

Thrive's ADHD

"What's Next"

Guide for Parents & Caregivers of Kids & Teens



02	A Personal Note from Amy Halls
03	Understanding the Diagnosis
04	Understanding the Diagnosis - Continued
05	Understanding the Diagnosis - Continued
06	Emotional Impact on Parents
07	Therapy & Coaching Options
08	Medication Management
09	Medication Management - Continued
10	Further Testing and Evaluation (Referral Sources)
11	Further Testing and Evaluation (Referral Sources) - Continued
12	Talking to Your Child About ADHD
13	Parenting Tips & Resources
14	Parenting Tips & Resources
15	School Support
16	Dietary and Lifestyle Changes
17	Dietary and Lifestyle Changes - Continued
18	Dietary and Lifestyle Changes - Continued
19	First 30 Days Checklist
20	Additional Resources from Thrive
21	Empowerment & Hope

As the owner of **Thrive Counseling Center** and the creator of this guide, I want to share that I didn't receive my own ADHD diagnosis until I was 38 years old. For much of my life, I struggled silently with the symptoms—juggling responsibilities, managing overwhelm, and trying to make sense of it all. Now, as a parent to children who also show signs of ADHD, I'm navigating this journey both personally and professionally.

Everything included in this guide—from books and parenting tips to local referrals—has been hand-picked and personally vetted by me. These are the tools I use in my own home and in my clinical work. My hope is that this guide gives you clarity, direction, and confidence as you take the next steps forward.

Please note: This guide is not intended to replace therapy, formal treatment, or medical advice. Rather, it's designed to provide a foundation for tangible *next steps and resources*, offering hope and direction for future progress.

♡ Amy Halls

Your child has been diagnosed with ADHD, which affects **attention, impulse control, and emotional regulation**. ADHD also comes with strengths like *creativity, energy, and unique ways of thinking*.

Understanding your child's profile is the first step toward support.

THERE ARE THREE PRIMARY TYPES OF ADHD

Inattentive Type

Often daydreamy, distracted, forgetful, and disorganized. These kids may seem like they aren't listening or have trouble following through.

Hyperactive-Impulsive Type

Often fidgety, constantly moving, impulsive, and talkative. These kids may blurt out answers or have difficulty waiting their turn.

Combined Type

Displays symptoms of both inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity.

ADHD isn't a behavior problem or a lack of willpower—it's a **neurodevelopmental** condition that affects how the brain grows, processes information, and regulates attention, emotion, and activity.

HERE'S A BREAKDOWN OF THE KEY BRAIN DIFFERENCES

1. NEUROTRANSMITTER IMBALANCE (DOPAMINE & NOREPINEPHRINE)

- 🌱 ADHD brains often have lower levels of dopamine and norepinephrine, which are chemicals that help with motivation, attention, and emotional regulation.
- 🌱 These neurotransmitters act like messengers between brain cells. When they're low, the brain struggles to send and receive important signals efficiently—especially in areas related to focus and self-control.

Think of it like a radio with static—you're trying to tune into a station, but the signal keeps cutting out.

2. EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING CHALLENGES (PREFRONTAL CORTEX)

- 🌱 The prefrontal cortex, the "CEO of the brain," is responsible for planning, impulse control, working memory, and decision-making.
- 🌱 In ADHD, this area is often underactive or develops more slowly, making it harder to:
 - 🌱 Stay organized
 - 🌱 Think ahead
 - 🌱 Start or finish tasks
 - 🌱 Inhibit impulses

Imagine trying to run a company without a manager at the helm. Things still happen, but it's much more chaotic.

3. DELAYED BRAIN MATURATION

- 🌱 Research shows that brain development in kids with ADHD may be delayed by 2–3 years, particularly in regions related to attention and self-regulation.
- 🌱 This doesn't mean they won't catch up—it means they may need more support and patience along the way.

It's not that they won't develop skills—it's that the timeline might look different.

4. DEFAULT MODE NETWORK (DMN) DISRUPTIONS

- 🌱 The Default Mode Network is a part of the brain that activates when we're resting or daydreaming. In ADHD, this network often turns on when it shouldn't, like during tasks that require focus.
- 🌱 This leads to "mind wandering" or feeling distracted even when trying hard to concentrate.

It's like trying to do homework with a movie playing in the background you didn't mean to start.

5. REWARD SENSITIVITY

- 🌱 Many individuals with ADHD are more sensitive to immediate rewards and less responsive to delayed gratification. This explains why tasks that are boring, repetitive, or don't offer quick feedback are especially hard.
- 🌱 This also contributes to emotional intensity and frustration tolerance—their brains are wired to seek stimulation or reward right away.

This isn't about being spoiled—it's about needing a different kind of fuel to stay engaged.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Understanding the **neurobiology** of ADHD helps us replace judgment with compassion. It explains why traditional methods don't always work—and why tools like visual schedules, fidgets, medication, and structured routines can make a dramatic difference.



ADHD IN BOYS VS. GIRLS

ADHD can look very different depending on the child. Boys are more often diagnosed due to outward behaviors like hyperactivity or impulsiveness. Girls often present with more internal symptoms, such as inattentiveness, anxiety, or emotional sensitivity, and may be misdiagnosed or overlooked.

Understanding how your child uniquely experiences ADHD can help you better support their needs at home and at school.

It's completely normal to feel a wide range of emotions after your child is diagnosed—relief, guilt, sadness, or even grief. Many parents wonder if they “missed something” or if they’re to blame. **You’re not.** This diagnosis is not a reflection of your parenting, but a roadmap for how to better support your child moving forward.

“ADHD doesn’t rewrite your child’s potential—it just rewrites the strategies you’ll use to help them shine.”




COMMON MYTHS ABOUT ADHD



ADHD is caused by bad parenting

FALSE



Kids with ADHD are lazy or unmotivated

FALSE



They’ll grow out of it

SOMETIMES, BUT NOT ALWAYS




ADHD only looks like hyperactivity

FALSE

By busting these myths, we help remove shame and stigma.

Many kids benefit from therapy to develop emotional regulation, executive functioning, and social skills. Below are trusted local referrals who specialize in supporting kids with ADHD:



Thrive Counseling Center
Clinicians who specialize in treating ADHD.



Madigan Counseling Co.

Located in Ankeny, offers services for ages 5+ and provides Child Parent Relations therapy.



Cascade Clinical Connections

Serving Ames and Des Moines; ADHD-focused therapy for children and families.



Flawsome Counseling LLC

Based in Ankeny; specializes in play therapy and emotional regulation.



Ivory Lotus Therapy

Located in Waukee and Clive; provides services for ages 5+ with a focus on child and family therapy.



Healing at Home

Located in West Des Moines; focuses on parental support and in-home interventions.



Joyful Mind Psychiatry

Based in Ames; provides psychiatric care including med management for ADHD.

Medication can be a helpful tool in managing ADHD symptoms. It doesn't work the same for everyone, and finding the right type, dosage, and timing can take some time. There are two main categories of ADHD medication: stimulants and non-stimulants.

STIMULANT:

Stimulant medications (such as methylphenidate and amphetamine-based options) are often first-line treatments. They work by increasing dopamine and norepinephrine levels in the brain, helping to improve attention and reduce hyperactivity and impulsivity.

NON-STIMULANT:

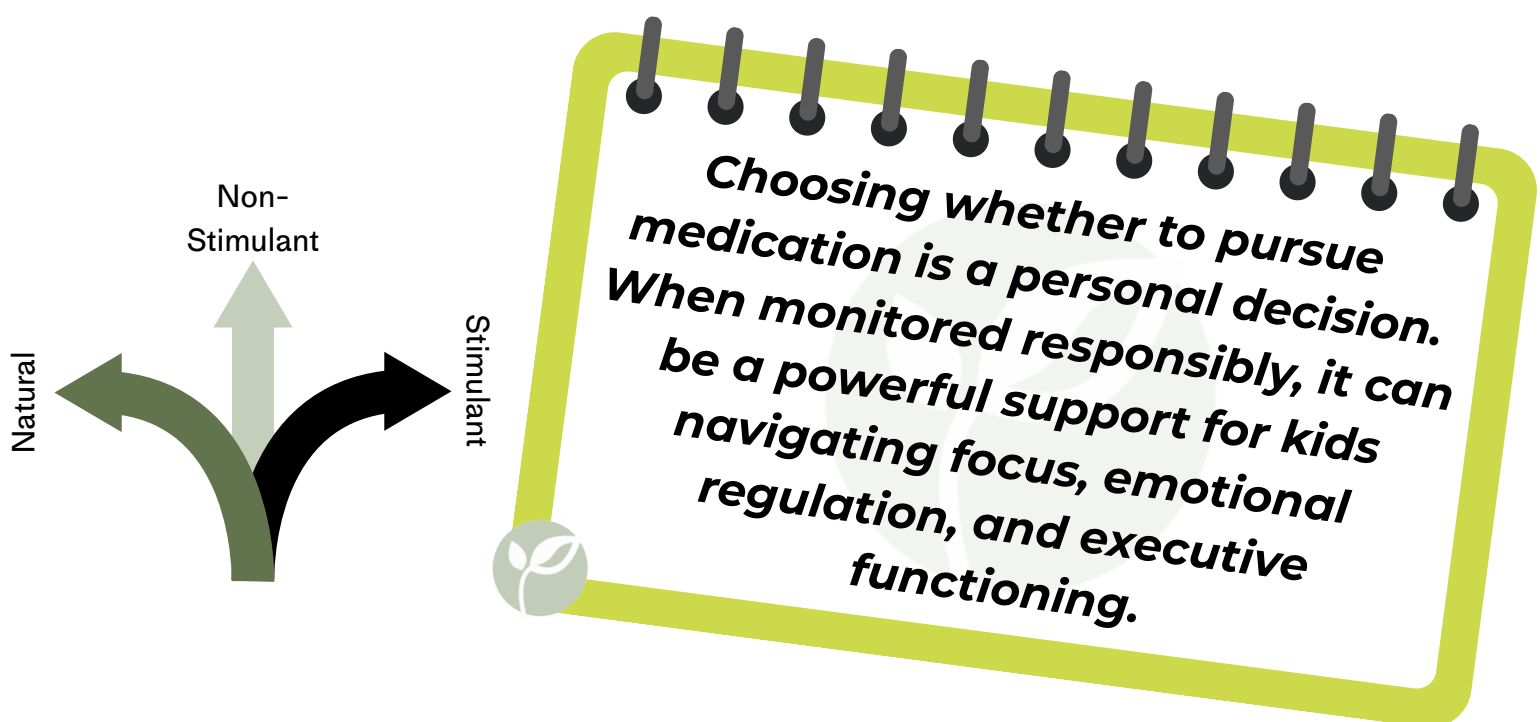
Non-stimulant medications (such as atomoxetine or guanfacine) may be used if stimulants aren't effective or cause unwanted side effects.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO:

- ➔ Work closely with a prescribing provider who understands ADHD (*like Tonia Erickson, DNP, FNP-BC at Thrive Counseling Center*).
- ➔ Keep track of your child's response to medication, including benefits and any side effects. This may include tracking changes in focus, mood, sleep, appetite, and behavior at home and at school. Use a simple journal or tracking sheet to note when the medication was taken, how long it seemed to be effective, and any changes observed throughout the day.
- ➔ Watch for common side effects such as appetite suppression, irritability, headaches, or sleep disturbances, and bring up any concerns with your prescribing provider promptly. Sharing input from teachers or caregivers can also provide helpful context in evaluating how well the medication is working.
- ➔ Maintain regular follow-ups to assess and adjust the treatment as needed.
- ➔ Understand that medication is not a cure but a tool—often most effective when combined with behavioral strategies, structure, and support.

At Thrive, we use **evidence-based research** and provide families with access to current studies and trusted information when considering medication. We also *deeply value* the perspectives and concerns of families and clients —your insights are essential.

This is a collaborative conversation, **not a one-size-fits-all approach**. Many families choose to try the strategies outlined in this guide (*such as therapy, lifestyle changes, or school interventions*) first, depending on the severity of symptoms and how much ADHD is impacting daily life.



In some cases, additional testing may be beneficial to better understand overlapping concerns such as anxiety, learning disorders, or the need for academic accommodations. Comprehensive evaluations can guide more targeted support in both school and home settings.

REFERRAL SOURCES



[Anxietytreatmentonline.com](https://www.anxietytreatmentonline.com)

- Online

Offers online assessment services for ADHD, learning disorders, and academic accommodations.



[Central Iowa Family Institute](#)

- Ankeny

Provides psychological evaluations for ADHD, autism, learning disabilities, and behavioral issues.



[On With Life - Ankeny](#)


Specializes in neuropsychological evaluations for children and adolescents with neurodevelopmental disorders.



[Blank Children's Psychological Services](#)

- Des Moines

Offers evaluations for ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, and other developmental concerns.



[Balance TMS, Esketamine, and Psychiatry - Ankeny & West Des Moines](#)

Provides psychiatric evaluations and treatment for children and adolescents.

BRAIN BALANCE & OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

BRAIN BALANCE:

An integrative program focusing on brain-body connection, sensory processing, and academic skills. This is a non-medication option for treating ADHD.

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY:

Helps with emotional regulation, sensory needs, and motor skills.

LOCAL OT REFERRALS IN THE ANKENY/SURROUNDING AREA

- ✓ KIDS LEAD OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY – CLIVE
- ✓ BLANK CHILDREN'S PEDIATRIC THERAPY – ANKENY
- ✓ SELECT PHYSICAL THERAPY – ANKENY PEDS
- ✓ AXIS THERAPY CENTERS – ANKENY
- ✓ ON WITH LIFE – ANKENY OUTPATIENT NEURO REHABILITATION
- ✓ CHILDSERVE – JOHNSTON

➔ **CONSIDER ASSESSMENTS IF YOUR CHILD HAS MELTDOWNS, SENSORY ISSUES, OR COORDINATION DIFFICULTIES.**

Use child-friendly language to explain the diagnosis.

EXAMPLE

"Your brain is wired differently, and that's okay. It just means you may need some extra tools to help focus or feel calm, kind of like how someone wears glasses to see better."



Empower your child with stories of famous individuals with ADHD, or how their brain is built for big ideas and creativity.

FAMOUS PEOPLE WITH ADHD

- ✓ **Simone Biles** – Olympic gold medal gymnast who has spoken openly about her ADHD.
- ✓ **Michael Phelps** – The most decorated Olympian of all time, diagnosed with ADHD at age 9.
- ✓ **Emma Watson** – Actress and activist, reportedly diagnosed with ADHD and treated with medication.
- ✓ **Will.i.am** – Musician and tech innovator who has credited ADHD with fueling his creativity.
- ✓ **Justin Timberlake** – Singer and actor who has shared his experiences with ADHD and OCD.
- ✓ **Richard Branson** – Founder of Virgin Group, entrepreneur who attributes some of his success to his neurodivergent thinking.
- ✓ **Howie Mandel** – Comedian and host who speaks publicly about living with ADHD and OCD.


Let your child know that just like these public figures, they too have the potential to accomplish amazing things!

Parenting a child with ADHD can be both rewarding and challenging. Supportive family involvement plays a vital role in helping children with ADHD feel safe, understood, and successful.


Here's how families can help:




Consistent Routines



Predictability helps children with ADHD thrive. Try to keep daily routines consistent for meals, bedtime, and transitions.




Involve your child in discussions about strategies that work best for them. When kids feel heard, they're more likely to engage.




Collaborative Problem-Solving



Positive Reinforcement



Catch them doing well and acknowledge small wins with praise or simple rewards.




Kids benefit from seeing caregivers use healthy coping strategies like taking deep breaths, pausing before reacting, and naming their emotions.




Modeling Regulation



Family Check-Ins




Set aside regular time to connect and talk as a family. This helps your child feel supported and gives space to troubleshoot challenges together.



Explain ADHD to siblings in a developmentally appropriate way so they can understand the unique needs and strengths of their brother or sister.



Sibling Support

- 
- Use routines and visual schedules.
 - Provide clear expectations and rewards.
 - Break tasks into small steps.

Being a calm and consistent presence—even when things feel chaotic—can make a powerful difference in your child's regulation, confidence, and resilience.

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

What's Going On inside my head *by Molly Potter*

All Dogs Have ADHD *by Kathy Hoopmann*

Cory Stories: A Kid's Book About Living With ADHD *by Jeanne Kraus*

A Walk in the Rain with a Brain *by Edward Hallowell*

Mindfulness for Kids with ADHD *by Debra Burdick*

ADHD is Our Superpower *by Soli Lazarus*

BOOKS FOR PARENTS

ADHD Is Awesome: A Guide to (Mostly) Thriving with ADHD *by Penn & Kim Holderness*

The Explosive Child *by Ross Greene*

Smart but Scattered *by Dawson & Guare*

Scattered to Focused *by Kristen Carder*

The Whole-Brain Child *by Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson*

BOOKS FOR ADOLESCENTS

The Survival Guide for Kids with ADHD *by John F. Taylor*

Smart but Scattered Teens *by Dawson & Guare*

Scattered to Focused *by Kristen Carder*

Putting on the Brakes *by Patricia Quinn and Judith Stern*



Understanding how ADHD impacts learning is an important part of advocating for your child at school. Most teachers are already using classroom strategies that support many students with ADHD, such as visual reminders, movement breaks, and task chunking. Open communication with your child's teacher is key—sometimes just a few targeted supports and collaborative tools may be enough to help your child thrive.


IF MORE SCHOOL SUPPORT IS NEEDED

504 PLAN

A **504 Plan** provides classroom accommodations for students with medical or psychological diagnoses (like ADHD) to help them access learning (e.g., extended time on tests, movement breaks).

IEP

An **IEP (Individualized Education Program)** is a formal plan for students who qualify for special education services. It includes specialized instruction in addition to accommodations.



CLASSROOM TOOLS THAT CAN HELP:

- 🌱 Velcro strips under desks for tactile stimulation.
- 🌱 Noise-canceling headphones or earplugs during testing.
- 🌱 Resistance bands around chair legs to allow for quiet foot movement.
- 🌱 Access to movement breaks or alternative seating (e.g., wobble stools, standing desks).
- 🌱 Visual timers and checklists for task completion.

POTENTIAL SUPPLEMENT OPTIONS

Please note: The following supplements are provided for informational purposes only.

Always consult your child's healthcare provider before starting any supplements or vitamins. Only a qualified clinician can determine the appropriate timing, dosage, and combination based on your child's unique medical history, nutritional needs, and current treatment plan. Self-supplementation without medical guidance may result in unintended effects or interactions with prescribed medications.

Omega-3 fatty acids (EPA/DHA)

May support focus and emotional regulation.

Magnesium

May help with irritability, sleep, and muscle tension.

Zinc

Supports neurotransmitter function and attention.

Iron

Low levels linked to inattention (test before supplementing).

Vitamin D

Important for mood and brain health.

ADDITIONAL SUPPLEMENTS BEING STUDIED

Please note: The following supplements are provided for informational purposes only.

Always consult your child's healthcare provider before starting any supplements or vitamins. Only a qualified clinician can determine the appropriate timing, dosage, and combination based on your child's unique medical history, nutritional needs, and current treatment plan. Self-supplementation without medical guidance may result in unintended effects or interactions with prescribed medications.

Saffron

May improve attention and mood regulation.

L-Carnitine

May help with attention and behavior.

Phosphatidylserine

May aid memory, attention, and impulse control.

N-Acetylcysteine (NAC)

May reduce emotional dysregulation.

Probiotic

May support mental clarity and mood via the gut-brain axis.

NUTRITION & LIFESTYLE TIPS

Research shows that:

- 🍃 Steady blood sugar (eating regular meals with protein and fiber) helps reduce impulsivity and focus challenges.
- 🍃 Omega-3 fatty acids (found in fish like salmon, or supplements) can improve attention and emotional regulation.
- 🍃 Artificial colors and processed sugars may worsen hyperactivity in some people.
- 🍃 Provide a high-protein breakfast.
- 🍃 Include complex carbs and healthy fats.
- 🍃 Ensure consistent hydration.
- 🍃 Promote daily physical activity.
- 🍃 Encourage outdoor time.
- 🍃 Limit screen time before bed.
- 🍃 Teach mindfulness or deep breathing.

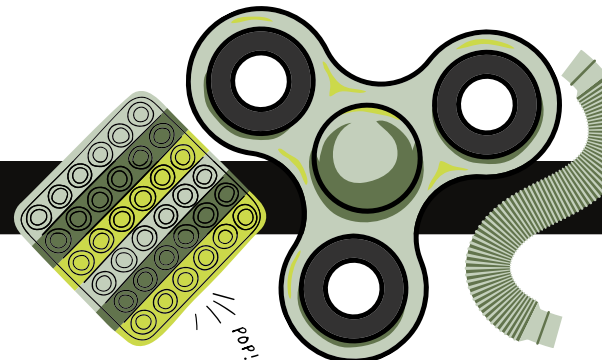
TIPS FOR TEENS WITH ADHD:

- 🍃 Eat small meals/snacks every 2-3 hours to avoid crashes.
- 🍃 Include a protein (like nuts or yogurt) with every snack.
- 🍃 Try adding more omega-3s through foods or supplements (ask a doctor first!).

HELPFUL TOOLS

Fidgets that help!

- 🍃 [Scientoy 35-Piece Fidget Set – Amazon](#)
- 🍃 [Needoh Stress Balls – Amazon](#)
- 🍃 [Transformable Fidget Spinners – Amazon](#)
- 🍃 [Sensory Fidget Strings - Amazon](#)
- 🍃 [Picky Pad Sensory Pad - Etsy](#)



- ADHD Kids Support Group
- Parenting ADHD & Autism (Penny Williams)



- [Brili Routines](#)
- [Habitica](#)
- [ClassDojo](#)
- [Calm](#)
- [Headspace for Kids](#)
- [GoNoodle](#)
- [Smiling Mind](#)



- [CHADD.org](#)
- [ADDitudeMag.com](#)
- [Understood.org](#)
- [HowtoADHD YouTube](#)

Ask us about Thrive's printable 'Visual schedules!'



REMEMBER: TAKE IT ONE STEP AT A TIME. THIS IS A JOURNEY, NOT A RACE.



Schedule med consult if exploring medication.

Schedule therapy intake (child or parent).

Talk to the school about a 504 plan.

Pick one book to start reading (like "Smart But Scattered").

Try a visual schedule at home.

Introduce a fidget tool or mindfulness app.

Schedule any needed OT or further testing.

Do one thing for yourself (support group, walk, therapy, nap).

SEE THRIVE'S ADDITIONAL ADHD RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

PDF RESOURCES

ADHD RESOURCE GUIDE (PDF)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

EMOTIONAL REGULATION WITH ADHD (PDF)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

TROUBLES WITH FOCUS IN ADHD (PDF)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

AT-HOME PARENT GUIDE FOR PARENTING A CHILD WITH ADHD (PDF)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

ADHD FACTS IN YOUTH (PDF)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

10 COMMON SIGNS OF ADHD IN FEMALES (PDF)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

THRIVE NUTRITION GUIDE FOR TEENS (PDF)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

SLEEP HYGIENE AND RELAXATION PLAN (PDF)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

SLEEP HYGIENE AND RELAXATION JOURNAL - OPTION ONE (PDF)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

SLEEP HYGIENE AND RELAXATION JOURNAL - OPTION TWO (PDF)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

VIDEO RESOURCES

ADHD & EMOTION REGULATION: UNDERSTANDING THE CONNECTION (VIDEO)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

ADHD TIME BLINDNESS (VIDEO)

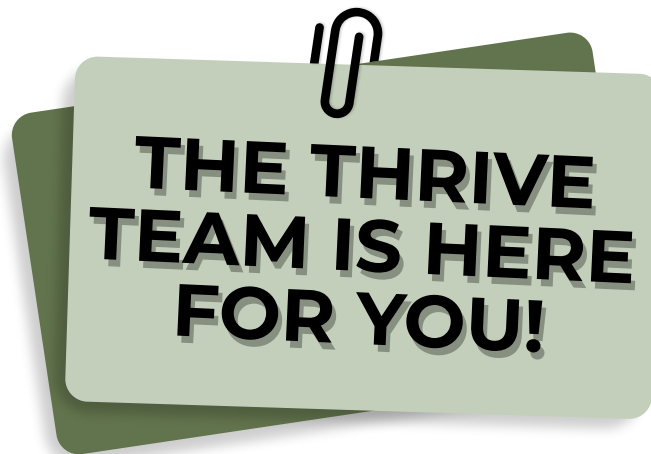
[DOWNLOAD](#)

DIFFERENCES IN ADHD FOR WOMEN VS MEN (VIDEO)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

Remember: Your child is not broken! They are wired for creativity, empathy, and out-of-the-box thinking. With the right supports, kids with ADHD can live joyful, fulfilling lives. Some of the world's greatest thinkers, inventors, and entrepreneurs had ADHD.

“ADHD is not a flaw—it’s a difference. With understanding and support, your child can thrive.”



While we know this is not an exhaustive guide to ADHD, our hope is that it serves as a steady companion in this new chapter—offering support, clarity, and encouragement as you navigate the ups and downs.

Remember: You are not alone. There is a community of parents, professionals, and resources ready to walk this journey with you. Take things one step at a time, trust your instincts, and know that every small step forward is meaningful.

You've got this—and we're cheering you on. If you need additional support just know we are only a phone call away.

