

**PLAY LIKE
A CHAMPION
TODAY**

Character Education Through Sports

Champion Parent Note

Educating and Forming Champion Parents

ADHD in Young Athletes

When we think of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), we commonly think of kids who cannot focus their attention on anything for any length of time, or the child who can't seem to sit still, keep their hands to themselves, and won't stop talking (or asking questions). Conversely, some parents will say "My kid can't have ADHD, they can focus on video games for hours on end." According to experts in the field, this is an inaccurate characterization of what ADHD is.



The reality is that ADHD is NOT about the inability to focus, it's about *selective focus* – kids with ADHD can focus on things they find interesting, intriguing, unusual or different, but their brains struggle with maintaining focus on things they may need to attend to, but which they find boring or (in their perception) useless. It is important to note here that this is not a matter of choice on the child's part. This is a brain "disorder" that interferes to various degrees with daily functioning and development ([nimh.nih.gov](https://www.nimh.nih.gov)).

Ryan Wexelblatt, LCSW, an expert in child ADHD studies and treatment has identified ten often-overlooked symptoms of ADHD, particularly seen in boys. Today's note shares these ten symptoms and looks at how they apply to youth sports settings:

1. **Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria** – According to ADDitudemag.com, RSD is characterized by intense mood shifts triggered by a distinct episode, typically one of the following: a) rejection - the real or perceived withdrawal of love, approval, or respect, b) teasing, c) criticism, no matter how constructive, and d) persistent self-criticism or negative self-talk prompted by a real or perceived failure. If you suspect that an athlete is experiencing RSD (avoiding eye contact, looking as if they are about to cry, acting sullen are all signs), give feedback one-on-one rather than in public. Use the "Sandwich Approach" covered in *Play Like a Champion* training. Deliver the feedback side-to-side rather than stand eye-to-eye.
2. **Weak Episodic Memory** – as a parent or coach, if you find yourself constantly uttering, "How many times do I have to tell you..." and, "We've gone over this a thousand times," you're likely dealing with an athlete with poor episodic memory - difficulty remembering past experiences and the emotions associated with those past experiences. Kids with weak episodic memory often respond with, "I don't remember...", and they honestly don't. Asking questions with concern and compassion, "What did you do the last time...", and "Can you remember how it felt...?", and guided journaling can be effective tools to strengthen episodic memory.
3. **Inconsistent Situational Awareness** – situational awareness is how we take different pieces of information from our environment, put them together as a whole, and make meaning from them. For example, most baseball players with a few years of experience in the game would know that with bases loaded and two outs, you've got a play at any base. The kid with inconsistent situational awareness may be

thinking to him/herself, “I’ve got to throw the batter out at first to end the inning.” Checking for understanding can be useful here – “Listen up everybody... we’ve got an out at any base... Jerry, did you get that?”

4. **Difficulty with Self-Directed talk** -- We all have an internal dialog in our heads that we use to talk to ourselves, a “brain coach” as Wexelblatt calls it. He says that in people with ADHD, the volume of their brain coach is turned down, making it more difficult to pay attention. Real-time reminders as well as regular practice of positive self-talk can serve to increase the volume, “Sandy, I need you to keep telling yourself that you got this. Give it a try.”
5. **Difficulty with Unexpected Change** – as a parent or parent/coach, if you’ve ever found it difficult to get your kid to shut off the videogames and start their homework, that difficulty comes from the challenge of moving from a preferred task to a non-preferred task without time to prepare. That challenge is exacerbated by ADHD. Giving advance notice or finding ways to make the non-preferred task more “fun” or challenging can ease the transition.

The remaining five overlooked symptoms include: 6) Hyper-focusing on Things That Are Interesting and Difficulty Sustaining Attention on Things That Are Not, 7) Poor Future Thinking Skills, 8) Difficulty Sensing the Passage of Time, 9) Poor Perspective Taking Skills, and 10) Trouble Putting Problem Size in a Relevant Context. [These additional symptoms along with the ones above are described in a handout you can access here.](#) [You can also view the original article and video referenced above via [additudemag.com](#) by clicking here: [ADHD in Boys: 10 Common Signs & Symptoms](#)]

While the above article tends to focus on boys, these overlooked symptoms of ADHD are not exclusive to boys. Find out more about the challenges of diagnosing ADHD in girls and young women in ADDitudemag.com articles available at these links:

- [Why ADHD in Girls Is Often Overlooked](#)
- [Diagnosing ADHD in Girls: New Symptoms Checklist for Doctors](#)

It's also important to realize that positive reinforcement is critical to helping children and young athletes with ADHD learn and grow. Find out what works here: [ADHD in Children: Signs, Challenges & Help with Positive Reinforcement.](#)

Take the time to learn about the symptoms listed above and how your child might benefit from a better understanding of these areas in the youth sports setting. Consider how you can use these tips to improve your child's youth sports experience, or share them with your coach to help them better facilitate growth on and off the field of play.

The note above comes courtesy Bill Matthews, a licensed professional counselor and mental health consultant with experience in areas of both ADHD assessments and sports psychology.

You keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. ~ 1 Peter 5:6-10

October is ADHD Awareness Month



More than 5.7 million kids ages 6-17 have ADHD. The month of October provides an opportunity to better understand ADHD and correct misconceptions that coaches, parents and other educators might have. The *National Institute of Mental Health* provides [online resources](#) that may be beneficial in educating coaches and helping them to better work with young athletes. [Click here to visit a website with resources](#) that you can share with coaches, parents and administrators in your community. By generating awareness, we can help provide a better youth sports experience for a large number of children on our

Vatican Summit Promotes "Sport for All"



Play Like a Champion was thrilled to be in the Vatican September 29-30th for a landmark summit **[Sport for All: Cohesive, Accessible and Tailored to each Person.](#)**

The two-day event gathered leaders in sport from around the world to engage in discussion on the importance of sport in society and the ways in which we can make the benefits of sport accessible to all persons. Check out last week's **[Friday Morning Rally](#)** to read more about the event, then look for more in our upcoming Fall Newsletter

and on our website, as we focus on the steps we can take to realize this vision.

A Prayer for Parents

Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of sport in our family's life. May we always be grateful for the opportunity our children have to be physically active and have a team experience to learn and grow from. Help me have the Fortitude to guide my child in setting Goals that develop physical skills as well as help my child to be a better person through sport. I pray that I have a deep sense of Justice in supporting the entire team that they may be safe and successful in their play while forming close Relationships with each other. Help me to have the Prudence to support my child as s/he has challenges and failures, allowing my child the Ownership to work through these circumstances independently with my love and your guidance Lord. Finally, help me to have Temperance in keeping sports in the proper perspective by honoring the game and my child's play as praise for our Creator. Amen.



Access Resources & Learn More at www.playlikeachampion.org

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