

THE COUNSELOR'S CLASSROOM

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UNDERSTANDING GIRLS WITH ADHD

By Julia Taylor for the [American School Counselor Association](#) for [GuidanceChannel.com](#)

When teachers hear the term ADHD, they usually envision hyperactive, out of control boys that climb the walls, don't listen, and refuse to work. For years, ADHD has been seen as a primarily male-dominant disorder, but this is not the case. Patricia Quinn, author of *Understanding Girls with ADHD*, believes that just as many girls are affected with the disorder as boys. Researchers believe that girls with ADHD may be under-diagnosed because they are not hyperactive, but inattentive. Girls are more able to be academically successful, especially during the elementary years, and do not start displaying symptoms until the middle and high school years when school is more demanding. To overcomplicate this matter, parents may confuse these "sudden" symptoms with normal teenage angst and blame puberty. If left undiagnosed, it can lead to overwhelming problems in later school years and spill into adulthood.

Girls with ADHD often cannot follow directions, have trouble listening, are easily distracted, anxious, disorganized or overorganized, controlling, and overwhelmed by the demands of everyday life. For these girls, it is not about having a messy backpack or locker, it is about the frenzied mind that makes it extremely difficult to know where to begin cleaning it out – and what to do when they cannot complete the task. When a teacher is talking, they are often daydreaming or talking to their friends. They just cannot stay on task. Sometimes girls are so embarrassed by this they hide it and withdraw completely, living quietly inside of their own head.

Quinn describes four different personalities of girls with ADHD:

The Shy, Dreamy Child

Girls with ADHD are generally more inattentive and "spacey" than hyperactive and impulsive. These girls are easily overwhelmed by things like too much noise or activity or demands made upon them to be on time or following exact directions. Instead of acting out when overstimulated, like boys tend to do, girls may respond by social isolation. They may play by themselves or may be seen as a loner, often daydreaming. "Just because a child is dreamy or shy, however, doesn't mean she's got ADHD," says Quinn. "The difference for girls with ADHD is that their shyness or dreaminess is a response to a stressful situation and it interferes with their functioning." Unfortunately, because girls with this type of ADHD don't have obvious behavior problems, their condition often goes unnoticed; they are often simply labeled "spacey."

The Chatty Cathy

Girls with this form of ADHD will rapidly talk about anything and everything, all the time. Often termed "social butterflies" and seen as outgoing, this behavior usually causes them problems in

getting along with others. They can be an annoyance to teachers and students not in their social circle. This girl may be the "Queen Bee" of the class and always demand to be the center of attention. As a result, a girl with hypersocial ADHD may find it hard to keep friends because of her inability to listen and stick with one train of thought. She may find it very hard to remain on task in class and often cannot keep up with assignments, but does great in areas that involve hands-on learning, leaving school professionals to believe that she just needs to "stay quiet."

The Tomboy

This type of ADHD seen in girls is the most easily diagnosed because it fits the traditional profile of a child with ADHD. These girls display signs of hyperactivity, impulsivity, and risk-taking behavior. Even at a very young age, they stand out, engaging in dangerous and unruly behavior, such as climbing and throwing things. They understand they are not behaving properly, but continue to engage in it, as controlled by a motor. When she is upset at friends or classmates, she may act out physically and/or irrationally. These girls display the symptoms at a very young age and may be misdiagnosed as bipolar and/or having oppositional defiant disorder.

The Moody Child

Like the "Tomboy," these girls may be misdiagnosed with bipolar and/or oppositional defiant disorder. They are difficult to satisfy and do not comply with requests by parents, teachers, and/or friends. Quinn gives this example: she may ask for a glass of orange juice, and then insist she'll drink it only out of her yellow cup; when the juice is poured into the requested cup, she insists she wants apple juice instead, and so on. All children can display periods of inflexibility, but a child with dysphoric ADHD remains inflexible and causes severe problems at home and school. This type is also noted in early childhood, as many girls have frequent temper tantrums and become easily upset and hard to calm down, even when the situation causing the tantrum is complied with.

Gifted Girls with ADHD

To further complicate matters, there is a high correlation between gifted girls and ADHD, but often times the giftedness is not recognized due to common myths surrounding ADHD. Some parents and educators assume that a child who can concentrate for a long time cannot have ADHD. This is incorrect. It's understandable that an observer might dismiss the possibility of ADHD, because from all appearances the child is so absorbed in a task that everything around her fades into oblivion. When interrupted or the routine is changed, this girl may become hostile and irritable. While this may be viewed as a sign of a creative mind, it could also be "hyperfocused ADHD," which is marked by over controlling, perfectionist, and inflexible behavior -- everything has to be "their way."

Educators need to know that ADHD is not characterized by a child's inability to pay attention, but marked by the inability to control their attention. A girl with ADHD has great difficulty paying attention to tasks that are not immediately rewarding and that require effort. Yet, as previously stated, many of these girls are masters at hiding the symptoms.

ADHD may be less apparent in a gifted child than in one who struggles more obviously. It is more common to miss the symptoms of ADHD in gifted kids than to misdiagnose them with ADHD. Since many girls often overcompensate for their ADHD, they can go undiagnosed until it causes serious problems. Many times these problems arise in early adulthood -- appearing at work, in relationships, and as addictions.

A gifted child's over-reliance on her strengths unintentionally obscures her disability. While emphasizing strengths seems to be a positive step, it does not eliminate the reality of ADHD. It could lead to a worse scenario: she can doubt her abilities because of her struggle just to maintain them. If a child is allowed to acknowledge her condition, then she can be taught

appropriate coping skills.

If a girl's behavior causes her to be impaired academically, socially, or developmentally, she should be examined by an experienced medical professional. If her behavior is simply attributed to creativity or giftedness, her problem will linger until it is directly addressed.

How School Counselors Can Help

Helping students with ADHD involves consistent consultation and communication with teachers, parents, and students. First and foremost, school counselors can provide parents and teachers with important information involving girls with ADHD through newsletters, websites or brochures. School counselors can also help assist with behavioral interventions -- teaching coping skills, social skills, and self-monitoring skills (with or without rewards). Girls may have trouble understanding what is wrong with them and how to cope once diagnosed. Feelings of isolation, depression, and frustration are common and adjustment to medication may be difficult. School counselors can provide support through individual and group counseling.

School counselors can also provide parents with needed information in drop-in counseling workshops and support groups. Preparing parents for a diagnosis and understanding how to help their daughter in a group format may be a popular way to help bridge parents together for extra support.

To help teachers, school counselors can provide them with background information on the unique challenges facing girls with ADHD. They can also offer tips on how to address the following issues:

- Distractibility
- Lack of organization
- Over-organization paired with perfectionism
- Negativity
- Daydreaming
- Low self-esteem
- Messy handwriting
- Isolation

School counselors need to work with teachers to develop a plan to meet each girl's individual needs. In addition to the challenges listed above, they should be sure to focus on building social skills and preparing the student for transitions. Specific teaching tips, such as breaking down lessons learning into smaller sections during a block schedule may help tremendously, as well.

Coping with this issue, like all learning disabilities, is difficult for everyone. Education and empowerment go a long way. The following online resources may be of interest to parents, students, and educators:

- [ADDvance](#)
- [Attention Deficit Disorder Association Southern Region](#)
- [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder](#)
- [CHADD \(Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorders\)](#)
- [It's Time to Empower Our Girls](#)
- [Misdiagnosis and dual diagnosis of gifted children Citation: Abstracted from: Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnoses of Gifted Children and Adults: ADHD, bipolar, OCD, Asperger's, depression, and other disorders](#)
- [Misunderstood Minds](#)
- [Teens and ADHD](#)

- [Why Do So Many Smart Children With ADD Fail In Our Public Schools?](#)

FEATURED RESOURCE: THE SOLUTIONS KIT FOR ADHD



This comprehensive kit is packed with hands-on materials for a multi-modal approach to working with ADHD kids ages 5 through 12. In one convenient storage box, you'll find our:

- *ADD Program Planner* including a detailed checklist and 3 student planners;
- *ADHD Self-Control Problem-Solving Cards* to guide discussion on ways to develop impulse control;
- *In Control Book of Games* featuring six games to help children keep cool under any circumstances;
- *Face It! Card Deck* that can be used to play 10 card games designed to teach children the importance of expressing and understanding feelings;
- *Children`s Self-control Checklist* to help assess kids` self control as treatment strategies are set; and
- *Forms for Helping the ADHD Child* to assist clinicians in helping children achieve their behavioral goals.

To find out how you can order this all-inclusive kit that features everything you need to help the ADHD child, [click here](#) !

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For over 30 years, Sunburst Visual Media has been producing the highest quality guidance and health programs. From the start, Sunburst Visual Media's mission has been to enhance learning and help teachers get students thinking and talking about the difficult issues they face every day. Sunburst Visual Media's reputation as the recognized leader in the field of guidance and health, is built on its ability to present tough-to-teach topics in a realistic, non-judgmental, and captivating manner. Sunburst Visual Media's prides itself on consistently providing educators with award-winning programs in such areas as: anger management, bullying and harassment, character education, violence prevention, conflict resolution, drug abuse prevention, sex education, career education, health, and parenting skills.

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ABOUT THE AMERICAN SCHOOL COUNSELOR ASSOCIATION

Professional school counselors everywhere share the same vision to support their schools by serving their students. School counselors know that guiding students toward personal and social development leads to improved academic achievement. Through their partnership with principals and teachers, school counselors help prepare today's students to become tomorrow's adults.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) responds to school counselors' unique needs, helping them grow individually as professionals and providing them with real tools to guide their students. As an international nonprofit organization founded in 1952, ASCA has the benefit of foresight and hindsight. It has grown to fit counselors' changing needs through social and educational movements from desegregation to standardized testing. Responding to the needs of counselors as voiced by counselors has enabled ASCA to remain vital and forward-thinking.

ASCA serves as the voice of school counselors on Capitol Hill and helps members ensure their voices are heard in state legislatures. ASCA has active government affairs representatives who monitor activities in Congress, the Department of Education and throughout Washington to advocate on behalf of school counselors' interests: funding, certification, student-to-counselor ratios and more.

A full-color bimonthly magazine, *School Counselor* provides practical information and how-to articles to help school counselors help their students and themselves. Each issue has a focus on something school counselors care about, from public relations to grief counseling, as well as departments and columns covering a range of topics. Professional School Counseling is ASCA's award-winning bimonthly academic journal, providing peer-reviewed articles on school counseling theory, research, practice and techniques. The journal and the magazine together provide counselors with the most well-rounded and up-to-date information in the field.

For more information, visit www.schoolcounselor.org or call 703.683.ASCA.

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