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**WHAT IS ADHD?** Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a group of behavioural symptoms that include inattentiveness, hyperactivity and impulsiveness. Symptoms tend to be noticed at an early age, it is a lifelong condition and its impact on functioning changes over time. Below is a list of the main signs of each aspect of the condition.

Inattentiveness	Hyperactivity and impulsiveness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Short attention span and easily distracted</li><li>• Easily forgetful or losing things</li><li>• Appears unable to listen or carry out instructions</li><li>• Making careless mistakes</li><li>• Unable to stick to a task and frequently changing activity or task</li><li>• Difficulty organising tasks</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unable to sit still</li><li>• Excessive physical movement</li><li>• Little or no sense of danger</li><li>• Constantly fidgeting</li><li>• Acting without thinking</li><li>• Interrupting conversations</li></ul>

ADHD is a neurobiological condition (meaning there are affected brain areas) with a strong genetic basis which means it often runs in families. All symptoms of ADHD are experienced by everyone at some point, but people with ADHD experience these symptoms more often, more intensely and have greater difficulty controlling these aspects of their functioning. Each person is different and their challenges differ but ADHD can affect behaviour, interpersonal relationships and academic studies.

**SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH ADHD:** Areas to focus on in terms of management will be dictated by the aspects of the child's life that are causing problems. Medication can be an important aspect of treatment which can have a significantly beneficial impact on a child's ability to focus and concentrate. Parenting and teaching a child with ADHD is more challenging (and often extremely rewarding) and requires particular knowledge and focus. Below are a list of strategies that can help children and families affected by ADHD.

<b>Environment</b>	Children with ADHD have a higher risk for sustaining accidental injuries. Increase parental supervision, positive parenting and greater time available to be with the child are some ways to help create a safe environment.
<b>Promote safety in the home</b>	This is especially important for the hyperactive-impulsive child. The first step is physical safety, i.e. safety-proofing and supervision. It is necessary to create a calm, structured positive approach to parenting; this also allows for a more acceptable response to limit-setting. As a parent of a child with ADHD, be aware that when they are in a heightened state of arousal these young people can act more impulsively and need help to calm down.
<b>Creation of structure</b>	Structure refers to clarity of communication, routines and promotion of organised reading, space and activity time. Free time at home and school is needed for any child, and it's a great way to burn off excess energy. However, this can also be a time that a child with ADHD may get into "trouble". Supervision is essential. Parents will need to communicate with the school so that appropriate support is provided, resulting in a consistency in structure between home and school.

<b>Enhance self-esteem</b>	A child with ADHD will need support to build their confidence. Reinforcing things that they enjoy and/or do well can enhance the child's sense of confidence. The more the family finds to reinforce the child's strengths the easier it is to handle the frustrations of what remains difficult. The key factor is developing resilience.
<b>Habit development</b>	<p><b>The daily positive report card:</b> This is a useful strategy between the school and home. It should not be used as a 'punishment' but will enable the teacher (with parental support) to focus specific praise on areas of positivity and progress. Children with ADHD can be 'delay averse' (e.g. find it hard to wait for things) so rewards should be immediate but need only be small.</p> <p><b>The white board reminder:</b> This is placed in a common place in the house, like the kitchen, and is a useful way for the family to know what is happening during the week. It also promotes family communication when the weekly agenda is reviewed once a week. This can also be used as a time to remind the child of their successes over the week and things to work on for the week ahead.</p>
<b>Homework output using a clock-timer</b>	This allows the child to determine the efficiency of their homework. Dividing the tasks into bite sized chunks and using the clock timer enhances the child's competitive spirit (the child wanting to receive their reward for good behaviour) and also limits their frustration, as they know the task is time limited. Homework time will also need to be structured and routine. Encourage the child to have a distraction free environment when working, e.g. remove wireless internet when they are writing an essay. The Time Timer is a useful visual resource for tracking time: <a href="http://www.timetimer.com">www.timetimer.com</a> for
<b>Friendships</b>	Children with ADHD usually have good social skills but can get carried away in the moment with friends and the over-stimulating effect leads to them being impulsive and sometimes over-bearing. It is important to offer support for playdates and structure interactions to help with this so that the child does not feel isolated. See the book by Fred Frankel "Friends Forever: How Parents Can Help Their Kids Make and Keep Good Friends" which has good strategies to try.
<b>Appointments</b>	It will be important for your child to be reviewed regularly by professionals. This will include medication and physical reviews with the GP and communication with the school.

## SUPPORTING ADOLESCENTS WITH ADHD

**Impulsivity:** Research has shown the hyperactivity reduces in adolescence over time. However, impulsivity may have consequence as all adolescents experiment and like to try new things leading to a degree of risk taking. The adolescent with ADHD may need closer monitoring.

**Medication:** Taking medication is a demanding task and between 48-68% of adolescence may stop taking their medication. Parents can support their child with taking medication by organising consultations with the GP. It is important that this is a collaborative decision and they understand what and why they have been offered medication and given guidance on the best strategies for remembering to take it regularly.

**Safety issues- Drug-drug interaction:** Alcohol, illicit substances and excessive coffee and energy drinks can create problems with ADHD medication. It is important that the adolescent is educated on how these substances interact with their medication. Abstinence or significant reduction of these substances should be encouraged.

**Educational issues:** ADHD adolescents are at greater risk of dropping out of school early, repeating school years and not achieving their academic potential. School should support the student in developing organisational skills and time management. Increasing their engagement in studies will be essential.

**Tutoring/coaching:** When parents of adolescents with ADHD try to help with homework this can often lead to arguments and resentment. Individuals with ADHD do tend to respond better to one-to-one attention and an external tutor to help support task completion and organisation could be an alternative option.

## Further resources

- **C.H.A.D.D. (Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder)** is a national educational and advocacy group ([www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org)). It has a database of helpful resources and support materials that are highly recommended.
- The **ADHD Foundation** (<http://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/>) provides a comprehensive overview of the latest research and developments of issues related to ADHD.
- The book available at [www.fidgettofocus.com/](http://www.fidgettofocus.com/) is a fantastic little read for information and helpful suggestions for managing ADHD.
- The book "**Step by Step Help for Children with ADHD: A Self-help Manual for Parents**" by Cathy Laver-Bradbury, Margaret Thompson, Anne Weeks, David Daley, Edmund Sonuga-Barke is also highly recommended as an overview of ways to manage at home.
- The use of a gadget called the Time Timer ([www.TimeTimer.com](http://www.TimeTimer.com)) can help the child to comprehend how long they need to "focus" on staying on task or that might be reasonable to spend on a task.
- "**Attention Deficit Disorder – Strategies for School Age Children**" by Clare B. Jones is another useful resource for teachers and parents.