



Assessing Child Maladaptive Behaviors: Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Other Mental Disorders, and Childhood Adversity

There are several conditions with overlapping diagnostic criteria that can look like ADHD. Let’s take a closer look at how to assess and distinguish between ADHD and some other mental illnesses.

Detecting ADHD

You can refer to [clinical practice guidelines for ADHD](#) [for guidance on diagnosing, evaluating and treatment of ADHD](#). When diagnosing and treating for ADHD with medications, please complete an in-person or telehealth/remote follow-up (using billing modifier 95 for telehealth) within 30 days of the member starting medication.

Other Conditions Requiring Assessment of ADHD-Like Symptoms

ADHD has diagnostic criteria which can look similar in presentation to other mental illnesses besides depression; they include the following:

- [Oppositional defiant disorder \(ODD\)](#)
- [Conduct disorder \(CD\)](#)
- [Bipolar affective disorder \(BD\)](#)
- [Disruptive mood dysregulation disorder \(DMDD\)](#)

Child traumatic stress may also overlap and look similar in presentation. Additional information on child traumatic stress and treatments is available here:

- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
- [Texas Health Steps](#)

Compared to other conditions, ADHD might be unique in having the characteristics of 1) unproductive hyperactivity and 2) impulsivity that is internally and not externally driven.

Comparing Characteristics of Child Traumatic Stress and ADHD

Characteristic/Condition	Child Traumatic Stress	ADHD
Self-esteem	May feel guilt or shame	Variable
Pleasure	May struggle	Variable
Attention	Easily distracted	Easily distracted
Hyperactivity	Hyperactive	Unproductive
Sleep	May be disturbed	Chronic, poor, often late bedtimes
Speech	No pattern	Often rapid, may be pressured
Impulsivity	May react to sensing threats	Internally driven
Social	May be fearful, edgy, on alert for threats	Often poor
Academic	May have difficulty concentrating & learning	Often poor
Psychomotor activity	May be restless, agitated	Chronically agitated




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Need help?

Magellan Behavioral Healthcare manages services related to mental and behavioural health care. Medicaid providers can call 1-800-327-7390. You can also review the [Behavioral Health Toolkit](#).

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