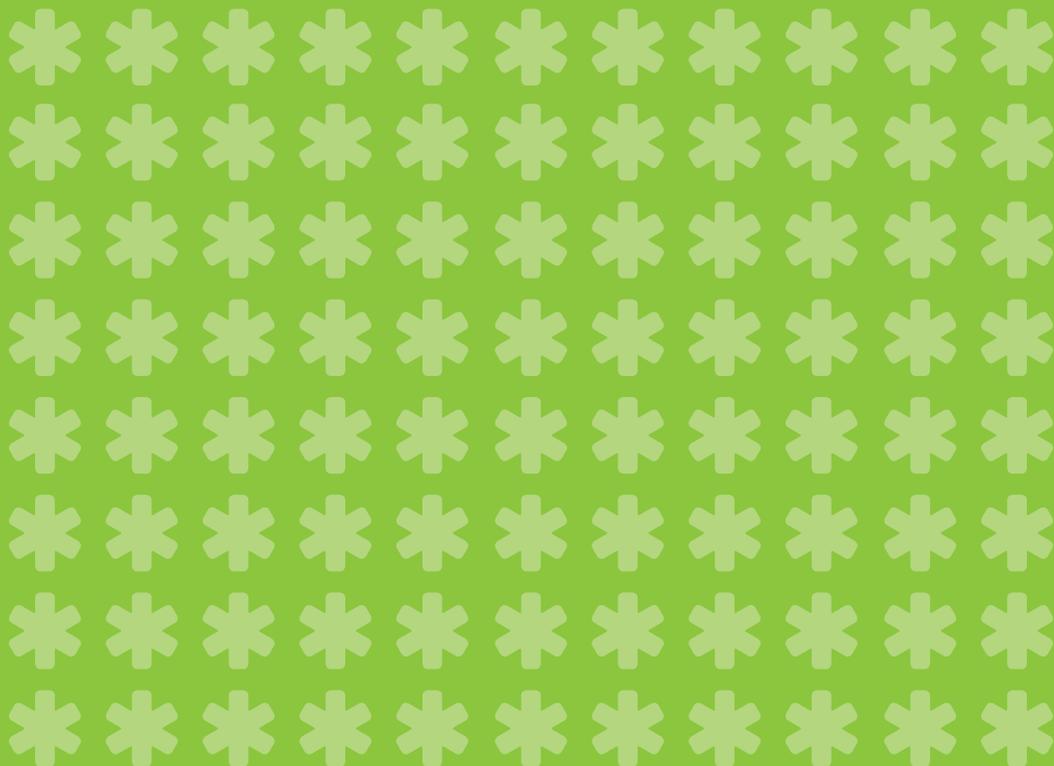


Service information guide

Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service

ADHD - information for schools



Commissioned by:



Welcome to the Essex Child and Family
Wellbeing Service

ADHD is a developmental disorder, often hereditary, and is thought to be caused by under functioning of the frontal lobe and an imbalance in the neurotransmitter chemicals, dopamine and noradrenaline.

What is ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is not a new condition. It was first described 100 years ago, and affects between 2-5% of all children. ADHD is a developmental disorder, often hereditary, and is thought to be caused by under functioning of the frontal lobe and an imbalance in the neurotransmitter chemicals, dopamine and noradrenaline. This leads to the characteristic behavioural problems such as impulsivity and lack of attention.

ADHD is more common in boys than in girls, and the boys tend to show more hyperactive and disruptive behaviour, but many girls with ADHD remain unrecognised as they tend to be less disruptive than boys. These girls may appear to be 'in a world of their own' in the classroom. It is suggested that on average in the UK there will be one or two children with ADHD in every classroom.

ADHD is a long-term condition which can affect the young person's learning and behaviour during their school years, as well as their behaviour at home and during play. Each young person has their own unique set of signs and symptoms. But with the right support they can live happy and fulfilling lives. Young People with ADHD can be intelligent and creative. The problems of ADHD may ease with time, and although the condition can last into adulthood, coming to terms with ADHD can make it easier to deal with.

Young People with ADHD may have a parent or close relative with the same disorder. A parent with ADHD may find it hard to manage their ADHD child consistently and calmly. The difficult behaviour presented by the young person can make any parents' discipline inadequate. Poor parenting does not cause ADHD, but can make the behaviour worse.

Key features of ADHD

Inattention

- Has trouble getting started and often does not follow instructions through
- Has difficulty organising tasks and needs reminders to stay on task
- Has difficulty following sequenced directions and often does not appear to listen when being spoken to directly
- Misunderstands directions, and often does not have required equipment for the task
- Is easily distracted from tasks, and often fails to complete them
- May avoid tasks which require sustained mental effort
- Quickly loses interest, and appears unmotivated

Hyperactivity

- Squirms in seat, fidgets with hands, feet, and clothing
- May leave seat in classroom and wander around the room
- Appears constantly on the go
- Finds it hard to regulate 'volume control', particularly when playing
- Often talks excessively

Impulsivity

- Often butts in or interrupts
- Has difficulty waiting for his turn
- May blurt out answers in class
- Acts without thinking

Classroom strategies

Each young person with ADHD is a challenge in the classroom. Teachers are experts at dealing with all types of students, with a wide range of learning styles and behaviours. Many of the strategies already in place may help the young person with ADHD, but some additional suggestions may help for specific young people. It is important to remember that although the young person with ADHD can often be frustrating and irritating, they are not doing it on purpose. Although the young person does not have a visible illness they do have a genuine medical condition, and adaptations will need to be made to help them learn effectively.

Their whole attitude to school and learning may have become damaged because of all the criticism they have received so far. A key means of dealing with this is to 'reframe' the approach to a young person by looking for the positives wherever possible. For example, if work is untidy and messy, look for signs of effort; if the young person keeps interrupting, look at it as if they are interested and enthusiastic. Some teachers may find this a difficult way to view the situation, but it does help to maintain positive relationships, and raise self-esteem.

Once a young person has been diagnosed with ADHD there is now a good opportunity to work together with the parents to improve the young person's learning and behaviour. Inform all the school staff of the difficulties the young person encounters, so that a consistent approach is maintained by all. Arrange to meet the parents regularly to discuss progress, and how everyone is coping.

The term student is used for the young person with ADHD in this information.

Improving skills

Develop a sequence of events so the student can learn to become organised.

- Start with a simple overview of what you want them to achieve
- Create a framework of simple steps so they know what is meant to happen next
- Improve memory by encouraging visualisation
- Repeat directions individually
- Use reminders and lists, or memory prompts and checklists on their desks
- If attention is wandering use special cue phrases such as *"wait for it..."*, *the next bit's interesting..."* *"here we go..."*
- Consider using reward system, and remember to praise whatever positives you can find
- To help the child think first before acting impulsively help them to respond in three stages:
 - To stop and listen
 - To look and think
 - To decide and do



Classroom approaches

Classroom set-up

- Students have different thresholds for stimulus. Most ADHD students benefit from sitting away from distractions, such as windows, door, bookcase etc. However, a few students, who seek sensory feedback, do benefit from sitting near a window. Try different seating positions and see what works for them.
- Sit the student at the front, or close to the teacher
- Use peers who are good workers as role models for the student to sit near.

Routines

- Have routines for tasks
- Make a checklist for routines
- Ask the young person to tick off as they complete each part
- Check work before the young person moves on

Interest

- If the student finds your subject interesting they will concentrate. Try to make lessons interesting, capture their imagination and curiosity
- Straight forward book learning can be very hard for the student who is creative and on the move. Can they learn this topic in a different way? Play to their strengths.
- Motivation; provide frequent positive feedback and consequences
- Some students may find the work easy or finish early and then distract others...find a way to challenge them. Make the most of interest and skills.

Getting the message across

- Address the student by name – use their name first and then the question/request
- Look directly at the student and try to make eye contact, but don't force the issue. Some young people find eye contact difficult, especially if they also have Autism. Just because they aren't looking at you doesn't mean they aren't listening.
- Speak clearly
- Tell the student the end objective
- Give instructions in a simple step-by-step way, pausing between each step, and giving the student a chance to do each activity.

Transition times

- Give the students a time warning before the end of the lesson
- Have a calm down time after breaks or activities
- Use activities to occupy students while they are waiting for others to finish
- Some students benefit coming in a few minutes earlier from a break time just to give them a little more time to calm down and adjust to the classroom situation.

- It may help to draw up a list of specific rules with the student so that they clearly know what is and isn't acceptable.

Cut down and 'chunk' work

- Limit the amount of work given at any one time so that it does not appear overwhelming
- Cover up portions that are not required
- Allow sufficient time to complete tasks
- Repeat instructions if needed.

Movement

- Allow for regular movement breaks – to stretch, walk, take a message
- Fidget toys – if used appropriately in the classroom, they can help the young person to concentrate. Blue tak, tangle, fidget cube, bendy ruler and a doodle pad can all be things the young person can use in the classroom without distracting others. If this works for the person make sure that all teachers are aware as they are often confiscated. If a fidget toy is used inappropriately, it can be taken away, but given back after an allotted time. If the student repeatedly misuses the fidget toy an alternative should be considered.
- If a student needs a break time or lunchtime student detention, consider whether this is the appropriate time. They are often hyperactive and need their break times to get rid of some energy. A change of environment and sensory input is needed to make them alert for the next set of lessons.
- The ADHD specialist or an occupational therapist may suggest a wobble board/fidget cushion. This provides sensory feedback and helps them to concentrate.

Classroom rules

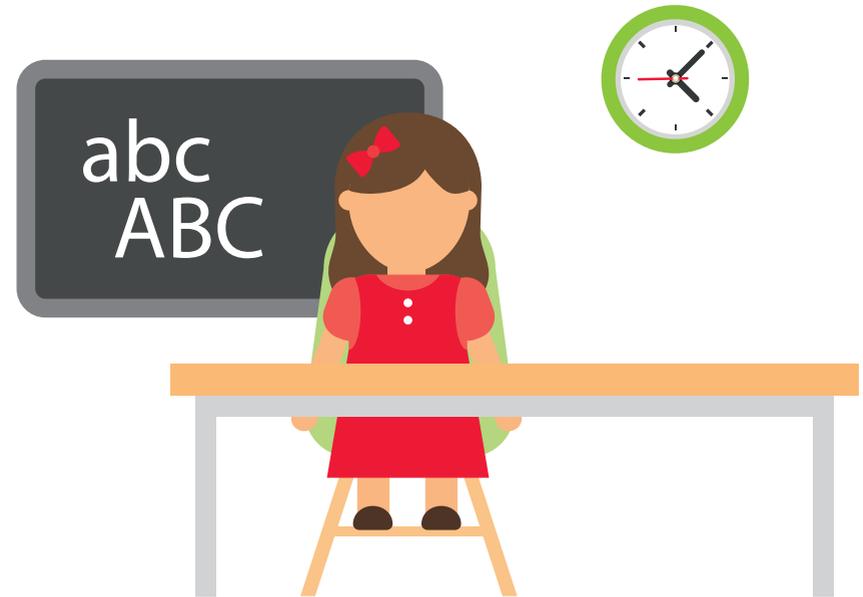
- Use the displayed rules regularly when you want to praise behaviour
- Use a traffic light or 'volume' system for acceptable noise level in class
- Use positive rules, not starting with '*Don't...*'
- Display the day's events so that the student knows what will be happening
- Be consistent with your expectations and the consequences for breaking rules

Use technology

- Allow the student to use computers to present work
- Can the lesson be recorded?
- Use flow charts and mind maps
- Allow notes to be photocopied and annotated
- Use apparatus rather than pencil and paper wherever possible
- Use games, coins, etc for teaching
- Colour code their homework diary

Using discipline

- When telling the student off try and be specific about what you want them to do rather than what they shouldn't do
- Remind the student that bad behaviour has consequences
- Tell them how their behaviour has made you feel
- Remind the student about the specific task they should be doing rather than telling them to 'get on with their work'
- When dealing with outbursts of anger, in primary school, make use of 'Time Out'. Establish a special place – a chair, or corner where the child goes to cool off for a set period of time. It also allows you time to cool off. Use a timer for the period of time, which should be one minute for every year of life. During 'Time Out' don't pay attention to the student or talk to them. When the time is up, don't discuss the problem – they have 'served their time' and now start again with a clean slate. You may decide to name this 'thinking time'.
- If the student has refused to go to 'time out', warn of withdrawing a privilege such as computer time, and if necessary carry out this sanction. The sanction should always be the same day and not for an extended period.
- Older students can start to recognise when they are getting angry or not coping with the classroom situation.



- They can use 'Time out' cards, which gives them permission to leave the classroom until they feel calm enough to return. Depending on the school, some students sit outside the classroom while others have designated areas.
- Any sanction/detention should be carried out on the day. Threats of not going on a school trip or a detention two days later are not effective. The student will not remember why they are being punished. If a student is regularly causing problems, a token jar/star chart to gain points towards going on a school trip is the positive way to reinforce good behaviour.
- Avoid detentions in break times as the student needs to use up some energy. A change of environment is needed to re alert the senses to help them concentrate in the next set of lessons.
- Some students are defiant and want the power. Give them 2 solutions to the problem, so they still feel they have control.

Structure

- Involve the student in session planning where possible; it may give them motivation to attend and participate
- Constraints on the student's behaviour may be necessary to allow learning to take place
- Initial activities should be short, simple and achievable, so that the student learns to attend to the task and success is achieved
- Teach in small steps, gradually increasing duration and complexity so that the student learns what is expected and moves towards a normal environment
- Engage the student in parallel play by sitting beside them, demonstrating without interfering
- Be certain the student can foresee an end to the task

Homework

The cause of a lot of conflict at school and home is homework or the lack of it. There are many reasons why homework isn't completed:

- Medication wears off by the end of the school day, so concentration is reduced
- Haven't written it down; forget to do it
- Haven't understood what the homework was
- No routine of doing homework
- Students don't believe that they should have to do school work at home

A few solutions are:

- Teacher to check comprehension of homework and that it is written in a homework book
- After school homework clubs
- Adapt homework so it works to their skills
- Use of a computer instead of handwritten

- Meet with parents and student. Consider what is a reasonable amount of homework? Positive reinforcement from home and school.

Medication

Young people with ADHD may not display all of the characteristics described earlier but will have their own unique blend of symptoms, which can also vary at different times. There isn't a simple test to diagnose ADHD and considerable care will have been given to diagnosing each child, looking at how his difficulties affect all aspects of his life. NICE guidelines are in place to direct Specialists with diagnosis and treatment.

Young People can have associated co-morbid conditions such as specific learning difficulties, anxiety problems, conduct or oppositional behaviour problems, and occasionally symptoms similar to autistic spectrum disorders. Inevitably ADHD causes confusion for the young person who constantly gets things wrong and seems to be continually in trouble. Life at home can be under considerable stress, and at school the young person may be under-performing, finding it hard to make and keep friends, and can become the object of teasing. They often have low self-esteem and a lack of confidence. Young people will usually benefit from the strategies described but some may need medication as well.

While medication is not a cure it can help them concentrate more in class, and behave better. Some respond well to methods which help to change their behaviour while others respond well to medication, but medication should be used as part of the overall range of psychological, behavioural and educational therapies. There are two types of medication; stimulant and non-stimulant.

The most commonly used medication is **Methylphenidate** (stimulant), but **Atomoxetine** (non-stimulant) and **Lisdexafetamine** (stimulant) can also be prescribed. Medications are either short acting or long acting. Short acting medication lasts around 4 hours, so the dose is given after breakfast and lunch. Long acting medication can last 8 hours +, depending on the type and brand, so usually given at home after breakfast. The dosage will be adjusted as necessary by the Specialist. If the medication helps to improve the young person's behaviour they may continue taking it for several years.



The medication periodically needs increasing as their weight goes up. By secondary school, most students are on long acting medication. Some only take medication for school days to help with concentration, but some take it every day. Frequency of taking the medication is discussed in reviews with the Specialist, which occur approximately every 6 months. Atomoxetine is a non-stimulant and is the only ADHD medication which must be taken every single day.

- ADHD medication is a controlled drug. If the student needs a lunchtime dose, this should be kept in the school office. Parents will often bring medication once a week. Schools have their own systems/paperwork/care plans which are agreed with parents/carers, so they can administer the medication in a safe way.
- ADHD medication often suppresses their appetite. If they have a lunchtime dose, they must have their lunch first and then the tablet. Lunchtime staff may be asked to monitor what the young person eats, if weight becomes an issue.
- Monitor any side effects of the medication. Often teachers are the only people to see the young people while they are taking the medication. The medication has usually worn off by the end of school. Common side-effects include nervousness, difficulty sleeping, loss of appetite, headache, drowsiness, tics, dizziness or blurred vision. Please inform parents if there are concerns.
- School may be asked to complete a checklist of side effects before clinic reviews.

Further information

Up to date information and resources be found on the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service website.

w: www.essexfamilywellbeing.co.uk/team/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd-nurse/

Recommended ADHD websites

Living with ADHD

w: www.livingwithadhd.co.uk

ADD-vance

w: www.add-vance.org

ADDISS

w: www.addiss.co.uk

CHADD

w: www.chadd.org

Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children

w: www.gosh.nhs.uk/conditions-and-treatments/conditions-we-treat/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd

Your notes

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