

# Chapter 1

## Defining attention deficit disorder (ADHD)

A child receiving a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is often very difficult for the parents to come to terms with. After what seems to be a long wait, that final diagnosis can be met with hurt, anger, and self-blame. In my experience, parents often feel confused and have lots of questions that need to be answered during the assessment process and the results. 'What is ADHD? Did we do something we did or didn't do, can it be fixed, will he have to take medication, and will he have to take medication for the rest of his life?' are just some of the most common questions. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is defined as a disorder that begins to show signs and symptoms in childhood. According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the DSM), which provides the standard criteria for mental disorders for mental health professionals, ADHD is visible in the kindergarten-aged child. Often the first signs that alert the kindergarten teacher, schoolteacher, or parent are that something about the child's behaviour is not quite normal. ADHD has three core symptoms: inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity — and these are different behaviours that the child constantly exhibits. The DSM categorises ADHD into three types based on these symptoms.

Defining attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

1 **ADHD, Combined Type:** both inattentive and hyperactivity-impulsivity.

2 **ADHD, Predominantly Inattentive Type:** inattentive symptoms are more than enough (at least six out of nine) hyperactivity-impulsivity symptoms are not enough.

3 **ADHD, Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Type:** hyperactivity-impulsivity symptoms are more than enough (at least six out of nine) inattention symptoms are not enough.

#### Case study

A ten-year-old boy was referred to my clinic because his mother was quite concerned with his behaviour and she had been to the doctor. The first time I met the boy I invited him to sit on the chair in front of me. He could only sit in the chair for maybe a couple of minutes (and that was stretching it!). He constantly investigated my bookshelf; he kept on pulling books off the shelf to read the title, but without completely reading it, he would grab for another book. He investigated the window blinds up and down and up and down, then while he was looking at the blinds up and down he saw someone had left a toy car on the desk, he was more than happy to go and ride it for a while. He investigated the tissue box on the desk, the phone, the pen holder, the whiteboard markers (which he offered to use to write on the office wall). When he did sit down he was fidgeting, moving his feet back and forth, and he constantly changed the subject. When asked a question, he would try to answer it, but then get distracted by something else in the office he hadn't investigated yet and start investigating and answering the question. But he was never satisfied with the answer. And all this happened in the first 10 minutes.