

## ADHD and Poor Academic Achievement

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Children with ADHD often have a “triad” of related difficulties:

- inattention
- poor working memory
- poor academic achievement

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Attention problems are related to weaknesses in both working memory and academic achievement. In turn, these two variables relate to each other. For instance, studies indicate that children with working memory deficits tend to perform worse on tests of academic achievement than children without such impairments. This is true whether or not children have ADHD.

A child with the triad of difficulties may:

- lose her place when copying information from the board or a textbook
- forget some parts of instructions, so that she may appear not to be listening
- have problems recalling information correctly, so that she may forget some words in a sentence
- give up on tasks with multi-steps or tasks that require holding some information in mind while working on other parts
- show problems with reading, math, and particularly writing, even though she may have good basic skills

### Working memory and literacy

Working memory is linked to reading comprehension and written expression. This makes sense, because both are complex processes. It is not surprising that they place a load on working memory. For example, when writing, a student must hold many different things in mind:

- what to write: ideas, words, sentences
- how to write it: grammar, syntax, mechanics
- the purpose of the text: audience, style

### Working memory and numeracy

Working memory is linked to math skills. Specifically, better working memory is linked to:

- solving word problems accurately
- using sophisticated strategies to solve math computation problems
- ignoring irrelevant information in word problems

Medication for ADHD does not address working memory weaknesses. Children with ADHD may need extra support at home and at school to help them compensate for poor working memory, even if they are taking medication for ADHD.

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