

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Behaviour Strategies

Information for parents and carers

**ADHD/ASD Specialist Nursing Team
Community Paediatrics**

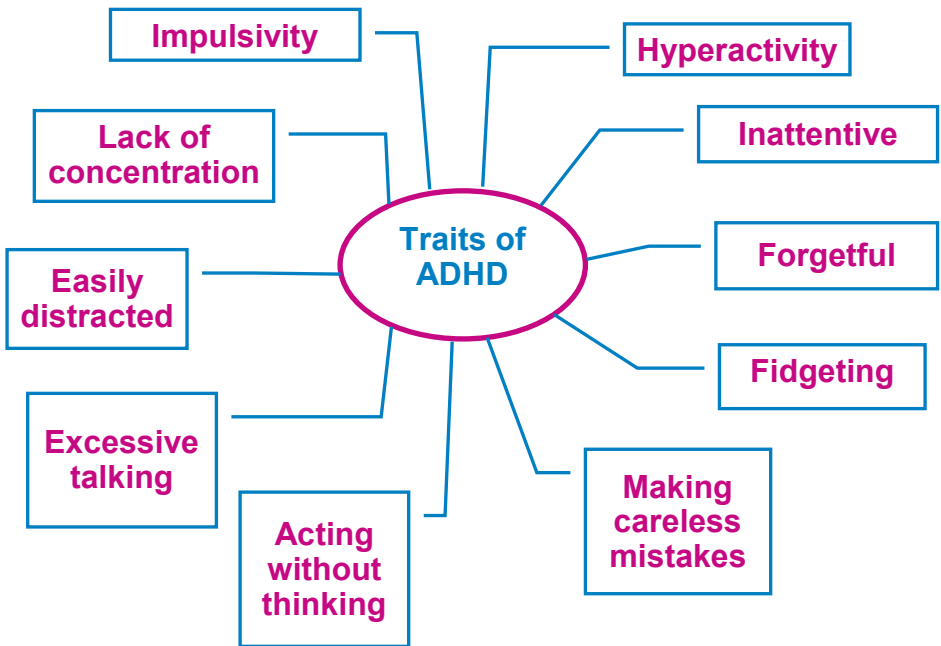
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This leaflet is for parents / carers of children and young people who have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

This is a condition that can affect concentration and ability to focus and pay attention, make you more impulsive (act without thinking first) and make you more restless and need to move more. However every person with ADHD is unique and has their own individual symptoms and behaviours.



People with ADHD can be spontaneous, creative, quick-thinking and energetic, but caring for a child or young person with ADHD can be draining. The impulsive, fearless and chaotic behaviours typical of ADHD can make everyday activities exhausting and stressful.

The *fizzy* time bomb

We all have different things that can irritate us; someone leaving the milk out the fridge or leaving the loo seat up - but we usually deal with things in a controlled manner. If we bottle up our stress and irritations it can affect our mood and mental health.

Children and young people with ADHD are no different; little things can irritate them and they can struggle to deal with these feelings in a controlled manner, allowing them to build up.

Imagine a bottle of coke being shaken each time they get annoyed by something. The fizz increases and then gradually settles....until the next annoyance / incident that annoys / frustrates, which causes another increase in fizz.

If these issues are not dealt with early enough the build-up of fizz can be excessive and you may get an explosion as the lid pops off the bottle.

It is very difficult to deal with a situation once a child has already hit full fizz, they will not be in a state to listen or respond to you. Their behaviours may be quite extreme.

Although it can be difficult at times, it is important to remember that a child with ADHD cannot always help their behaviour. People with ADHD can find it difficult to suppress impulses, which means they do not find it easy to stop and think about a situation, or the consequences, before they act.

Whilst ADHD in itself does not 'cause' poor behaviour, it can lead to making poor choices, appearing disruptive or not to be listening and frustration for both the child or young person and the parent or carer.

Limiting the *fizz*

All children and young people need structure and routine in their lives in order to function well:

- **Plan the day** so your child knows what to expect and when. Set routines can make a difference to how a child with ADHD copes with everyday life.
- **Create a visual timetable** of the days planned events. This can be using pictures on a chart on the fridge or similar.
- **Clear boundaries** are essential so jointly create a set of house rules. It is important that everyone knows what behaviour is expected.
- **Consequences** - Reinforce positive behaviour with immediate praise or rewards. Be clear, using enforceable consequences, such as taking away a privilege, if boundaries are overstepped.
- **Consistency** - Ensure any rules, boundaries and consequences are the same between parents or carers, or else it will be confusing for the child and harder to enforce.
- **Giving clear instructions** - Rather than asking a child to tidy their room, be specific "Please put your toys into the box and put the books back onto the shelf." Then it is easy to praise specific actions completed.
- **Be positive and give specific praise** - i.e. "You washed the dishes really well. Thank you." Your child will then understand exactly what has made you happy.
- **Incentive scheme** - Set up your own incentive scheme using a points or star chart, so good behaviour can earn a privilege e.g. Behaving well on a shopping trip will earn your child time on the computer. Involve your child in the design and allow them to help decide what the privileges will be as these will have a better impact. Children get bored easily so these charts need changing regularly.

- **Intervene early** - Watch for any warning signs. If your child looks like they're becoming frustrated, overstimulated and about to lose self-control, intervene early. Distract your child, if possible, by taking them away from the situation. Divert them onto a different activity of their choice, maybe a bike ride, a run around the garden or a cuddle and story time. This may calm them down and reduce the *fizz*.
- **Social situations** - If these are overwhelming and 'get out of hand' - keep them short and with a purpose. If friends come around to play set a time limit with a defined end time, ensure you give a 10 minute warning that the activity is going to end.
- **Exercise** - Ensure lots of physical activity during the day. Walking, trampoline and a bike or scooter ride can all help your child wear themselves out and improve their quality of sleep. Short exercise sessions spread regularly throughout the day is best. Just make sure they're not doing anything too strenuous or exciting near to bedtime.
- **Food** - Keep an eye on what your child eats. Some children become more hyperactive after eating certain foods, which contain additives or caffeine (including coffee, tea, 'energy drinks' and Cola / Dr Pepper - even if 'diet' or 'zero').
- **Night time** - Sleep problems and ADHD can become a vicious circle. ADHD can lead to sleep problems, which in turn can make symptoms worse. Please follow the links below for further advice regarding good sleep routines:
 - www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness
 - www.sleepcouncil.org.uk
 - www.thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk
- **Medication** - If your child is prescribed a medication for their ADHD ensure it is given exactly as it has been prescribed to help it work best. Further advice is also available through your Specialist ADHD nurse or Paediatrician.

Being a parent isn't easy

There is no manual on how to do it correctly, but there are some things that can help maintain calmer family life. Remember, raising children is hard but raising a child with ADHD may often seem impossible.

There is no 'magic cure' for ADHD and if medications are used they target schoolwork not 'behaviour', but with help and the advice in this leaflet, things can often be improved upon.

- **Maintain realistic goals** - Children need help to manage their ADHD by you providing useful strategies and interventions. Despite this, most children will still struggle at times. Expecting too much from them, or from yourself as a parent, isn't fair to either of you. Be realistic about what can be achieved and that sometimes you may need to choose a more reachable goal.
- **Let your child make some mistakes** - It's good to let your child make and deal with 'safe' mistakes in situations that won't cause irreparable damage. Let them learn from the consequences resulting from their behaviour.
- **Respect the need for privacy** - All children need monitoring, but every child or teen needs personal space.
- **Mild rebellion or disrespect** - During adolescence, young people develop a sense of identity. This is often expressed as disagreement and conflict. Add this to the typical impulsivity that comes with ADHD and the whole process of adolescents maturing can become quite challenging, but is still normal development. Like with any teenager, set clear, appropriate and consistent boundaries that are reasonable and realistic.
- **Pick your battles** - Not everything is worth fighting over. Being an overprotective parent will increase conflicts between parent and child. Take a stand on the important issues and be more flexible on things that really don't matter. Less conflict eases tensions in the household.

Time out

As adults we all need to allow ourselves 'Time-out' of usual daily activities in order to regulate our minds. We may go for a walk, do some exercise, read a book, watch a good movie, meditate, listen to some music or meet up with friends for a coffee.

For children and young people this is just as important. For a child with ADHD the world is very busy, constantly changing and creating new challenges for them and it can be exhausting. Often children absorb so much information and bottle up their emotions / stresses until a time later on when their brains are less busy. Otherwise their brains become too full of stress that it has to escape, this is when you may see unwanted behaviours.

Further resources

The following websites and books may be helpful for further information about ADHD for parents / carers and for children and young people to help them understand their ADHD, behaviours and moods.

- **ADHD Foundation**
Includes animations and downloadable books
www.adhdfoundation.org.uk
- **Adders**
www.adders.org
- **Putting on the Brakes: Understanding and Taking Control of Your ADD or ADHD** - 2012 by P. Quinn and J. Stern
- **Survival Guide for Kids with ADHD** - 2013 by J. Taylor
- **All Dogs Have ADHD** - 2008 by K Hoopmann
- **ADHD Book of Lists: A Practical Guide for Helping Children and Teens with Attention Deficit Disorders** - 2015 by S. Rief
- **Cory Stories: A Kid's Book About Living with ADHD** - 2004 by J. Kraus
- **Marvin's Monster Diary: ADHD Attacks! (But I Rock It, Big Time)** - 2016 by R. Melmed, A. Sexton, J. Harvey

Feedback

We appreciate and encourage feedback. If you need advice or are concerned about any aspect of care or treatment please speak to a member of staff or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS):

Freephone: 0800 183 0204

From a mobile or abroad: 0115 924 9924 ext 65412 or 62301

E-mail: pals@nuh.nhs.uk

Letter: NUH NHS Trust, c/o PALS, Freepost NEA 14614, Nottingham NG7 1BR

www.nuh.nhs.uk

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet please email patientinformation@nuh.nhs.uk or phone 0115 924 9924 ext. 67184.

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