

ADHD or Anxiety?

How to tell the difference



POINTS TO ADHD

Distracted by everything

Pulled toward novelty and stimulation, not just one source, not a focus problem tied to worry.

Acts before thinking

Interrupts, blurts out, and moves to the next thing fast. Impulsivity is the core feature.

Restless in every setting

Shows up at home, school, and play, not just around one feared situation.

POINTS TO ANXIETY

Avoids specific situations

School, social events, or separation from parents, avoidance tied to a clear trigger.

Stomachaches or headaches

Frequent physical complaints with no medical cause, especially before triggering events.

Reassurance-seeking & catastrophizing

Needs constant reassurance and tends to expect the worst-case outcome.

How To Tell Them Apart At A Glance

Feature	ADHD	Anxiety
Source of Distraction	Pulled toward novelty and stimulation	Captured by worry and rumination
Behavior Style	Impulsive, acts before thinking	Overcontrolled and inhibited
Avoidance	Avoids boring, low-stimulation tasks	Avoids specific feared situations
Physical Complaints	Not typical	Stomachaches, headaches, tension
Where Symptoms Appear	Across all settings, since early childhood	Often tied to specific triggers or transitions

What Helps

For ADHD

- Behavioral parent training
- School-based interventions
- Organizational skills training
- Reinforcement of desired behaviors

For Anxiety

- Cognitive behavioral therapy
- Graduated exposure practice
- Technology-delivered CBT

Helps Both

- Physical exercise
- Mind-body practices like yoga
- Omega-3 supplementation
- Consistent routines and monitoring

When To Seek an Evaluation

Academic & Behavior

- School refusal or avoidance
- Falling grades
- Frequent emotional meltdowns

Home & School Reports

- Chronic physical complaints
- Significant family conflict
- Teacher concerns

Daily Life & Worry

- Avoidance affecting daily life
- Excessive worry or reassurance-seeking



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Not Sure Which It Is? We Can Help.

If your child's distraction, worry, or avoidance is interfering with daily life, call our practice for an evaluation.

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