



## Student and Community Services *Psychological Services*

# Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

### **Psychological Assessment Checklist**

*A full assessment should include:*

- Developmental History: cover prenatal, birth history and early development
- OSR Review: document social/communication problems that interfere with classroom performance
- Observation: direct behavioural observation of the child should be pursued, with a particular focus on unstructured social settings, such as the school yard, daycare and/or home
- Cognitive Assessment: evaluate cognitive ability and any other learning disorder
- Behaviour Rating Scale/Survey: administer a behaviour rating scale or survey that systematically evaluates the child's behavioural functioning in a variety of areas, in different settings (home vs. school)

Other sources of information:

**Continuous Performance Task:** the CPT can provide information from a vigilance task, to directly observe the attention problems.

**Medical Assessment:** to be completed by a physician (e.g., pediatrician, neurologist, psychiatrist, etc.). This type of assessment is recommended to determine the need for other medical studies (e.g., genetic studies, neurological assessment, endocrine studies etc.) There may also be co-morbid neurological and psychiatric conditions, such as OCD, CD, tics and anxiety disorders that also need to be addressed.

## **Diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: The Specifics**

As with any clinical diagnosis, a broad-based, behavioural evaluation is necessary in order to rule out other diagnostic categories with overlapping symptoms, and to confirm the actual diagnosis that is being made. A differential diagnosis using DSM-IV or ICD-10 is necessary to confirm a diagnosis within this category of disorders.

In diagnosing Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, behavioural observations, psychometric measures, clinical judgement and qualitative information must be considered in coming to the diagnosis. It is also important to consider a wide range of childhood disorders that could account for the behavioural symptoms, before making any diagnosis.

- Developmental History:

Interview the parents or a parent, to obtain information about the child's early development, symptoms before age 7, and symptoms now. The developmental history must indicate that the problem is of more than 6 months duration. Current and past stresses in the family that could impact on the child must be probed.

Medical history should also be obtained from the parent. Keep in mind medical conditions that could interfere with attention, such as poor vision, skin irritation, diabetes, ear infections, asthma, allergies, or use of medications which contain stimulants. Also look for frequent accidents or head injuries that may have occurred in the child's past.

- Review of the OSR:

Seek information on behavioural symptoms reported since school entry and the course of the symptoms, particularly before age 7, which interfere with classroom performance.

- Observation:

Direct behavioural observation of the child should be pursued. Distributed observations over several occasions are preferable to single session observations. Behavioural symptoms of ADHD must be investigated in at least two settings, usually home, school, or daycare. More finely differentiated settings might include the classroom, the school yard, the individual assessment setting, etc.

- Cognitive/Emotional Assessment

A complete cognitive assessment is very important. The WISC-III/WIAT should be administered to rule out any other learning disability. Freedom from Distractibility and Processing Speed factors may be significantly discrepant, providing support for a diagnosis of attention problems. Also, emotional factors, such as frustration, depression and/or anxiety should also be evaluated to rule out an emotional basis for the attentional difficulties.

- Behaviour Rating Scale/Survey:

An objective measure evaluating the child's behavioural symptoms should be completed by parents and teachers. The behavioural symptoms of ADHD must be investigated in at least two settings, usually the home, school and/or daycare. Results from this can be used to match the child to the DSM-IV criteria. A behavioural rating scale can also help to determine the extent of other clinical symptoms.

### **Suggested Questionnaires and Behavioural Rating Scales:**

Behaviour Assessment System for Children  
 Achenbach Child Behaviour Checklist/ Teacher's Report Form/Youth Self Report  
 Conners rating scales  
 Attention Deficit Disorder Evaluation Scale  
 Home and School Situations Questionnaire  
 checklists, such as in **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: A Clinical Workbook**,  
 by Russell Barkley

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