

# Rise in ADHD Diagnoses Can Leave Parents Confused about 'Typical' Behavior for Kids

*Children have higher energy levels than adults – but what is 'typical' behavior?*

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EINPresswire.com/ -- Parents of children who fidget, daydream, and enjoy running and jumping should not automatically be concerned about ADHD.

This is the argument of a team of experts, comprised of a pediatrician, social worker and occupational therapist. They say it is important to attempt to alleviate confusion among parents around what is 'typical', and when children need professional help for developmental or behavioral differences.



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Based on extensive evidence, their new book [Developmental and Behavioral Complexities in Children](#) highlights how the prevalence of ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, and some other developmental and behavioral diagnoses has increased – although they suggest it is not clear if this is because more people are aware of the conditions, screening has improved, changes in the diagnostic criteria have occurred, and/or if there is a genuine increase in the population. The increase in public awareness can sometimes lead to parents and caregivers questioning whether their child's behavior is different from others.

Jo-Ann Blaymore Bier, a retired developmental-behavioral pediatrician from Boston Children's Hospital, occupational therapist Theresa A. Johnson, and Ellen Mullane who is a social worker, also say that opinions can differ among professionals which adds to the uncertainty for people who have children.

"The field of child development is not always a 'black and white' science," they add.

"The way that children behave varies under different conditions and settings. Professionals may

have varying thresholds for recommending intervention.

For example, they say: "Being energetic does not necessarily mean that a child has ADHD. Most children enjoy movement, and young children have limited attention spans.

Based on latest research and clinical experience, the experts offer strategies to manage problematic behaviors and examine the evidence behind available treatments.

The book is intended for advanced level students and professionals working in the field of child development, but may also be beneficial for parents and other caregivers who may have concerns. The book also answers questions that caregivers often ask such as is it my child's personality or something more serious?

The authors, who have helped thousands of children, document a range of 'typical' behaviors as well as those likely to be symptoms of specific diagnoses, including autism, ADHD, and oppositional defiant disorder.

In the book, they emphasize that no one demonstrates what others consider acceptable behavior all the time, and that all children are 'wired' differently.

ADHD is the most common childhood neuro-behavioral disorder, with some data sources indicating that about a million more children and adolescents in the US were diagnosed with ADHD in 2022 compared to 2016.

Increased awareness, changes in diagnostic criteria and in social norms are among many factors which the authors of Developmental and Behavioral Complexities in Children suggest may have contributed to the rise in cases.

However, no single specific medical test exists for ADHD. Clinicians make an assessment based on the child's clinical presentation and on information from people who have observed the child's behavior.

For instance, children who are more energetic than their peers but also 'function in group activities' may not necessarily have ADHD, according to the authors.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is also on the rise and is examined in detail in the book. The authors say the ASD diagnosis may have become even more complex – instead of easier – to understand.

The term 'neurodiversity' has also become increasingly used. In the book, the authors say: "Accepting and encouraging individuality can be positive goals. But if an individual's differences are having a negative impact on their functioning, providing supports to improve their quality of life can be beneficial."

Further Information

Developmental and Behavioral Complexities in Children: A Guide for Students and Clinicians, by Jo-Ann Blaymore Bier, Theresa A. Johnson, Ellen Mullane (Routledge, 2026)  
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Theresa A. Johnson, MS, OTR/L is a registered, licensed occupational therapist at Perkins School for the Blind. She has extensive experience working with children in hospital, developmental clinic, and school settings.

Ellen Mullane, LICSW is a licensed independent clinical social worker who has worked with children and families in the medical setting, developmental clinic, and in the community.

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