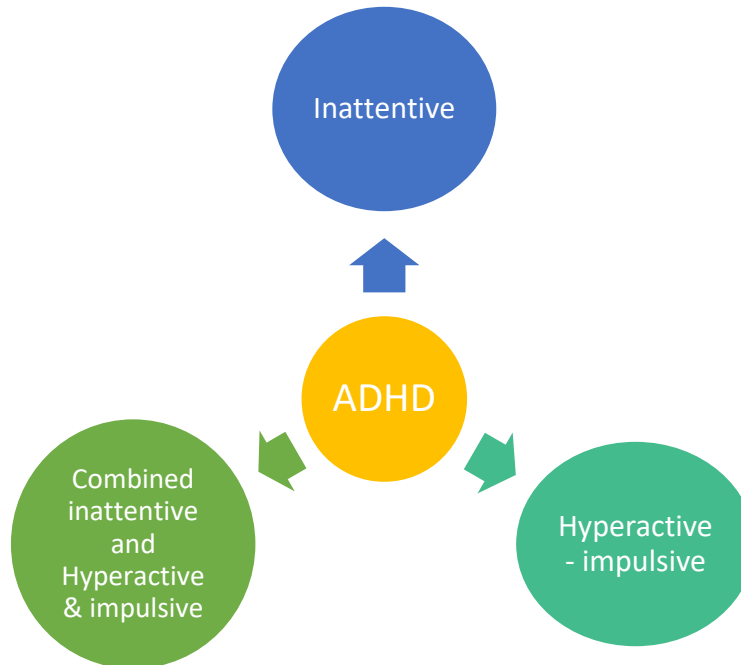


Top tips for understanding ADHD and supporting children in the classroom

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In consultation with Lorraine McAleer 2020

Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder/Attention Deficit Disorder is a complex diagnosis. Individuals with ADHD can be:



As a professional, parent or carer for a child with ADHD there are 3 basic core features of ADHD to consider:

Inattention

- the chemical switch which helps us focus and not daydream is not working effectively

Impulsivity

- the chemical switch which presses pause between thought and action is not working effectively

Hyperactivity

- some of the most recognisable features of hyperactivity relate to difficulties with processing sensory information.

For children with ADHD, not being able to process sensory information and not being able to control their responses to sensory stimuli affects Social, Emotional, Behavioural Well-being and their academic development. The consequences are many.

- Aggression
- Delinquency
- Inappropriate responses across settings (home, school, community) (Dunn and Bennett, 2002)
- Oppositional Defiance Disorder (Ghanizadeh, 2009)
- Separation anxiety disorder (Ghanizadeh, 2013)

- Conduct Disorder (Shimizu, 2014)

They also with struggle with:

- Academic achievement
- Cognitive processing
- Independent functioning
- Fine motor/ perception (Shimizu, 2014).

The overall impact can be long lasting behavioural and mental health problems;

- Low tolerance of disappointment,
- Impatience,
- Anger,
- Anxiety
- Intense emotional reactions
- Low self-esteem,
- Poor frustration tolerance,
- Irritability (Shimizu, 2014)

Some things to bear in mind as you arrange your classroom environment, plan lessons and manage classroom behaviours.

(A) Inattention

1. The child will drift to day-dream (everyone's default 😊) almost immediately if you lose eye contact, move out of physical proximity with them or their group or they lose interest in the subject so:
 - a. Keep as much eye contact as possible
 - b. Use engaging body language, pause and create suspense by looking around before asking questions
 - c. Use your physical presence to keep them alert and engaged
 - d. Plan lessons that are meaningful/ purposeful/ relate to real life
2. Do not seat the child near a child they have shared interests with during new learning sessions. They will always draw their attention – you can't compete.
3. During group work, seat the child with peers who are motivated, interested in the learning and who have good social skills.
4. Give the child an active role in group work, perhaps keeping the group on task.
5. Try not to give them the resource monitor job – too much of a risk for getting lost on the way back (For movement breaks; see C1).
6. Encourage peer tutoring
7. Avoid distracting stimuli. Try not to place the child near heaters, doors or windows or other potential distractions.
8. Inattention can lead to loss of information. Either the information is coming to quickly, they get physically distracted or you trigger a thought process that takes their minds on a tangent of thinking. Whatever the reason, information gets lost.
 - a. Make directions clear and concise and be consistent with daily instructions
 - b. Check in on the child's group before independent work, to review first steps.
 - c. Use a desktop whiteboard to leave visual reminders, use whole class visual reminders e.g. IWB or add reminders to the worksheets.

- d. Maximum visual, minimum words
- e. Plan tasks that allow the child to experience success, with a little bit of challenge
- 9. Give children one step to complete then check on progress. Set a timer, if the child would respond well to it (some don't).
- 10. Test knowledge, not attention span.

(B) Impulsivity

1. Remember, times of physical relocation or transitions can be tricky. Impulsive responses can occur because of sensory stimulation, social interaction, and/or uncertainty about where to go and what to do next.
2. Have a visual schedule and make sure there is a symbol for unexpected change.
3. Set clear rules and expectations for transition times about:
 - a. How we pack away our things;
 - b. How the class lines up;
 - c. Where the class lines up;
 - d. Who leads the line;
 - e. Where the child is to be in the line that week (even if they are not the class leader).
4. Set clear rules about what happens during an unexpected change (see above)
5. Perhaps set a peer buddy who guides the child at such times through the transition
6. Let the child know what will be happening on school trips. Give them a personal schedule of events to refer to.
7. Monitor them closely on extra-curricular activities such as educational outings
8. Establish a contract explaining the child's role in trying to make good choices and the adult's role in supporting them.
9. Set clear expectations, rewards and consequences with the child

(C) Hyperactivity and sensory processing difficulties

1. Children with ADHD are often (not always) **under-sensitive** to movement and so seek movement. Build in movement breaks, like a 'thinking walk' with a peer or c/a after a seated activity. This will allow the child to talk through their task and get movement before returning to his/her seat and a settled class (Minimises distraction – see A5). They need to move safely. Here are some other ideas.

link to a range of fidget and attention products





<https://www.learningspaceuk.co.uk/additional-support-c13062/fidget-toys-attention-skills-c13162>

2. Provide the use of a weighted jacket (10-15 minutes max) or lap-toy during seated tasks to help them feel 'grounded', reducing unwanted movement seeking behaviours and improving focus.

Link to range of weighted items



<https://www.learningspaceuk.co.uk/sensory-needs-c13008/proprioceptive-body-awareness-c14125/weighted-deep-pressure-c14128>

3. Some children with ADHD have poor visuo-motor perception and this can impact accuracy of fine movements, including pencil grasp and reading, spelling and handwriting more challenging. Some can seek deep pressure in inappropriate ways – e.g. nipping, hitting. They may not be aware of how hard they are nipping or how rough they are being. Provide deep

pressure alternatives e.g. spiky hand-sized ball, Plasticine © or firm, squeezable objects. These can have the additional benefit of increasing focus and temporarily improving visuo-motor processing.

<https://www.learningspaceuk.co.uk/additional-support-c13062/fidget-toys-attention-skills-c13162>



4. Children with ADHD are often touch sensitive, impacting emotional sensitivity; girls more than boys. Seat them with space to one side when possible so that are not bumping into another child or at risk of being touched unexpectedly.
5. Some children with ADHD are **under-sensitive** to sound. They struggle to hear everything, they can't pick out your voice and miss your instructions and teaching. Don't put head phones on them. If you do, you reduce the information they are trying to receive even more – sensory deprivation. This can lead to frustration and outbursts. It can also lead the child to make noises of their own or shout. Try to keep noise at a minimum when new learning or a new skill is expected so it easier for them to process what you say.

BUT

6. Some children with ADHD are **over-sensitive** to sound. They hear everything and so get distracted and overwhelmed, or may make their own sounds to over-ride background sound. Ear-defenders and ear plugs can reduce background noise and enhance concentration, however, explain the use of these before offering the choice of this resource to the child. A quiet class will work for this child too.



<https://www.learningspaceuk.co.uk/sensory-needs-c13008/sound-c13009/ear-defenders-c14426>

7. Stimulants taken by children with ADHD can increase their **sensitivity** to visual stimulus e.g. classroom lighting and busy worksheets.
 - a. Provide worksheets with reduced information
 - b. Provide a class space which is less visually cluttered
 - c. Encourage tidy desks/work surfaces
 - d. Coloured overlays of coloured screens can reduce glare



<https://www.learningspaceuk.co.uk/sensory-needs-c13008/visual-c13010/visual-strain-c13059/a4-coloured-overlays-single-p13320>

8. Children with ADHD have difficulty with multi-sensory processing, especially in busy classroom environments. Incorporate relaxation times, e.g. Take Ten, before they become overwhelmed.



<https://www.learningspaceuk.co.uk/sensory-needs-c13008/visual-c13010/visual-strain-c13059/a4-coloured-overlays-single-p13320>

Developing a good working relationship with the child

1. Ensure that the child knows that you understand their struggles, and have a sense of humour!
2. Agree an unobtrusive and appropriate way for the child to access your advice and support.
3. Encourage pupil independence, becoming less reliant on the teacher.
4. Ensure that a communication diary or online forum e.g. SEESAW, is set up between the parent and teacher.
5. Work with parents on extending useful strategies from school to the home. Work as a team!

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