

## Supporting a child with ADHD: A Guide for Parents.

### What is ADHD?

ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

It is a condition which can affect a child's (or adult's) behaviour in a number of ways:



### Symptoms:

Symptoms of ADHD vary from person to person. Individuals may display a combination of the following:

- \* Difficulty following instructions
- \* Short attention span
- \* Inability to sit for long periods without becoming restless
- \* Forgetfulness or disorganisation
- \* Becoming easily distracted
- \* Talking, moving or fidgeting excessively
- \* Difficulty turn-taking
- \* Acting on impulse, without thinking of consequences of actions
- \* Underdeveloped sense of danger

### Diagnosis:

It can be hard to diagnose ADHD in young children because they are still developing and their behaviours will change over time. However, if you feel that your child displays a combination of the

symptoms, it will be useful to have a conversation with your child's teacher or the school SENCo to find out whether they have also observed the symptoms. You may then need to speak to a doctor about your concerns. They may ask you a range of questions, including the symptoms you have observed, how long your child has exhibited the symptoms, any family history of ADHD and whether your child displays the symptoms in all environments.

They will also ask you how the symptoms affect your child's every day life—for example, they might have trouble making friends if they are impulsive or find turn-taking difficult. If a doctor thinks that your child may have ADHD, they might suggest a period of **'watchful waiting'**, where you will need to observe your child over a period of time to see if the symptoms stay the same or whether they get worse or better. You may also be invited to seek support within an ADHD-focused education programme—this will help you develop strategies which will help your child.

## The next steps:

If your doctor thinks that your child has ADHD and you both believe that it is affecting their day-to-day life, your child should be referred for a formal assessment with a specialist.

You can also speak to the Academy SENCo, Mrs Banks, by email on

[Rebecca.Banks@she.e-act.org.uk](mailto:Rebecca.Banks@she.e-act.org.uk) or by calling the school on 0121 464 5191

## What can I do to support my child?

### Have a clear routine:

Children with ADHD might need support with transitions during the day; it's best that they know what is going to happen throughout the day. You can support this by talking through the day with them and having set routines for different activities. Breaking tasks into small steps will be a great support strategy too.

Encourage your child to lay out their clothes ready to get dressed the next day and use 'now' and 'next' vocabulary: 'Now we are going to brush our teeth ready for bed and next we will listen to some calming music.'

A visual timetable of activities for the day can be a useful reference for your child—display it somewhere that they can easily see and involve them in changing the activities day by day.

Discuss any changes of routine with your child's teacher and ask them to inform you of anything different that might happen so that you can discuss it with your child in advance. This alteration could be situations like having a supply teacher or a change of timings of activities in the day. Discussing this at home gives your child chance to talk through their concerns and process the information—before the change happens.

### Set boundaries:

Children with ADHD tend to require clear boundaries so that they know exactly what is acceptable and what is not. As a parent, it can be hard to keep to the boundaries you set, but it will be beneficial in the long run. Be consistent in your approach and ensure your child knows the rewards and consequences for following—or not following—your boundaries. Discuss the boundaries with your child and allow them to have an input. Is there something you can put in place to empower them and make the boundaries easier to manage? Some children with ADHD can respond well to reward systems and having a simple visual reward system in place at home can help to reinforce your boundaries. Talk to your child about what rewards they might like regularly, so that they take ownership of this and see how they will benefit from following rules.

Some children may not respond well to reward charts—discuss with your child what their individual likes and dislikes and only put things in place which will support you both.



## Be clear with instructions

Children with ADHD often need very clear and specific instructions. Make sure you focus on one or two small tasks at a time—your child is more likely to be successful (and get a sense of achievement) with smaller, more achievable tasks. Rather than saying ‘Can you tidy up?’ try giving them one or two focused tasks, such as; ‘Please put the pens into your pen pot,’ followed by, ‘Thank you, now put the books onto the shelf.’ Your child will understand exactly what your expectations are and they will be able to complete these relatively small tasks without feeling that the instruction is unachievable. This paves the way for further achievable tasks to be added and for your child to feel a sense of achievement and pride in their actions.

## Be Positive

Your child will enjoy being praised—they’ll enjoy it even more when they know what behaviour or action has warranted the praise. This means they’ll know what type of behaviour is desired. Instead of saying, ‘Well done, Anya!’, try being more specific in your praise: ‘You put those clothes away so neatly Anya—well done!’

## Watch for signs

You will know your child’s behaviour well and you may be able to identify some signs that they are starting to become impulsive or are losing focus. In these situations, try to discuss this with them, what is it that they are finding tricky? How can you support them? Taking ownership of their behaviour and strategies they find supportive will empower your child and lead to more positive experiences.

## Teach calming methods

Your child may require time and space to calm down following a period of heightened or dysregulated emotions. Providing your child with a space where they feel safe will be important; it is equally important to remember that this ‘calm space’ will not be the same for all children. Some children may like a small space because large spaces might feel overwhelming—a small tent or den in the corner of a room can be a calming area. However, other children dislike the feeling of being in an enclosed space, so they will need a quiet area that does not hem them in. You know your child best: see what works for your child, involve them in discussions and allow them to input their own ideas about their ‘calm space’. Whichever space you choose together, try to keep it clutter-free so that you can help your child reduce sensory overload. Teaching your child some easy calming methods will help them to feel more at ease. You could try asking them to stand up and do some slow stretching or close their eyes and count slowly to ten. They might respond well to the concept of ‘blowing away’ their feelings—taking a breath in and then blowing the feelings out—in order to restore inner calm.

Once your child has successfully regulated their emotions, you could guide them to learn from the experience with a few simple questions.





## Remember...

*Your child will take cues from you—if you are supporting them as they calm down but you are in an agitated state, then it is unlikely to work. Try to remain calm, speak in a lowered tone and be respectful and supportive.*

## Encourage exercise and sleep

You may find that your child has lots and lots of energy! Physical activity increases concentration and helps to relieve stress and anxiety, as well as leading to a better night's sleep. Provide lots of opportunities for your child to be active during the day—they might like to join a club for a particular club they enjoy. Sports that provide your child with movement will be more successful than those which require your child to sit for long periods. Rounders and cricket both mean your child will be inactive for longer periods and may not be as beneficial as activities such as football, hockey, rugby, netball or running. ADHD can lead to sleep problems, which can then in turn exacerbate the symptoms of ADHD, so it is important to establish a good bedtime routine. To help with this, you could try some of these:



## Have a clear routine:

Don't shy away from providing your child with opportunities to socialise—these experiences give opportunities for social interaction and time to practice emotional regulation. Some children may express an opinion that your child talks too much, interrupts or is too impulsive; others will enjoy their company, their intelligence, their creativity and their general all-round personality.

**Remember...** *The desire to 'fit-in' does not fall entirely at your child's feet.*

Children in your child's social groups, school or sports clubs may need to be taught about why your child has difficulty controlling their emotions to enable them to understand. Not everybody will understand what makes your child tick, so you might need to be their advocate to ensure they get the best out of every experience.

## Be patient—with your child and yourself

Your child needs you to be their biggest fan and their advocate. It's important not to let ADHD become the thing they think you focus on. To nurture a positive relationship with your child, you could:



It can be easy to forget yourself due to the necessary considerations you need to give your child—you also need to look after yourself. Time away from your child can be beneficial so you don't feel overwhelmed and so that you can replenish

your energy. Never feel that you are 'failing' because you're frustrated with their behaviour or finding things difficult—all parents feel this at some point. You'll never get everything right and nobody would ever expect you to—you're learning too!

## Remember there is support for you too...

Talking to another parent of a child with ADHD might help to see what things work for them or even just to discuss your thoughts and feelings with them. Try the UK ADHD Partnership, which has more information on ADHD, resources and support groups across the UK.



