



UNDERSTANDING ADHD

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WHAT IS ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurological condition defined by a consistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactive impulsivity which interferes with daily living in at least two life domains such as home or school.

WHAT CAUSES ADHD?

The exact cause of ADHD is unknown however, there seems to be a strong genetic link as ADHD appears to run in families. Other environmental factors thought to lead to ADHD include:

- Exposure to pesticides or lead in early childhood
- Premature birth or low birth weight
- Brain injury
- Prenatal exposure to drugs and/or alcohol
- Lack of early attachment
- Childhood PTSD.

TYPES OF ADHD

There are three sub-types of ADHD recognised by the American Psychiatric Society in the diagnostic guide, the DSM-V. For an ADHD diagnosis an individual needs to display 6 of the 9 symptoms listed under a type. A person with a diagnosis of a combined type will display 6 or more symptoms of both types.

Primarily Hyperactive-Impulsive

1. Fidgety
2. Frequently moving
3. Restless
4. Noisy
5. Always on the go
6. Talkative
7. Impulsive reactions
8. Struggles to wait their turn
9. Disruptive.

Primarily Inattentive

1. Careless mistakes
2. Short attention span
3. Poor listening skills
4. No follow-through
5. Disorganisation
6. 'Laziness' or 'apathy'
7. Misplacing things
8. Distractability
9. Forgetfulness.

SYMPTOMS OF ADHD

There are clear behaviours that we see from children with ADHD but, the disorder is much more complex than just 'surface' issues. There are many less overt, but no less problematic, issues that accompany ADHD.

Impulsivity

Blurts answers out, lacks self-control, interrupts, tells untruths, intrudes, talks back, loses temper.

Hyperactivity

Restless, talks a lot, fidgets, can't sit still, always on the go.

Inattention

Disorganised, doesn't follow through, forgetful, doesn't pay attention, doesn't seem to listen, makes careless mistakes, loses things, doesn't do school work.

Neurotransmitter deficits

Insufficient levels of dopamine, norepinephrine and serotonin lead to difficulty with executive functioning and neural processes.

Sleep issues

Doesn't get restful sleep, can't fall asleep, can't wake up for school, sleeps in class, irritable and morning battles with parent/carers

Impaired sense of time

Doesn't judge the passing of time correctly, doesn't have the skills to plan ahead, is late, has difficulty estimating the time tasks take, impatient, hates waiting.

Doesn't easily learn from rewards and consequences

Seemingly unable to delay gratification.

Immaturity

Acts less mature than biological age.

Weak executive functioning

Issues with working memory, recall, internalising language, controlling emotions, complex problem solving.

ADHD OR TRAUMA?

It is recognised that there is overlap between the symptoms of ADHD and childhood trauma.

Trauma

- Feelings of fear, helplessness, uncertainty, vulnerability
- Increased arousal, edginess and agitation
- Avoidance of reminders of trauma
- Irritability, quick to anger
- Feelings of shame
- Dissociation, feelings of unreality or being 'outside ones body'
- Continually feeling on alert for threat or danger
- Unusually reckless, aggressive or self-destructive behaviours.

ADHD

- Difficulty sustaining attention
- Struggling to follow instructions
- Difficulty with organisation
- Fidgeting or squirming
- Difficulty waiting or taking turns
- Talking excessively
- Losing things necessary for tasks or activities
- Interrupting or intruding upon others.

Overlap (both trauma and ADHD)

- Difficulty concentrating and learning in school
- Easily distracted
- Often doesn't seem to listen
- Disorganisation
- Hyperactive
- Restlessness
- Difficulty sleeping.

HOW CAN I SUPPORT MYSELF?



Education and skill building.



Keep a simple and consistent routine.



Remain calm and praise good behaviour.



Join a support group.



Engage in self care.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Sleep

- Consult a medical professional
- Record symptomology in a sleep diary
- Limit caffeine and large meals before bed
- Practice good sleep habits
- Restrict sleep to bedtime
- Keep the bedroom cool and dark
- Medication
- Weighted blankets.

Routine

- Structure in a child's day to day life allows them to feel secure, ADHD or not
- Supporting children in a routine will increase confidence and productivity
- A household routine gives ownership over his/her responsibilities
- Collaborative family rules
- Therapeutic parenting style
- Homework completed as soon as they get home to prevent fatigue
- Balance screen time
- Use a timer for tasks scheduling breaks
- Use goal setting and reinforce with rewards.

Discipline Framework

- Be clear and proactive.
- Be consistent with the rules you enforce.
- Talk about rights, rules and limits often.
- Use encouragement and support for broken rules.
- Instill a sense of social responsibility.

BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT PLANS

If your child is diagnosed with ADHD, you'll likely work with a health professional to develop a behavioural support plan. Implementing positive behaviour support strategies help increase cooperative behaviour and reduce challenging behaviours.

These usually cover a combination of:

- Behaviour Support Strategies
- Therapeutic approaches
- Medication.

While all 3 of these are effective strategies, used in conjunction with one another they can provide optimal long term results.