

High School Girls with AD/HD

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(This article is the fourth and last in a series about girls with AD/HD from preschool through high school.

It seems as if nature and society have conspired to pack the high-school years with so many daunting challenges that even the most adept and well-adjusted adolescent feels overloaded. When AD/HD is added to the mix, high school becomes even more challenging, and may even become a destructive experience.

Diagnosis of AD/HD in teenage girls

The accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment of girls with AD/HD is acutely important in these challenging years. However, the majority of teenage girls with AD/HD continue to go undiagnosed or misdiagnosed for a number of reasons. For instance, most girls with AD/HD behave very differently than boys, falling into the much harder to diagnose category of "primarily inattentive type." They typically work harder to hide their academic difficulties and to conform to teacher expectations; and they are often misdiagnosed as anxious and/or depressed. Girls who are particularly bright are able to compensate for their AD/HD much longer, and are therefore the most likely candidates for a late diagnosis.

The fact that a girl's AD/HD symptoms may not have been apparent in early years renders her AD/HD no less real when it rears its head in adolescence, a time when the demands for planning, organization, recall and focus intensify. There have been numerous discussions of the need for gender-based diagnostic criteria for AD/HD, but for now, professionals continue to rely on criteria that serve much better to identify boys than girls. Parents who may suspect that their teenage daughter may have AD/HD can refer to the questions at the end of this article. If your daughter answers "yes" to many of these questions, a careful assessment for AD/HD may be called for.

Troubling challenges faced by teenage girls with AD/HD

First, let's consider some of the most worrisome issues faced by teenage girls with AD/HD. Then, we'll discuss ways that parents can support and protect their daughters as they traverse their turbulent teens.

Social pressures

Social deficits associated with AD/HD often have their greatest impact during adolescence as girls begin to separate from family and move into the all-important social milieu of high school. The impact of feeling "different" often peaks in adolescence when social life takes on an intensified importance. Family support and acceptance is critical, but can never entirely counteract the damage that can be done to teenagers who feel rejected by their peer group. The very negative self-image that girls with AD/HD may develop during high school can haunt them for years afterwards.

