Criterion-Based Diagnosis

Description and Importance

A DSM-5-TR criteria-based diagnosis ensures that adult ADHD is identified using a standardized, ethical, and evidence-based framework. This approach strengthens clinical accuracy, prevents overdiagnosis, and aligns with best practices in psychological evaluation. Each of the five diagnostic criteria—symptom count, age of onset, context, impairment, and differential diagnosis—must be systematically documented. The adult ADHD specialist must also account for how ADHD presents differently in adulthood, such as restlessness replacing hyperactivity or disorganization replacing classroom inattention. This chapter teaches you how to properly apply the DSM-5-TR criteria in real-world adult cases, integrating retrospective reporting, functional impairment documentation, and differential clarity—all essential for accurate diagnosis and clear justification in clinical and legal settings.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, clinicians will be able to:

1. Accurately apply all five DSM-5-TR diagnostic criteria for adult ADHD.

2. Identify the three ADHD presentations (Inattentive, Hyperactive/Impulsive, Combined) and severity levels.

3. Differentiate adult ADHD from comorbid conditions such as depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder.

4. Recognize how symptom expression changes across the lifespan.

5. Gather and integrate developmental, functional, and contextual data to meet diagnostic requirements.

6. Identify compensatory strategies and their impact on the visibility of ADHD symptoms in adults.