

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) advice for school

Other formats

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- 01392 402093 (for Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter services)
- 01271 314090 (for North Devon services)
- rduh.pals@nhs.net

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder (or 'neurodiversity') that causes difficulties with concentration, impulsivity and hyperactivity. ADHD can have a significant impact for children in various aspects of their daily living, including school performance and maintaining friendships. Studies have shown that around 15 - 20% of people exhibit some form of Neurodivergence, around 5% of which is attributed to ADHD. It is a medical condition that requires support and understanding.

Understanding the ADHD brain

Brain differences in ADHD impact on executive function and behaviour. Children can find it difficult to grasp hindsight or foresight and may struggle to judge passage of time. Their mind can be on full alert to every sensation, leading to them becoming frustrated and easily irritated. Unrecognised or unmanaged ADHD can lead to low self-esteem, stress, anxiety, difficulty sleeping, and dislike of school which can lead to oppositional behaviours and emotionally based school non-attendance (EBSNA). Many children with ADHD also have other co-morbid conditions such as learning disability, autism, dyspraxia, which may also affect them in school.

Difficulties you might see in school

- **Hyperactivity**
 - Fidgeting
 - Excessive talking, rocking on chair
 - Walking around or walking out of the classroom

- **Impulsivity**
 - Calling out answers in class
 - Disturbing others
 - Quickly becoming aggressive when irritated

- **Inattention**
 - Forgetting tools for school, misplacing books or bag etc.
 - Homework incomplete or not attempted
 - Looking around room – day dreaming, zoning out
 - Appearing not to listen, unable to follow instructions

Some children mainly have 'inattention' symptoms. These children can be more difficult to recognise than those who are also hyperactive/impulsive.

How children with ADHD might feel under the surface

Sad, anxious, depressed, tired, shame, frustrated, confused, lonely, isolated, low self-esteem.

General tips for the school that could help

- Given that one in five children exhibit some form of neurodivergence, and around one in every 20 will have ADHD, whole school awareness goes a long way to creating understanding and acceptance. There are a few YouTube clips (links below) that could be shown in class and discussed.
- Children with ADHD / neurodiversity would benefit from an individual plan. No two children will be the same.
- Good communication with parent / carers and child i.e. knowing what is going on with the child at home can affect your choice of adaptations. Sharing what is or isn't working can inform your individualised plan and keep consistency between school and home.
- Consider offering pastoral care / emotional and wellbeing support
- Keep classroom decoration to a minimum, preferably behind the child at the back of the room so that the child is not distracted by them.

Specific classroom tips that could help individual children

- **Discuss with the child what strategies work best for them.** Help them learn how to recognise their own emotions and self-regulate using these strategies.
- **Strategic seating.** Consider if the child would be best placed at the front of the room where they might gain more teacher attention and less distraction from other pupils or at the back of the room possibly with a TA. Individual work spaces with screens around can also be useful for some children. Seating by a door or window could lead to greater distractions.
- **Fidget tools.** Can help aid concentration rather than hinder it. For younger children a box of fidget tools at the front of the class is helpful to encourage and normalise the use. For older children allow them to doodle or have blue-tack which is less distracting for other children.
- **Applying deep pressure.** Deep pressure increases serotonin along with other neurotransmitters creating a natural calming effect on the central nervous system, which can help with stress, anxiety and overload. A child can massage their hands or arms, this can be done discreetly in the class room.
- **Headphones** can be useful for individual class work to help avoid being distracted
- **Calm buddy.** Being close to a calm influence can encourage calm and give a child confidence and support
- **Regular brain breaks.** This could be in the form of movement, calm / mindfulness or sensory breaks. Whole classroom activities could be considered, such as requesting assistance from the child to help with handouts or cleaning a board etc. We know that people who are quite active benefit from activities that involve heavy use of their muscles.
- **Praise** regular, supportive feedback. Praise progress not just work completed and be specific. Avoid shaming for impulsive or hyperactive behaviours.
- **Give direct instruction,** repeat and check they have understood. Allow them to clarify questions.
- **Routine and organisation** are both important for children with ADHD, ideas could include:
 - keeping the routine as predictable as possible.
 - clear visual timetables - 'Now, Next and Then' boards work well for primary schools.
 - a timer could be used to help understanding of how long they need to remain engaged for. Individual attention span should be considered when determining the length of an activity.
 - colour coded schedules
 - handout or visual of the lesson plan that you can refer to throughout to break down the lesson into small chunks of learning.

- visual list or pictures of items required for each lesson.
- make their peg or locker the first or the last in the room.
- **Tests and exams**
 - Consider use of computers, oral assessment, scribe, breaks, extra time.
 - Consider what time of day tests/exams are done, based on when child usually concentrates best.
- **Learning strategies in the classroom**
 - Allow additional time for assignments / class work
 - Break down the lesson/tasks into small achievable steps
 - Many children with ADHD are visual learners so include visuals, interaction and engaging activities.
 - Encourage working to strengths; for instance, are they a good leader with good ideas? Let them lead on a project. Are they creative or artistic? Let them use their skills as part of project work.
 - Keep quizzes short; reduce questions for children with ADHD if needed.
 - Memory games are a good way to increase attention and concentration.

Please make sure to use Devon's 'Ordinarily Available Inclusive Education Framework'. It describes the inclusive provision and practice that all Devon schools should be able to provide for all children and young people, including learners with ADHD, from within their own resources. Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision - Support for schools and settings (devon.gov.uk).

For more information

- School staff can access additional training and support from Devon County Council: <https://www.devon.gov.uk/support-schools-settings/send/>
- ADHD Foundation – has section on advice for education settings: <https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/services-for-education/>
- Booklet on Teaching and Managing Students with ADHD: <https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Teaching-and-Managing-Students-with-ADHD.pdf>
- Three-minute video about ADHD and how it might present in school (suitable for school aged children): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1t9UHQgtDfU>

- Four-minute video on Autism (suitable for school aged children):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ezv85LMFx2E>
- Brain break cards:
<https://www.twinkl.com.cn/search?q=brain+break+cards&c=244&r=parent>
- Now, Next and Then visual cards:
<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-s-100-now-next-then-visual-aid>

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