

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 may display 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; this means sitting still is difficult. Some individuals with ADHD/ADD can find it difficult to gauge time, are forgetful and lose things.

Not all unacceptable behaviour can be put down to ADHD/ADD. ADHD/ADD 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 uses 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 parent/guardian/carer.

There are some side effects that are said to be brief and dose related, but research is continuing into long-term effects. These can include loss of appetite, headaches, tics and a sense of unease. Drug treatment may be required over many months or years. Living with someone who has ADHD/ADD can be very stressful and frustrating. These are some extreme incidences where families have been barred from certain places, for example swimming pools and supermarkets, because of the disturbance that a member of the family with ADHD/ADD can cause.

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

Individuals with ADHD/ADD can find it difficult to wait for their turn, constantly seek adult attention and/or have low boredom thresholds. This can be difficult to cope with and have an isolating effect on them as others find these characteristics unattractive in potential friends.

They may also show a tendency to blurt out inappropriate, often personal, comments. This of course does little for relationships or integration with their peers. They may also appear rude or saying halfway through a sentence and seem inattentive. All this requires a great deal of patience from everyone.

Practical Tips

- When giving a list of instructions, break it down. Many people would remember the order in which to do things to visualising themselves actually doing it; individuals with

ADHD/ADD repeat the sequence to themselves. This is effective unless something disrupts their chain of thought and they lose their place. Giving reminders during the task is helpful too.

- Use structured games and activities in your programme. Activities that require good self-control are not a problem; it is the new or less structured games that 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.
- Individuals with ADHD/ADD may also need help with organisation and remembering times, and places of meetings. In the young persons Patrol, Six or Lodge, suggest note taking to provide reminders or a 'buddy system' where the buddy phones immediately before the meeting to provide a reminder of any changes of time or venue. These reminder systems can lessen the frustration and anxiety, which can lead to inappropriate responses.
- The mood swings and unpredictable reactions brought about by ADHD/ADD can lead to the individual having difficulty in making friends. Support and patience from the other young people and Leaders in the Scout Group is very important. Teamwork skills are invaluable and make success possible.
- Set one small target at a time making it clear and simple. Any reward for completing a task must mean something and be immediate. Try to make praise public whilst keeping discussion of issues that have arisen, private.
- Flexibility is important and taking a break may prove very successful, especially where the individual can take time out them self when they recognise an outburst starting. Recognising their own need and taking steps to address it needs to be seen as a positive, so make sure praise is given.

Further Information

Discuss with the parents the extent to which support is needed and learn any practical tips they have to offer. They may also be able to arrange a chat with their teacher or others helping them

Support Organisations


ADDers.org

Promote awareness to Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and to provide information and as much free practical help as we can to sufferers, both adults and children, and their families in the UK and around the World via their website.

<http://www.adders.org/>

ADDISS

Provide people-friendly information and resources about Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder to anyone who needs assistance - parents, sufferers, teachers or health professionals.

 020 8952 2800

Fax: 020 8952 2909

<http://www.addiss.co.uk/>

NetDoctor ADHD

Written by experts, this UK site contains lots of information for parents, teachers and adults with ADHD. There are sections on causes, diagnosis and treatment as well as practical tips for parenting and school.

<http://premium.netdoktor.com/uk/adhd/index.jsp>