Information for Parents About
Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
(ADHD)

What Is ADHD?
ADHD is the name of a group of behaviors found in many children and adults. People with ADHD have trouble paying attention in school, at home, or at work. They may be much more active and/or impulsive than what is usual for their age. These behaviors contribute to significant problems in relationships, learning, and behavior. For this reason, children with ADHD are sometimes seen as being “difficult” or as having behavior problems. ADHD is common, affecting 4 to 12% of school-age children. It is more common in boys than in girls.

What Are the Symptoms of ADHD?
The child with ADHD who is inattentive will have 6 or more of the following symptoms:

- Difficulty following instructions
- Difficulty keeping attention on work or play activities at school and at home
- Loses things needed for activities at school and at home
- Appears not to listen
- Doesn't pay close attention to details
- Seems disorganized
- Has trouble with tasks that require planning ahead
- Forgets things
- Is easily distracted

The child with ADHD who is hyperactive/impulsive will have at least 6 symptoms:

- Runs or climbs inappropriately
- Is fidgety
- Can't play quietly
- Blurts out answers
- Interrupts people
- Can't stay in seat
- Talks too much
- Is always on the go
- Has trouble waiting his or her turn

What Causes ADHD?
Children with ADHD do not make enough chemicals in key areas in the brain that are responsible for organizing thought. Without enough of these chemicals, the organizing centers of the brain don't work well. This causes the symptoms in children with ADHD. Often there is a family history of ADHD. Things that don’t cause ADHD: poor parenting (although a disorganized home life and school environment can make symptoms worse); too much or too little sugar, Aspartame, food additives or colorings; lack of vitamins; food allergies or other allergies; fluorescent lights; video games; or too much TV.
What Can I Do to Help My Child With ADHD?
A team effort, with parents, teachers, and doctors working together, is the best way to help your child. Children with ADHD tend to need more structure and clearer expectations. Families may benefit from talking with a specialist in managing ADHD-related behavior and learning problems. Medicine also helps many children. Talk with your doctor or nurse practitioner about treatments he/she recommends.

What Medicines Are Used to Treat ADHD?
Some of the medicines for ADHD are methylphenidate, dextroamphetamine, atomoxetine, guanfacine, and clonidine. These medicines improve attention/concentration and decrease impulsive and overactive behaviors.

What Can I Do at Home to Help My Child?
Children with ADHD may be challenging to parent. They may have trouble understanding directions. Children with ADHD are often in a constant state of activity. This can be challenging. You may need to change your home life a bit to help your child. Here are some things you can do to help:

- **Make a schedule**. Set specific times for waking up, eating, playing, doing homework, doing chores, watching TV or playing video games, and going to bed. Post the schedule where your child will always see it. Explain any changes to the routine in advance.
- **Make simple house rules**. It’s important to explain what will happen when the rules are obeyed and when they are broken.
- **Make sure your directions are understood**. Get your child’s attention and look directly into his or her eyes. Then tell your child in a clear, calm voice specifically what you want. Keep directions simple and short. Ask your child to repeat the directions back to you.
- **Reward good behavior**. Congratulate your child when he/she completes each step of a task.
- **Make sure your child is well supervised**. Because they are impulsive, children with ADHD may need more adult supervision than other children their age.
- **Watch your child around his or her friends**. It’s sometimes hard for children with ADHD to learn social skills. Reward good play behaviors.
- **Set a homework routine**. Pick a regular place for homework, away from distractions such as other people, TV, and video games. Break homework time into small parts and allocate frequent breaks.
- **Focus on effort, not grades**. Reward your child when he or she tries to finish school work, not just for good grades. You can give extra rewards for earning better grades.
- **Talk with your child’s teachers**. Find out how your child is doing at school -- in class, at playtime, at lunchtime. Ask for daily or weekly progress notes from the teacher.