

Attention Issues



Although it is normal for children to experience issues with focus and behavior as part of typical development, persistent attention issues that affect performance at school, home, or in social situations require careful intervention.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a diagnosis commonly associated with attention issues, yet there are a number of other circumstances and health conditions that can contribute. Finding the right resources and support can be life changing for a child, their family and their teachers. The journey begins with understanding the issues and solutions.

Attention Issues Explained

Students with persistent attention issues may experience difficulty in and out of school including challenges with reading, writing, math, organization, focus, listening, comprehending, interacting socially, and controlling their bodies. Despite common misconceptions and stereotypes, students with attention issues can thrive in school and in life but likely need support in order to do so.

A variety of circumstances and health conditions can contribute to attention issues. The most prevalent and studied form of attention difficulty is attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). It has the potential to persist across the lifespan and is one of the most commonly diagnosed neurodevelopmental disorders during childhood. Sleep or food deprivation, stress and anxiety, trauma and neglect, vision and hearing problems, auditory processing disorder, and sensory processing disorder also contribute to attention issues. It is important to recognize that all of these circumstances and conditions can be especially problematic for children in school settings.

Paying attention is not always a choice for students. What can be viewed as a lack of motivation or disinterest in and out of school may actually be circumstances beyond the student's immediate control. When undetected or misunderstood, serious attention issues can adversely affect academic performance, physical and mental health, and keep a student from reaching their potential.

Because attention issues can be difficult to decipher and decode, they can easily lead to frustration and misdirection. A number of assessment tools are available to determine the sources of attention issues and should be administered as part of a full evaluation by a qualified professional. Students may not be able to describe how and why they struggle with attention, making appropriate identification, supports, resources and therapies all the more essential.

To qualify for services, ADHD and other diagnoses should be the result of evaluation conducted by a qualified clinical psychologist, school psychologist, or developmental psychologist. In cases where ADHD is ruled out, parents, teachers and clinical professionals can collaborate to explore other potential causes.



**SUMMIT
CENTER**

Reach New Heights

Northern California
Walnut Creek / East Bay
925.939.7500

Southern California
Torrance
310.478.6505

WEB summitcenter.us

EMAIL inquiry@summitcenter.us



Characteristics of Attention Issues

- Not enough deep and rejuvenating delta sleep leads to lethargy, hyperactivity, and the inability to focus and pay attention.
- Long-term malnutrition can lead to difficulties controlling emotions and attitude, reacting to stress, and sustaining attention.
- Stress and anxiety can alter cognitive performance producing symptoms including hyperarousal, concentration difficulties, impaired executive functioning and decision making, and difficulty sustaining attention.
- Trauma and neglect can result in a persistent “fight or flight” response, hyperactivity, internalization of symptoms, difficulty with executive functioning, weakened response to positive feedback, and difficulty with social interactions.
- Vision and hearing problems can significantly impact a child’s ability to operate within the expectations for behavior and academic achievement due to the inability to see or hear what is being taught.
- Auditory processing disorder creates difficulty making sense of the sounds, following instructions, and staying focused due to a breakdown between the brain and the ears.
- Sensory processing disorder leads to receiving unorganized information through the senses and can lead to behavior challenges and difficulty following instructions.
- ADHD can present as:
 - Inattention - wandering off task, lacking persistence, having difficulty sustaining focus and remaining organized
 - Hyperactivity - moving about constantly, including when not deemed appropriate; fidgeting, tapping, or talking excessively
 - Impulsivity - making hasty actions in the moment without considering high potential for harm; desiring immediate rewards; unable to delay gratification; interrupting

Serving Students

Support for attention issues comes in many forms. In the case of sleep or food issues in children, begin with an assessment of needs and possible interventions. Regular screening for vision and hearing problems should take place with immediate referrals to specialists when issues are identified. For auditory processing disorder, qualified speech therapists can assist in “changing the learning or communication environment to recruit higher-order skills that help to compensate for deficits. Support for sensory processing disorder typically involves therapy conducted by occupational or physical therapists who focus on activities that challenge the child with sensory input and as well as ways to respond appropriately to the sensory stimulus. Standard supports for ADHD include medication, behavior therapy, counseling, and specialized education services. In all cases, the student needs time, patience, and support to overcome attention issues and reach their potential both in and out of school.

Resources for Parents & Educators

- 2e News
- Bright & Quirky
- Davidson Institute for Talent Development
- GHF Gifted Learners (formerly Gifted Homeschoolers Forum)
- Hoagies’ Gifted Education
- Let’s Talk 2e
- National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC)
- Renzulli Center at University of Connecticut
- Roeper Review
- Summit Center
- Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG)

About Summit Center

Summit Center, founded by Drs. Daniel B. Peters and Susan Daniels, provides educational and comprehensive assessments, consultations, and counseling for children, teens, adults, and families. We work with clients who are neurodiverse, gifted, talented, twice-exceptional (have both gifted and less developed abilities), and/or are asynchronous in their development. Summit Center has assembled an expert team of professionals and specialists dedicated to using a strengths-based approach to help our clients reach their fullest developmental potential.