

Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder

Attention Deficit Disorder with or without **Hyperactivity** is a condition which affects the areas of the brain related to concentration, attention and impulses. There seems to be a genetic link and in some cases an environmental link. Compared with most children of the same age, sex and intelligence and with behaviours displayed in more than one setting, the child with ADHD has a range of 'problem' behaviours including:

- inattentiveness – appear to lack concentration, can frequently make mistakes by not paying attention to detail
- impulsiveness – not thinking before saying or doing something, frequently interrupt others, call out answers
- hyperactivity – unable to control the amount of physical activity which is appropriate to a situation, have difficulty waiting their turn, unable to talk or play quietly, cannot sit still for long
- poor learning skills – this sometimes masks a good IQ, handwriting problems
- poor socialising and communication skills
- no awareness of danger

Most children with ADHD are aware of their behaviour problems but cannot seem to control them.

In the UK, experts believe that about 3-7% of children have ADHD and it is usually obvious around the age of 5, in the majority of cases it carries on into adulthood although adults may find it easier to manage their behaviours. The condition is more common in boys, who are also more likely to be hyperactive.

Attention Difficulties

A child must exhibit at least six of the following symptoms for at least six months: Failing to pay close attention to detail and making careless errors; failing to finish tasks; appearing not to listen; failing to follow through instructions; disorganised; avoiding tasks requiring sustained mental effort; losing things e.g. pencils, books, toys; easily distracted; forgetful in daily activities.

Hyperactivity

A child must exhibit at least three of the following symptoms for at least six months: Runs around or excessively climbs over things; noisy or can't take part in quiet activities; unable to stay in a seat; fidgets with hands and feet or squirms on seat.

Impulsivity

A child must exhibit at least one of the following symptoms for at least six months: Blurts out answers; fails to wait in lines, doesn't take turns, struggles in group situations; interrupts others' conversations/games; talks excessively without regard to others.

Other Issues

Children with ADHD may also exhibit temper tantrums, sleep disorders, clumsiness, confrontational defiant disorder, conduct disorders, specific learning difficulties, severe clinical depression, and anxiety disorders. Diagnosis and treatments Diagnosis is usually by a child and adolescent psychiatrist or a paediatrician. Other professionals should be

consulted and evidence collected. Parents and teachers are key in observing and recording behaviours for evidence. Most experts favour a multi-modal approach toward treating and managing the disorder, recognising the co-existing conditions and the importance of treating all symptoms. Treatment may consist of management techniques for home and school, medication, psychological treatments, diet e.g. food allergies and supplements.

Medication

This should only be prescribed by a doctor or consultant for ADHD and should be taken only as and when directed. There are several tried and tested drug treatments for addressing the problems arising from ADHD. They can help increase attention, and reduce hyperactivity and impulsivity. There may also be some side effects such as weight loss, headaches or insomnia. Each person reacts differently to medication and careful monitoring is required.

At home

It is important to:

- have structure and routines
- be consistent
- set clearly defined rules and boundaries
- make deliberate eye contact
- break down tasks into achievable chunks
- try to resolve problem behaviours together and think of strategies
- build in as much regular exercise and activities as possible to burn off excess energy

- give fair and pre agreed sanctions when behaviour deserves it
- talk about situations afterwards in a calm manner
- give instant rewards and positive praise for the times when they get it right, stay quiet etc.
- Inform other family members and friends about ADHD so that they understand the implications and how they can help manage behaviours.

A child is born with ADHD. Confrontation is not an effective way to change behaviour. Expectations must be realistic. The most important input is patience and time, but most of all a child will learn if he feels valued and loved.

At school

A structured environment is essential so that these children have fewer problems with starting and completing tasks, making transitions, working with others, following directions, organising multi-faceted projects and maintaining attention. They need predictability, structure, short work periods, more individual instruction, positive reinforcement and an interesting curriculum. It is important to appreciate and accept that the child cannot help himself: his behaviour is not prompted by naughtiness.

Here are a few examples of good practice that have proved valuable:

- give directions clearly and frequently, and wherever possible, visually (i.e. timetable)

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- display classroom rules which are unambiguous and written in a positive way
- break down each task into its smaller component parts
- make clear lists – children need reminders they can access themselves
- use deliberate eye contact when speaking to a child with ADHD
- make sure a child knows the boundaries
- avoid long discussions about what is right and wrong in their behaviour
- avoid timed tests; they will not tell you what he knows
- do not set lengthy tasks: go for quality
- allow time out if required and regular exercise
- be consistent, firm, fair and patient and give constant feedback and rewards
- monitor progress regularly throughout the less

USEFUL CONTACTS

ADDISS

(Attention Deficit Disorder Information and Support Service) provide information and support for parents, individuals and professionals, keeps an extremely good book list and provide conferences and training.

Website: www.addiss.co.uk

Email: info@addiss.co.uk

Helpline: 020 8952 2800

They also run an on-line book shop selling books and DVD's.

Website: www.addiss-shop.com

The Hyperactive Children's Support Group

supports a dietary approach to the problem of hyperactivity/ADHD. They offer support to children and families and run inset days for schools/health professionals. They have a free information pack for parents/professionals and their website has lots of information on foods and substances that affect children and teenagers with ADHD/hyperactivity.

Website: www.hacsg.org.uk

Email: hacsg@hacsg.org.uk

Tel: 01243 539966

Contact a Family

UK wide advice on all aspects of caring for a child with any special need, disability or rare disorder; national SEN help line; downloadable fact sheets and publications; Connected magazine; local support groups and parent reps; campaigns and research etc.

Website: www.cafamily.org.uk

Tel: 0808 808 3555

Email: info@cafamily.org.uk

They also run a separate site Making Contact where you can share your experiences, get advice or local support from other parents with children with the same condition: www.makingcontact.org.uk

USEFUL INTERNET SITES

ThanetADDers

has lots of useful information and a list of local ADHD support groups run by parents.

www.adders.org

MK – adhd

a Family Support Group in Milton Keynes has superb information, tips, events and links useful wherever you live.

www.mkadhd.org.uk

Hi2u

a website for people with hidden disabilities, this is their information on ADHD

www.hi2u.org.uk/adhd.html

ADD and ADHD

has resources relevant to both children, adults and teachers to help make sense of ADHD.

www.addandadhd.co.uk

Janssen-Cilag

The pharmaceutical company Janssen-Cilag have an informative ADHD website which has been produced with advice from a group of European specialists. It has sections for parents/carers, teenagers and teachers.

www.livingwithadhd.co.uk

American websites:

www.help4adhd.org/en/about/www

www.addvance.com

USEFUL Reading

See the Cambian information sheet 'Books – where to find them' for a list of specialist publishers with a huge range of books.

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