



Assessing Child Maladaptive Behaviors: Distinguishing Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Depression

ADHD vs Depression Diagnostic Evaluation

There are several conditions with overlapping diagnostic criteria that can look similar to ADHD. Let's take a closer look on how to assess and distinguish between ADHD and major depressive disorder (MDD).

Diagnostic evaluations – Identify the Problem

Diagnostic evaluations can help you identify the problem correctly and prescribe appropriate interventions. Here's what's included in a diagnostic evaluation:

- History of present illness
- Substance use disorder
- General medical
- Occupational
- Medication review
- Mental status exam
- Mania
- Current symptoms
- Social
- Family history
- Review of systems

Characteristics of ADHD and MDD

When you assess a child patient for ADHD remember to overlap criteria and characteristics and distinguish these diagnoses. Symptoms of mental health conditions are sometimes characterized in terms of changes in self-esteem, pleasure, attention, hyperactivity, sleep, speech, impulsivity, psychomotor activity, and social and academic performance.

Behavior	Self-esteem	Pleasure	Attention	Hyperactivity	Sleep	Speech	Impulsivity	Social	Academic	Psychomotor activity
ADHD	Inflated and/or deflated	Variable	Distractible	Unproductive	Chronic, poor, often late bedtimes	Often rapid, may be pressured	Internally driven	Often poor	Often poor	Chronically agitated
MDD	Deflated	Unable, sad	Inattentive	May be restless	Often poor	Normal, slow	May be normal	Often poor	Often poor	Slowed

MDD Screening Tests

MDD screening tests are valuable, but it is important to understand that results of any depression screening alone are inadequate. The [US Preventive Services Task Force](#) says there is insufficient evidence for depression screening in young children but recommends screening for ages 12 and older. Brief screening questions for MDD are from the PRIME-D, also called Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ)-2. There is also a longer PHQ-9 that is the most common screening tool to identify depression. It is available in Spanish, and has a [modified version](#) for adolescents.



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ADHD Clinical Practice Guidelines

Always refer to [clinical practice guidelines for ADHD](#), and if you do diagnose and treat for ADHD with medications, please make sure to schedule an in-person visit within 30 days of the member starting those medications.

Additional learning tools to help with diagnosing, assessing and screening:

- [Criteria for diagnosing ADHD per DSM-5](#) and by the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#).
- [Guidance for Diagnosing MDD](#)
- [US Preventive Services Task Force](#)
- [PHQ-2](#)
- [PHQ-9](#)
- [Screening for MDD is available for adolescents with the modified version](#)

Need help?

Magellan Behavioral Healthcare manages services related to mental and behavioral healthcare. Medicaid providers can call 1-800-327-7390. You can also view the [Behavioral Health Toolkit](#) for additional info.

Reminder:

COVID-19 Update: Texas Health & Human Services Commission (HHSC) is allowing remote delivery of certain components of medical checkups for children over 24 months old. Because some of the checkup components require in-person contact, providers must follow up with patients to complete those in-person components within 6 months of a remote visit. **Modifier 95** must be used on claim forms to indicate remote delivery of services

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