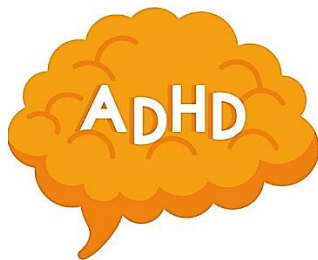


ADHD ASSESSMENT 101: Tips for Navigating the Testing Process

These days it seems like everyone is talking about ADHD. Maybe your brother was recently diagnosed as an adult, or you find yourself identifying with one of the many ADHD influencers on Tik Tok or Instagram. Maybe your child's 2nd grade teacher expressed concerns about his ability to listen and complete his work on time. Either way, if you are confused about what to do next, you are not alone. My name is Dr. Katie Lewallen, and I am a clinical psychologist and ADHD – Certified Clinical Services Provider at Alliance Behavioral Health. I have specialized in the assessment of ADHD and learning disorders for over a decade. The ADHD assessment process can feel a bit overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be if you know what to look for... here are a few tips for navigating the process.

But first, let's dive into what ADHD *actually* is...



ADHD stands for Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, though many researchers and clinicians believe this is a poor representation of what people with ADHD actually experience.

There are currently three different presentations: ADHD - Predominantly Inattentive Presentation (formerly known as ADD), ADHD – Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Presentation, and ADHD – Combined Presentation. But ADHD is

much more than just distractibility or difficulties sitting still. It is a set of complex neurodevelopmental differences that impact a person's entire life – including their functioning at home, work, school, and in interpersonal relationships.

People with ADHD typically struggle with executive function skills. What's executive functioning, you ask? Think about it like the “boss” of the brain. The executive system controls overall self-management functions like impulse control, emotional regulation, and task management (starting tasks, organizing tasks, completing tasks, etc.). ADHD is also highly connected to dysregulated dopamine in the brain. Too much dopamine can lead to fixation or hyperfocus on tasks, while not enough dopamine can cause inattention and disinterest.

So how do you know whether your symptoms warrant an official ADHD diagnosis, or whether they are typical when compared with others your age? That's where a comprehensive assessment comes in. Here are some things to consider as you navigate the ADHD assessment process.

TRAINING MATTERS...

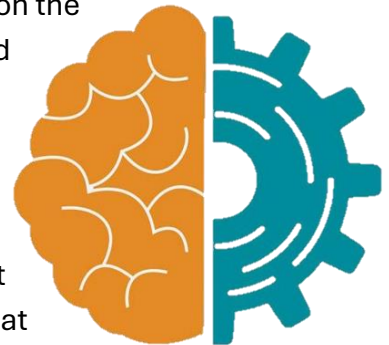


Many different types of healthcare providers **can** diagnose ADHD - including pediatricians, primary care physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists, and master's level counselors or therapists. However, clinical psychologists (PhDs) are the only mental health providers thoroughly trained to provide **comprehensive** psychological assessments that integrate multiple sources of data. Psychologists who specialize in assessments have hundreds of training hours

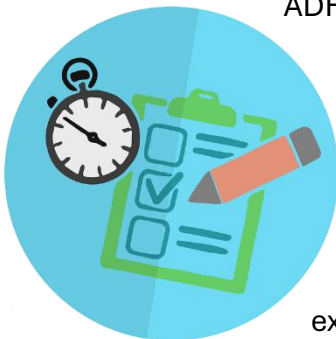
in administering psychological tests, scoring them, and interpreting the data – they are the specialists! When searching for an assessment provider, ask questions. Make sure that your provider is independently licensed and has specialized training in ADHD.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS PLAY A KEY ROLE...

In the last several decades, research in ADHD has shifted to focus on the relationship between executive function skills and attention-related deficits. There is significant overlap between the two, and people diagnosed with ADHD often exhibit significant challenges with executive skills such as impulse control, emotional regulation, and task-management. A comprehensive ADHD assessment should not only include measures to assess executive function, but it should also include specific treatment plan recommendations that address individual weaknesses in these areas.



COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENTS RULE OUT OTHER CONDITIONS...



ADHD is a complex and multi-faceted condition, and it rarely travels alone. As a result, other factors can mimic or contribute to attention problems. These factors can include anxiety, depression, Autism Spectrum Disorder, specific learning disabilities like dyslexia, and concussions. Comprehensive ADHD assessments should address these factors to determine whether they are contributing to clinically significant distress and/or impacting your attention and executive function skills.

YOU SHOULD LEAVE WITH A PLAN AND A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF YOURSELF...

Comprehensive ADHD assessments should include a follow-up session to review your test results. During this session, your provider should review your scores, discuss any diagnoses that are appropriate, and discuss a plan for managing your symptoms. This treatment plan may include school-based accommodations, interventions for managing behaviors at home, and medication options. In addition, you should receive a copy of your assessment report as part of your medical record. The assessment process is designed to increase insight and self-awareness of your current functioning, so it is imperative that you are given the opportunity to ask questions and discuss your results collaboratively with your provider.



ONE LAST THING...

There is quite a bit of confusion related to the school system's role in conducting psychological assessments, particularly related to learning challenges. It is important to note that a school-based assessment is designed to determine eligibility for services within the school system. This may include the development of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504-plan. School-based assessments do **NOT** provide a medical diagnosis that can be utilized outside the scope of the public school system.

If you are considering an ADHD assessment, or if you would like to learn more about the services offered at Alliance Behavioral Health, please don't hesitate to contact our office. You can call us at (256) 801-8937 or feel free to email the front office staff at staff@alliancehsv.com.



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