

# Inattentive kids show worse grades in later life

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Researchers studied children with and without attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and found that inattentiveness was linked to worse academic performance up to 10 years later, regardless of ADHD, even when they accounted for the children's intellectual ability.

Although grades aren't everything, academic achievement is clearly an important factor in later career success and financial stability. Helping children to maximize their academic potential and overcome obstacles to academic success is important. One factor in academic performance is [intellectual ability](#), and unsurprisingly, numerous studies have found that higher intellectual ability is linked with higher academic performance.

Another factor that can affect academic performance is attentiveness. Aside from making it difficult to focus in school and on homework, inattentiveness can be associated with other problems, such as mood disorders and difficulties interacting with other children. Helping children to overcome inattentiveness could pay dividends in later life.

Astri Lundervold, a researcher at the University of Bergen, is interested in the short- and long-term consequences of inattention in childhood. "A high number of children are challenged by problems related to inattention. A cluster of these problems is defined as hallmark symptoms of ADHD, but inattentiveness is not restricted to children with a specific diagnosis," explains Lundervold. Are problems related to inattention something that parents and teachers should address in any child?

This question inspired Lundervold to investigate the link between inattentiveness and academic performance in a sample containing mostly healthy children in Bergen, Norway. To make the sample more culturally diverse and inclusive of a larger spectrum of mental health disorders, she collaborated with researchers in America (Stephen Hinshaw and Jocelyn Meza). Together, they expanded the study, which was recently published in *Frontiers in Psychology*, to include a sample of girls from another long-term study in Berkeley, California, where a large subgroup had been diagnosed with ADHD.

The children were aged from 6--12 when the researchers recruited them and began the study. They assessed the children's IQ and asked their parents to rate their inattentiveness. Finally, 10 years later, the researchers followed-up with the children to see how they had performed in school.

Unsurprisingly, children with higher IQ scores tended to perform better academically. Also, as expected, the children with ADHD showed higher inattentiveness compared with those without, and also performed worse in school. However, the negative effects of inattention on academic performance were not restricted to children with ADHD. "We found a surprisingly similar effect of early inattention on high school [academic achievement](#) across the two samples, an effect that remained even when we adjusted for intellectual ability," explains Lundervold.

The results highlight the long-term effects that childhood inattention can have on academic performance. These findings suggest that inattention could have significant adverse effects on the [academic performance](#) of a variety of children, potentially including those with a high intellectual ability and no ADHD. So, how can parents help their children to achieve their academic potential, regardless of their IQ or [mental health](#)?

"Parents of primary school children showing signs of [inattention](#) should ask for help for the child. Remedial strategies and training programs for these children should be available at school, and not just for children with a specific diagnosis," says Lundervold. "Parents and teachers could also benefit from training to help address the needs of inattentive children."

**More information:** Astri J. Lundervold et al, Parent Rated Symptoms of Inattention in Childhood Predict High School Academic Achievement Across Two Culturally and Diagnostically Diverse Samples, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2017). [DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01436](#)

Provided by Frontiers

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