ASSESSMENT: When it might not be ADHD

Clinical scenario	Differential Considerations	What next?
Symptoms only reported in 1 setting	• Something specific about that setting is challenging (e.g, developmentally inappropriate expectations, bullying, difficult relationship with adult or another child(ren), separation anxiety • Symptoms are present but not observed or problematic in other settings	• Recommend interventions to address specific challenge in that setting (e.g., school intervention, individual or parent-child therapy) • Take further history to ensure the symptoms truly are not present in other settings, obtain VADRS from other caregivers
Symptoms started soon after major life change, trauma, or other stressors	• PTSD • Anxiety disorder • Mood disorder (especially depression) • Sleep disorder	• Assess for safety • Review signs of PTSD, anxiety, mood, sleep (consider PSC in children > 6) • Address stressor-related symptoms (relaxation strategies, consider referral for therapy)
Fewer than 6 symptoms	• Other disorder including developmental delay, anxiety, mood, sleep, (consider PSC in children > 6)	• Address non-ADHD symptoms as indicated • Monitor closely using VADRS or PSC and history
Parent Vanderbilt negative, teacher positive	• Different behaviors in home and school (see 1 setting above) • Developmental delay or learning problems • Separation anxiety disorder • Parent accommodation to child's behavior patterns (sees as normal) • High teacher stress or developmentally inappropriate expectations	• Confirm parent observations with parent to confirm validity of VADRS • Address any concern identified
Teacher Vanderbilt negative, parent Vanderbilt positive	• Teacher VADRS nearly positive • Child's behavior is more organized structured setting in school • Child is inhibited and anxious in school • Different behavior at home and school • Teacher does not know child well • High parental stress or developmentally inappropriate expectations	• Confirm parent observations with parent to confirm validity of VADRS • Address any concern identified

VADRS= Vanderbilt ADHD Rating Scale PSC= Pediatric Symptom Checklist

Helpful tools in assessment

Vanderbilt ADHD Rating SCALE

ADHD measure used for screening and monitoring treatment effects. Validated in children 6-12 but often used across children/adolescents

Safe Environment for Every Kid (SEEK)

Examines risks in the home environment. Can be used across all ages. TECC handout offers resources to address identified needs

Brief Early Childhood Screening Assessment (B-ECSA)

Validated measure of child mental health problems for children 1 1/2-5 yo. Not diagnosis-specific. Can be used to monitor progress

Pediatric Symptom Checklist-17 (PSC-17)

Validated measure of child mental health problem for children 6-18. Using scale scores offers additional information about diagnostic categories.

Screen for Child Anxiety & Related Disorders (SCARED)

Measure of child anxiety with child and parent report forms. Validated in children over 8, but can be used with caution in younger children.

All measures available in English, Spanish. Most also available in other languages