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Is It ADHD? Or Is It Depression?

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The symptoms of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in girls can be difficult to distinguish from those of clinical depression, especially when hyperactivity is not present, say experts who treat the disorder. The difficulty can be compounded because the two problems can co-exist: Experts estimate that 10 to 30 percent of children with ADHD are also clinically depressed. There is no surefire test to diagnose either condition.

Getting a careful evaluation from a clinician familiar with both problems is critical, experts say, but there are several ways in which ADHD differs from depression. Among them are:

- *Different core symptoms* . The hallmarks of depression include diminishing interest in or pleasure from activities, fatigue or loss of energy, insomnia or excessive sleeping, weight gain or loss, depressed mood for most of the day, and recurrent thoughts of death or suicide. These are not commonly seen in girls with ADHD, whose primary symptoms include pervasive inattention, chronic disorganization and impulsive behavior.
- *Inability to identify what's wrong*. Girls with ADHD can often say why they are depressed and may point to problems in school or with friends. Girls suffering from major depression may be unable to articulate why they feel sad or guilty.
- *Duration and onset*. Many girls with ADHD say they can't remember a time they didn't have trouble concentrating or finishing a task. By comparison, girls who are depressed usually can recall being able to focus or when they felt better.

--Sandra G. Boodman

Sources: Stephen P. Hinshaw, Patricia Quinn, National Institute of Mental Health, Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

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