

When You're Pretty Sure Your Child Has ADHD

(Like when you've asked them to put their shoes on 6 times. They're still barefoot.)

Quick note before we get started. We know, it's not only about the shoes. ADHD shows up a hundred different ways, and every kid has their own version. We're not here to tell you what will work for your child with ADHD (either suspected or confirmed). This is more about support for you – the caregiver – as you make sense of it all and keep moving forward.

1. Ready for Answers? Start With a Diagnosis

☐ **First stop: your child's pediatrician.** They can do an ADHD screening & talk through what you're seeing.

☐ **Ask the school for a psychoeducational evaluation.** (Yes, that's a mouthful.) This eval looks at how a child learns & what might be getting in the way.

- **Public school:** ask your child's teacher or school's psychologist
- **Private/homeschool:** call the central office of the school district you're zoned for

Under federal law (IDEA), every child is entitled to an evaluation (even homeschool and private school families.) This eval determines eligibility for school services—not a clinical diagnosis—but it's a critical first step & it's free.

☐ **Optional: Private psychoeducational or neuropsychological evaluation.** Unlike the school eval, it can give a clinical diagnosis and a fuller picture of your child's strengths and challenges—but it's usually expensive (\$2–5K) and not typically covered by insurance.

- Many families start with the free school evaluation, then decide if going private makes sense.
- Your pediatrician can help point you to reputable providers.

Worried about putting a label on your child?

We get it. But here's another way to look at it: a diagnosis doesn't change your child. It can help explain some of the things they've been struggling with—and open the door to school supports and accommodations that can make a real difference.

2. Once ADHD Is Confirmed – Now What?

A diagnosis can feel like relief, validation, grief...or all three. It doesn't hand you a magic plan, so this is where the real figuring-it-out begins. There's no one right path, but there are good places to start.

At School

- ☐ **Public schools: Set up a meeting to talk about a *504 plan or **IEP for your child.** These plans spell out accommodations your child may be entitled to—like extra time, quieter testing, movement breaks, or flexible seating—and once they're written in, the school is required to provide them.
- ☐ **Private schools: Have a conversation with the school about accommodations.** They aren't legally required to offer the same support as public schools (or even set up to do it), but many will work with you.

But if you hear:

"They just need to focus more."

That's your cue to dial your advocacy way up.

*504 Plan

Gives students the support they need to keep up in a regular classroom. (Think accommodations, not special instruction.)

**IEP

Individualized education plan—a full support plan with accommodations and specialized instruction.

At Home

These are common levers that can make things a little easier for both ADHD brains and the people caring for them. (If these prevent one argument or meltdown, that's a win.)

One-step instructions.

Instead of: ~~"Clean your room."~~

Try: "Put your dirty clothes in the hamper."

- ☐ **A routine that's flexible, not rigid.** Knowing what comes next matters more than sticking to the clock.
- ☐ **Timers, countdowns or visual cues for transitions.** A "five minutes left" warning before switching activities is a game-changer.
- ☐ **Built-in movement breaks.** A short walk around the block between homework tasks can do wonders.
- ☐ **Celebrating effort over outcomes.** Saying "I saw how hard you tried" goes a long way.
- ☐ **Prioritizing bedtime and sleep.** Everything is harder when no one's rested.

Remember to be gentle with yourself

This can all look simple on paper, but in real life, it often takes a lot of patience and emotional energy. **Give yourself (and your child) grace when things don't go perfectly.**

3. A Note on Medication From a Caregiver POV

We're not here to tell you whether medication is right for your child. That's not our lane.

What *is* helpful to know: **medication is rarely a straight line.** For some kids, it's life-changing. For others, side effects outweigh the benefits. Many families land somewhere in between.

What often surprises caregivers is how much trial and error is involved: different meds, doses, timing, and sometimes something works...until it doesn't. Frustrating? Yes. Common? Also yes.

Whether or not medication is part of your path, what matters most is how your child is functioning, what's helping (and what isn't), and how *your child* feels.

Medication isn't a measure of success or failure.

It's one tool among many, and how (or if) it's used can change over time.

Quick note

Comment sections and social media groups aren't great places to make medical decisions. They're excellent at amplifying extremes. Not giving you clarity.

Our Final Word to Caregivers

If this cheat sheet does one thing, we hope it helps you feel a little less alone as you navigate ADHD in real life. You're carrying a lot, and the fact that you're here shows you're doing great.

Probably even better than you think.

Save yourself some Googling.

More Caregiver Cheat Sheets at [WeCareOutLoud.org](https://www.WecareOutLoud.org)

