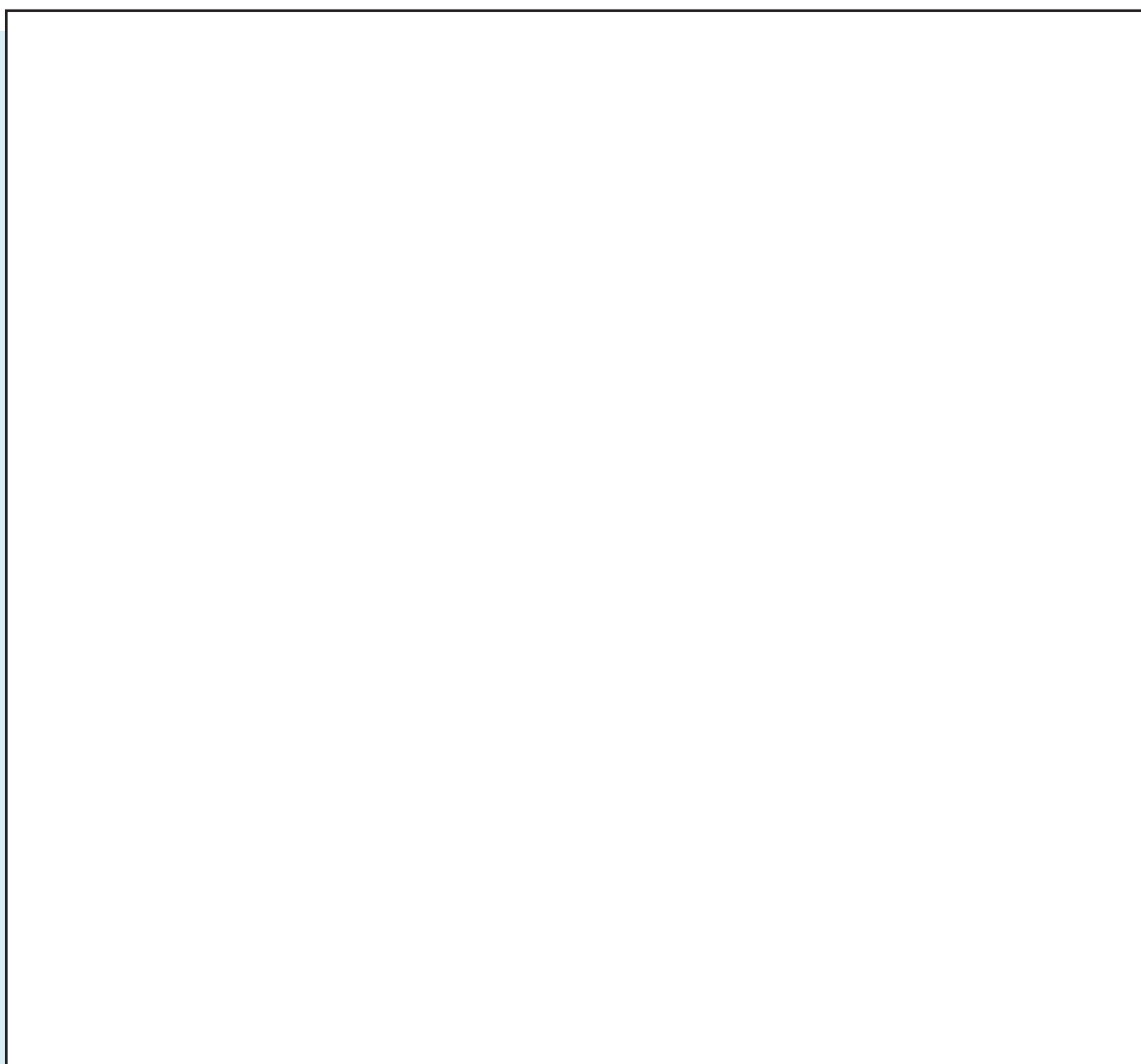
**H**

**D**

## ACTIVITY 4

# I'm Not Scared of *That!*

When you first heard the term *ADHD*, did you get scared? Then maybe you discovered it wasn't so bad and realized that you are still you. Let's draw some pictures of things you were scared of when you were younger but then realized really weren't so scary. For example, 10-year-old Ariana was terrified of the dentist for the first five years of her life. Then, finally, she realized it didn't hurt when she went. In fact, her mom told me she now looks forward to going to her appointments! What can you think of that originally made you nervous but then you realized wasn't so terrible after all? Draw a picture or write the story here.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for drawing or writing. It is positioned on the page below the introductory text.