

A Parent Guide to ADHD

Some of your questions answered

*Amy Honey Specialist Teacher for Social, Emotional and
Mental Health needs*



Specialist Teaching & Learning Service
amy.honey@goldwyn.kent.sch.uk

'The behaviour of a child with ADHD can be frustrating and annoying. But it's crucial to remember that the child isn't doing it on purpose. Although there is no obvious physical disability, ADHD is a genuine medical condition.' (O'Regan 2014, p18.)

Facts about ADHD and symptoms

- ADHD is an abbreviation for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. You may also hear the term ADD, which is Attention Deficit Disorder. Children with ADD may often appear 'off in their own world' and day dream a lot.
- ADHD is a developmental disorder. Children with ADHD have a different brain anatomy. It is wired differently thus affecting executive functioning skills. (More about this later.)
- ADHD can be influenced by genetic factors.
- ADHD can occur in people of any intellectual ability.
- Some factors suggested as potentially having a role in ADHD include: premature birth, low birth weight and smoking, drug or alcohol use during pregnancy.
- ADHD is not due to poor parenting, divorce, stress, too much gaming/tv, poor diet...HOWEVER some or all of these factors are likely to add to a child's difficulties.
- ADHD / ADD is not a problem with laziness.
- Symptoms can improve with age. However, ADHD is not something most children totally outgrow – many will continue to have symptoms in adulthood although these may present differently as they mature.
- There are two main behavioural areas that people with ADHD find difficult. These can impact on someone's ability to: focus, have appropriate emotional responses and impulse control. It is important to remember that children with ADHD experience the condition differently and may not have difficulties in both of the areas.

1. Inattentiveness
2. Hyperactivity and impulsiveness



Inattentiveness:

- Having a short attention span and being easily distracted

- Making careless mistakes – for example, in schoolwork
- Appearing forgetful or losing things
- Being unable to stick to tasks that are tedious or time-consuming
- Appearing to be unable to listen to or carry out instructions
- Constantly changing activity or task
- Having difficulty organising tasks

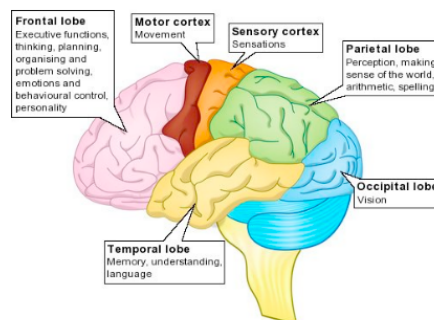


Hyperactivity and Impulsiveness:

- Being unable to sit still, especially in calm or quiet surroundings
- Constantly fidgeting
- Being unable to concentrate on tasks
- Excessive physical movement
- Excessive talking
- Being unable to wait their turn
- Acting without thinking
- Interrupting conversations
- Little or no sense of danger

The above symptoms can cause significant difficulties in a child's life. For example: making and sustaining relationships, poor social interaction, underachievement, low self-esteem and problems with discipline.

The Neuroscience bit:



Research suggests that certain parts of an *ADHD brain* is not performing as well as a *neurotypical brain*.

These parts are called the **frontal lobes** and **parietal lobes**.

The frontal lobes are responsible for executive function (see information below) and the parietal lobes initiate action.

In an ADHD brain, the **communication** between the frontal lobes and the parietal lobes is thought to be **slower** than 'normal.'

Other studies have shown that people with ADHD may have an imbalance in the level of neurotransmitters in the brain, or that these chemicals may not work properly.

Executive Functioning Skills:

Executive Functioning Skills are skills required in order to effectively get started on, complete tasks and solve problems.

The brain's frontal lobe (that controls our executive functions) is one of the last to fully develop and is not complete until our mid-20s.



1. Impulse control (think before acting)
2. Emotional control (keep feelings in check and respond appropriately in the moment)
3. Flexible thinking (adjust to the unexpected)
4. Working memory (keep key information in mind)
5. Self monitor (can use 'self-talk to monitor and regulate behaviour and future actions.)
6. Plan and prioritise (decide on a goal and plan to meet it)
7. Task initiation (take action and get started without too much procrastination, for example: start homework, get ready for school...)
8. Organisation (keep track of things physically and mentally)

Related conditions in children and teenagers with ADHD:

According to the NHS, some children may experience other difficulties or conditions alongside ADHD, such as:

- Depression
- Anxiety Disorder
- Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC)
- Epilepsy
- Tourette's syndrome
- Learning difficulties, such as Dyslexia
- Sleep difficulties



Strategies that can help my child at home and at school:

It is important to remember that no two children are the same. Work with your child to find the ways that work best for them and their lifestyle.

- ✓ Offer genuine, explicit praise for effort rather than outcomes whenever you see them having a go / trying hard
- ✓ Educate your child to understand the reasons for their frustrations and difficulties. Knowledge is power. Ensure that they know they CAN improve their executive functioning skills with the right support and strategies
- ✓ Listen to them non-judgementally and get to understand how things feel for them / what their experiences are like
- ✓ Keep to a small set of simple rules. Ensure your child can explain them
- ✓ Create simple daily check lists (to organise school bag, get ready in the morning etc)
- ✓ Selectively ignore inappropriate (low level, safe) behaviours
- ✓ Actively reinforce positive behaviours
- ✓ Make things fun whenever possible to enable easier engagement
- ✓ Create clear routines and stick to them whenever possible
- ✓ Before you respond to a situation, stop and think: WHY are they doing this? And, HOW am I feeling right now and how will this influence my response?
- ✓ Create clear boundaries and expectations (academic and social)
- ✓ Use a diary / timetable / calendar
- ✓ Pre-warn of changes when possible – try not to spring things on them
- ✓ Be consistent
- ✓ Encourage and explicitly teach note taking skills
- ✓ Model emotion coaching language to support understanding of emotions

and regulation (see separate hand out)

- ✓ Allow extra time to get organised before transitions
- ✓ Set reminders
- ✓ Explicitly teach executive functioning skills
- ✓ Provide brain breaks. These are not a reward. They are a planned necessity
- ✓ Use of timers / countdowns
- ✓ Include movement into tasks as much as possible
- ✓ Encourage strengths and talents – when is their time to shine?
- ✓ Ensure small pieces of information are given at one time. Don't overload them.
- ✓ Reduce the amount of talking when giving instructions. Use visual prompts if appropriate
- ✓ Make things multi sensory
- ✓ Allow time for thinking (processing) and getting started
- ✓ Teach prioritising skills
- ✓ Don't give too many choices
- ✓ Keep areas organised and tidy. Your child may lose things easily and may need support in setting up a system and sticking to it.
- ✓ Pick your battles
- ✓ Support their independence – give them some responsibility
- ✓ Allow them to make mistakes and learn for themselves
- ✓ Be realistic and set achievable goals
- ✓ Respect their privacy and give them space when needed
- ✓ A task management board can help pupil's to keep on track in class
- ✓ Consider seating position to minimise distractions and support concentration
- ✓ Fiddle toys / objects
- ✓ Surround them with positive role models
- ✓ Maintain eye contact when giving instructions. Repeat if needed in a calm and positive way.
- ✓ Check that they know what to do by asking them to tell you – use open questions
- ✓ Give ONE task at a time and monitor frequently
- ✓ Support them to learn to THINK in a non-patronising way (what do you need to do next? Have you thought about...?)

- ✓ Teach skills like HOW to study / do homework
- ✓ Be mindful of transitions as these can be difficult for people with ADHD to manage



What should I do if I think my child has ADHD?

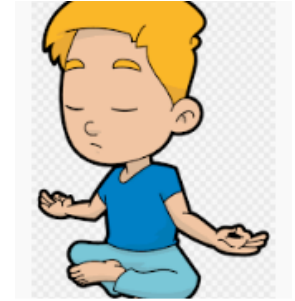
- Consult your child's teacher or the SENCo to discuss your concerns.
- You can also speak to your GP who may refer you to the relevant service depending on your child's age.
- Waiting times can be very long (up to 2 years on the NHS).
- There are also many independent services that can diagnose and support.
- The SENCo may carry out some observations or checklists to identify your child's areas of strength and weakness in order to see how he/she can be supported in the classroom. This is called SEN Support.
- The school does not need a formal diagnosis to put support in place for your child.
- If the school feel that they need further advice despite a period of consistent intervention with little or no no progress, they may refer to the Specialist Teaching and Learning Service (STLS), with your permission.
- STLS may visit and support school with further recommendations to help your child.

How can I get a diagnosis of ADHD for my child?

- ADHD is usually diagnosed through a qualified medical professional, known as a Child Psychiatrist.
- Depending on the services available in your area, and your child's age, your child may be referred to a Paediatrician who is a specialist in children's health.
- You will be asked to answer some questions and complete some paperwork regarding how your child behaves at home.
- School will also be asked to provide written information.



Can ADHD be treated or managed?



- Once diagnosed, you may be offered the option of medication. It is important to talk to professionals about the benefits and possible side effects.
- There are also different types of therapy that can be effective in treating symptoms. For example: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Behavioural Therapy. It is important to ask about all of the options available to you so that you feel well informed enough to make a confident decision.
- Parent training and support groups may also be available. This does not mean you have been a *bad* parent. Courses aim to build confidence in your ability to manage difficult behaviours and support your child effectively with their daily difficulties and frustrations.

Useful websites and services:

Attention Deficit Disorder Information and Support Group Service (ADDISS)

Telephone: 020 8952 2800

www.addiss.co.uk

The NHS website: www.nhs.uk/conditions/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/

The ADHD Foundation: www.adhdfoundation.org.uk

Every child deserves a champion!