

10 Overlooked Symptoms of ADHD in Boys [and Girls] and Why They Should Matter to Parents and Coaches

Writing for ADDitudemag.com, Ryan Wexelblatt, LCSW, an expert in childhood ADHD and its treatment suggests that the signature symptoms of ADHD in boys are not hyperactivity and impulsivity. Instead, he shares these top ten manifestations of ADHD:

1. **Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria** – According to ADDitudemag.com, RSD is characterized by intense mood shifts triggered by a distinct episode, typically one of the following: **1)** rejection (the real or perceived withdrawal of love, approval, or respect), **2)** teasing, **3)** criticism, no matter how constructive, and **4)** persistent self-criticism or negative self-talk prompted by a real or perceived failure. If you suspect that an athlete is experiencing RSD (avoiding eye contact, looking as if they are about to cry, acting sullen are all signs), give feedback one-on-one rather than in public. Use the “Sandwich Approach” to giving feedback (covered elsewhere in PLAC training and publications), rather than stand eye-to-eye deliver the feedback side-to-side.
2. **Weak Episodic Memory** – as a parent or coach, if you find yourself constantly uttering, “How many tike do I have to tell you...” and, “We’ve gone over this a thousand times,” you’re likely dealing with an athlete with poor episodic memory -difficulty remembering past experiences and the emotions associated with those past experiences. Kids with weak episodic memory often respond with, “I don’t remember...”, and they honestly don’t. Asking questions with concern and compassion, “What did you do the last time...”, and “Do you remember how it felt...?”, and guided journaling can be effective tools to strengthen episodic memory.
3. **Inconsistent Situational Awareness** -- is how we take different pieces of information from our environment, put them together as a whole, and make meaning from them. For example, most baseball players with a few years of experience in the game would know that with bases loaded and two outs, you’ve got a play at any base. The kid with inconsistent situational awareness may be thinking to him/herself, “I’ve got to throw the batter out at first to end the inning.” Checking for understanding can be useful here – “Listen up everybody... we’ve got an out at any base... Jerry, did you get that?”
4. **Difficulty with Self-Directed talk** -- We all have an internal dialog in our heads that we use to talk to ourselves, a “brain coach” as Wexelblatt calls it. He says that in people with ADHD, the volume of their brain coach is turned down, making it kore difficult to pay attention. Real-time reminders as well as regular

practice of positive self-talk can serve to increase the volume, “Sandy, I need you to keep telling yourself that you got this. Give it a try.”

- 5. Difficulty with Unexpected Change** – as a parent or parent/coach, if you’ve ever found it difficult to get your kid to shut off the videogames and start their homework, that difficulty comes from the challenge of moving from a preferred task to a non-preferred task without time to prepare. That challenge is exacerbated by ADHD. Giving advance notice or finding ways to make the non-preferred task more “fun” or challenging can ease the transition.
- 6. Hyper-focusing on Things That Are Interesting and Difficulty Sustaining Attention on Things That Are Not** – fortunately or unfortunately depending on your perspective, medication continues to demonstrate the best results when it comes to sustaining attention on things that are not interesting. But it is important to keep on mind that your child’s tendencies to hyperfocus on things that are interesting to him/her could help them become very successful in life.”

Take, for example, Dr. Fred J. Epstein (1937 - 2006). Born with various learning disabilities including dyslexia, Dr. Epstein writes in his book, [If I Get to Five: What Children can Teach Us About Courage and Character](#), that he also had ADHD. Growing up his family thought that he would never get into college let alone become a psychiatrist like his father and grandfather. But Dr. Epstein became one of the most renowned pediatric neurosurgeons in the world. He was credited with the development of pioneering neurosurgical techniques to treat children with life-threatening brain and spinal-cord tumors. He was also known to take cases that other pediatric neurosurgeons had deemed “hopeless.”



- 7. Poor Future Thinking Skills** – kids with ADHD tend to live moment-to-moment, and therefore can be challenged by having to think too far in the future. For example, telling your kid, “If you do your homework every night this week, you can stay up later on the weekend.” First off, telling them only to do their homework doesn’t guarantee they’ll remember to turn it in. Secondly, if it is Monday and they must wait till Friday evening to get a reward, chances are it won’t work. Make things that will happen in the future visible as on a wall calendar or cell phone or cell phone calendar app (activating automated reminders). Mix periodic verbal reminders with compassionate questioning, “Do you remember what we’ve got going on this Friday?” and connect rewards to desired behavior as quickly as you can (e.g., tonight, tomorrow).
- 8. Difficulty Sensing the Passage of Time** – people with ADHD have difficulty with time as a concrete concept, including estimating how much time a task will take. In the context of sports, this often results in chronic tardiness for practice and events. During events, difficulty sensing passage of time may can result in underestimating how much time is left in the game, to take a shot, etc. Tips for helping young athletes note the passage of tie more effectively, visualizing events such as writing and prominently posting on a calendar and using mobile phone alarms and reminders. A “fun” activity to help with sensing the passage of time is to challenge your athlete to guess how long a minute is. Have them close their eyes, announce the start of the timing and have them raise their hand when they sense a minute is up. When the hand goes up, stop the clock and let the

athlete see how much tie has actually passed. Repeat the activity until they can more accurately sense the passage of time. It is important to note that if you as a parent or parent/coach have ADHD and difficulty sensing the passage of time, you need to work on your own skills rather than put it all on your child to correct.

9. **Poor Perspective Taking Skills** – This refers to difficulty reading social cues, and understanding others’ expressed thoughts, feelings and how he/she comes across to others. Kids with poor perspective taking skills might react by laughing when a friend falls off a bike or is otherwise slightly injured. They can have a tough time knowing when their teasing has gone too far or when their behavior is otherwise becoming annoying to others. Parents and coaches can help young athletes increase their perspective taking skills by compassionately asking questions to elicit perspective – “How do you think ____ felt when ___?” “How would you feel if that happened to you?” If your child’s response is, “I don’t know...” provide some options and ask them to pick the one they think fits best. You can also use family TV time to teach perspective-taking. As you watch the TV plot play out, ask a few well-chosen questions that requires your child/teen put him/herself in the position of one of the characters and think things through from that character’s perspective.
10. **Trouble Putting Problem Size in a Relevant Context** – kids with ADHD often either over- or under-react to the size of a problem. This includes a tendency to awfulize situations. To them, striking out may seem like the end of the world, while forgetting to bring essential equipment to the game may seem to them like, “What’s the big deal?” Kids who have difficulty right-sizing problems in context, characteristically use sentences beginning with “always”, and “never”, or “can’t ever” such as, “I always strike out,” or “I never get a chance to...” and perceived slights can result in extreme sulking or aggressive payback. Helping kids put problem size in context in much the same way you would for the perspective taking skill development. You can also compassionately challenge absolutes such as always and never – “You mean to tell me that you have never, ever, ever done anything but strike out?” Doing it in a bit of a playful, not mocking, way can help reduce the tension of such conversations.

Content for these Top 10 under-recognized of ADHD are taken from: **The Top 10 Manifestations of ADHD in Boys**, by Ryan Wexelblatt, LCSW, updated August 28, 2022. You can read the original article here: [ADHD in Boys: 10 Common Signs & Symptoms \(additudemag.com\)](https://additudemag.com/adhd-in-boys-10-common-signs-symptoms/)

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