

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD or ADD)



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What is Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder?

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is a condition of brain dysfunction which can significantly interfere with everyday life. Some individuals may only be inattentive whilst others are persistently 'over the top'. Problems may include conduct disorder (unacceptable behaviour), depression, anxiety, obsessions, specific learning difficulties, speech or language disorders, low self esteem, poor social skills, difficulties in forming relationships/friendships and problems with auditory processing. Obviously many of these are also side effects of the behaviour displayed by a particular individual.

Living with Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

Those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder often have a poor attention span and weak impulse control, sitting still is difficult and they can find it difficult to gauge time – often losing track and appearing to 'switch off'. They can be forgetful and lose things.

Obviously not all unacceptable behaviour or lack of social skills can be put down to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. ADHD can be difficult to diagnose and requires careful assessment by a child psychiatrist. Part of the treatment may involve using drugs such as Methylphenidate (Ritalin). The drug can be highly effective in calming and improving concentration and is used as part of an overall treatment strategy that also includes systematic behaviour modification. Dosages and timings of administration are very important as the effects of the drug can be short-lived. Leaders should follow the medical advice provided by parents.

There are some side effects which are said to be transient and dose related, but research is continuing into long term effects. These can include loss of appetite, headaches, tics and

sense of unease. Drug treatment may be required over many months or years.

Living with someone who has this disorder can be very stressful and frustrating and there are some extreme incidences where families have been barred from certain places – swimming pools and supermarkets for example, because of the disturbance that a member of the family can cause.

The drug treatment often goes alongside systematic behaviour modification techniques both at home and at school and Leaders will need to link closely with the individual and their family to find the best method for dealing with any outburst or preventing escalation of a problem.

Those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder can find it difficult to wait for their turn, constantly seek adult attention and/or have low boredom thresholds. This can be trying and have an isolating effect on them as others find these traits unattractive in potential friends.

They may also show a tendency to blurt out inappropriate comments often personal; this of course does little for relationships or integration with their peers. They may also appear rude or disinterested as they may forget what they're saying halfway through a sentence and seem inattentive – all this requires a great deal of patience on everyone's behalf.

Practical Tips

When giving a list of instructions break it down – whereas many people would remember the order in which to do things by visualising themselves actually doing it, individuals with ADHD repeat the sequence to themselves, this is effective unless something distracts their train of thought and they lose their place! So break down instructions and provide reminders during any task.

Favoured activities especially where they don't require good self control are no problem, it is

other, often newer or less structured activities which can provide triggers for anxiety and potential loss of control. Providing support or extra instructions to help them through the transition to more flexible tasks should help to head off any confrontation.

They may also need help with organisation and remembering times, places and meetings. Help with reminders or note taking or a support system within the Patrol, Six etc. where a friend agrees to telephone immediately before setting out for example can all stave off the frustration of seeming unreliable or missing something important.

Many finding making friends difficult because of mood swings or unpredictable reactions this needs support and patience from others in their Unit, Patrol, Six etc. Such teamwork skills are invaluable and make success possible – this can alleviate some of the feelings of anxiety and frustration which can trigger inappropriate responses.

Set one small target at a time, and make it clear and simple. Any reward must mean something and be immediate. Try to make praise public whilst keeping discussions of problems which have arisen private.

Flexibility is important and taking a break may prove very successful, especially where the individual can take time out themselves when they recognise a problem escalating – this needs to be seen as a positive – recognising their own need and taking steps to address it.

Further Information

Discuss with the individual and/or parents the extent to which help is needed and learn any practical tips that they can offer.

Support Organisations

ADD Families Support Group,
1a High Street,
Dilton Marsh,
Near Westbury,
Wiltshire,
BA13 4DL

Adders.org
Promoting awareness of ADHD and providing
information and practical help
Web site www.adders.org

ADDISS – The National Attention Deficit Disorder
Information and Support Service

Web site www.addiss.co.uk