

Understanding ADHD and Commonly Asked Questions

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a neurodevelopmental condition that can affect people in different ways. Common characteristics include:

Inattention

Difficulty sustaining attention, following through on tasks, and organising activities.

Hyperactivity and Impulsivity

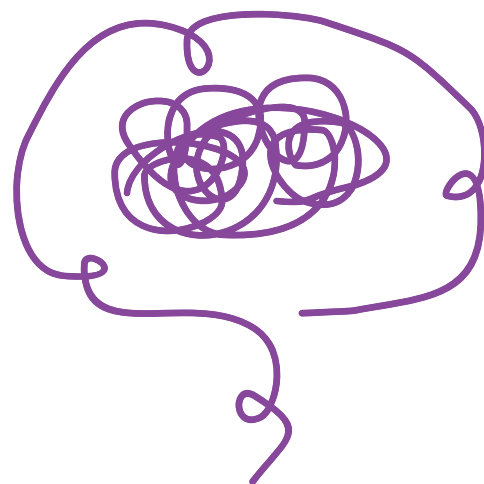
Excessive fidgeting, difficulty remaining seated, and talking excessively.

Acting without thinking, interrupting others, and difficulty waiting for one's turn.

All children can seem inattentive, impulsive and hyperactive at times and a child's experience of ADHD is as unique as they are.

However, for a child with ADHD, these characteristics have a persistent and significant negative impact on their daily life.

ADHD affects the brain's ability to manage certain mental skills called "**executive functions**." These skills help us **plan, organise, start** and **finish** tasks. They also play a big role in **controlling attention, emotions** and **impulses**. Executive functions support everyday abilities like **remembering information, managing time, checking our own progress, and adjusting when things change**. When these processes are harder to manage, it can make daily routines and learning more challenging for children with ADHD.



Brown's model of executive functions impaired in ADHD



Focus



Challenges:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Gets stuck on one activity
- Finds it hard to transition between activities

How you can help:

- Use timers for tasks – to show how long a child needs to focus for, and to show when a task is finished
- Pomodoro method – working in short, focused bursts with breaks
- Give clear warnings before change e.g., 'in five minutes', 'after you have had three turns'
- Create a calm, distraction free work space

Memory



Challenges:

- Forgetting what they are doing/supposed to be doing
- Retaining and applying what they learned previously

How you can help:

- Visual reminders for important information.
- Simplifying tasks into 'now', 'next' and 'then' – e.g., **now:** breakfast, **next:** shoes on, **then:** coat on
- Visual timetables, to support transitions through daily tasks.
- Repeating important information
- Tools such as to do lists and homework diaries

Activation



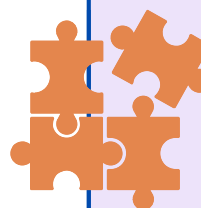
Challenges:

- Finds it difficult to plan ahead and start tasks
- Low motivation and feeling overwhelmed by tasks
- Has trouble seeing the steps to take to complete goals

How you can help:

- Task lists to break tasks into smaller chunks
- Be patient, encouraging and supportive when tasks are unfinished
- Provide support to identify motivating factors for task completion
- Adapt tasks using multi-sensory approaches (e.g. act out ideas, coloured pens, drawing instead of writing)

Effort



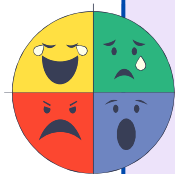
Challenges:

- Has good ideas and is often passionate but struggles to follow through to finish a task
- Difficulty with tasks with more than one step

How you can help:

- Breaking tasks down into manageable chunks and encouraging focus on one chunk at a time
- Identifying strengths and successes – helping build self-esteem by reinforcing things that are going well
- Vary how ideas are shared, e.g. verbally, drawing or using visuals

Emotions



Challenges:

- Small events can cause big reactions
- Mood can change frequently and intense outbursts can end suddenly
- Can be hypersensitive to feeling like they have done something wrong

How you can help:

- Emotion coaching– notice and label emotions in your child and yourself, so that they can start to better understand their own feelings.
- Tell your child what **to do** rather than what **not to do** e.g. instead of 'stop shouting', say 'let's use our quieter voices'
- Prepare your child before new activities or going to new places e.g. through the use of social stories
- Limit changes to routines
- Provide an accessible safe place or object
- Agree a secret signal to use in public, if they're getting overwhelmed e.g. a hand squeeze or code word

Action



Challenges:

- Difficulty monitoring and self-regulating behaviour
- Sometimes unaware of the effect of their behaviour on others
- Fidgety

How you can help:

- Specific praise when your child has done something well e.g. 'I liked **when you...**' and acknowledge effort
- Provide sensory activities to reduce impulsivity during activities such as homework e.g. fidget toys, colouring, and movement breaks
- Practise regulation skills, pausing and controlling impulses through playful activities and games e.g. musical statues or grandma's footsteps



Does my child need a diagnosis of ADHD to get support in school from outside professionals/the SENDCo?

No—Your child's school will meet the needs of the child rather than a diagnosis. Adults working with your child will assess their needs, plan how to support them and after a period of time implementing this plan they will review it's impact. This is known as the **Graduated Approach**.

Whether a child needs an EHCP isn't dependent on their diagnosis. A child may need an EHCP if they have significant, long-term needs, that cannot be met by the usual support a school can offer. This is determined following the graduated approach.

Does my child need a diagnosis of ADHD to get funding in school or an EHCP?

Many children with ADHD can access the right support they need to achieve their goals, without needing an EHCP.

If my child has ADHD, do they need one to one support in school or a special school placement?

Not necessarily. Every child is unique, therefore how ADHD impacts a child can differ considerably. Other conditions a child may have and the impact of wider influences, such as their family and home circumstances, can also play a part.

With the right adjustments to their environment and appropriate support for their executive function difficulties, many children with ADHD can thrive in a mainstream school.

Continuous one to one support can reduce a child's ability to develop independence and confidence in their own abilities – it is often not recommended as the best way to support a child with ADHD.

Common Myths about ADHD and the Support Available



Is medication the only treatment available for a child with ADHD?

No – the right support at home and in school can make a huge difference in the personal, social, emotional and educational outcomes of a child with ADHD. However, if your child's symptoms are very hard to manage and/or they don't respond sufficiently to environmental adjustments, other treatments are available.

Interventions available:

Non-medical approaches: There are therapies and treatments available, which can target specific difficulties a child may be experiencing:

- **Psychoeducation** – teaching individuals and families about ADHD and strategies to manage it effectively
- **Executive function strategies and interventions** – can help children develop their executive functioning skills, for example using visual timetables/task boards, chunking of information, sentence starters and alternative ways to record learning.
- **Parental training and education programmes** – can help parents learn strategies to support their child's behaviour, attention and emotional regulation.
- **Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)** – can help individuals develop coping strategies, improve emotional regulation and manage attention-related challenges.
- **Play therapy** – uses structured play activities to help children express emotions, build social skills, and improve self-regulation.
- **Lifestyle adaptations:** consistent sleep routines, regular physical activity and maintaining a healthy, balanced diet, can also support wellbeing and help manage ADHD symptoms.

Speak to your GP, paediatrician or child's school for further information.

Medication: NICE guidelines state that medication should only be considered 'if ADHD symptoms cause significant impairment after environmental modifications have been tried and reviewed'.

Support within school is not dependent on the use of medication.

There are two types of medication, **stimulant** and **non-stimulant** medications. They can be prescribed by your child's paediatrician or the ADHD nursing team.

Side effects of medication can include:

- loss of appetite and weight loss
- dry mouth
- nausea or upset stomach
- increased heart rate or blood pressure.

Many symptoms can ease, once the correct dosage has been worked out. It is important to communicate with healthcare professionals about any side effects your child is experiencing.

It is always a parent or young person's **choice** to seek medical intervention.

If you're concerned about your child's progress or wellbeing, your first point of contact should be their class teacher or the school's SENCo.

Birmingham SEND Local Offer



<https://www.localofferbirmingham.co.uk/>

Help, advice and information about the services available for your child across Birmingham

Birmingham SEND Socials

www.sendsocialsbirmingham.co.uk/



Social opportunities for young people and their families



Think ADHD Kapella Relationship and Wellbeing Support

www.kapella.org.uk/our-services/think-adhd/

Direct support for young people through 1:1 mentoring and group work

ADHD UK

<https://adhduk.co.uk/>

Information, advice and support for those affected by ADHD



Birmingham Resilience Education and Wellbeing Service

<https://brewseducation.org/>

6 week courses for carers of children in-person/online with a diagnosis or on the assessment pathway, knowledge and strategies for support



Pause Hubs (Forward Thinking Birmingham)

<https://www.forwardthinkingbirmingham.nhs.uk/pause>

Mental health support (not ADHD specific) – drop-in sessions across Birmingham providing access to immediate support from an Emotional Wellbeing Practitioner, for children in crisis.

