



Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Tips, Facts & Suggestions

ADHD FACTS

ADHD is a behavioural disorder that effects every aspect of the sufferers' life and puts their families under enormous stress.

- ◆ An estimated 10% of the population is suffering from ADHD.
- ◆ Males are 3 times more likely to have ADHD than females.
- ◆ Women and girls tend to be more often effected by ADD without the hyperactivity component.
- ◆ ADHD is equally spread throughout all ability levels, social classes and ethnic communities.
- ◆ It is most probably caused by a lack of the chemical DOPAMINE in the frontal lobe area of the brain.
- ◆ It is a genetic disorder and can therefore be passed on within families.
- ◆ ADHD is a lifelong condition.

The diagnosis is made via rating scales, interviews and observations. The people involved in the diagnosis are: parents/carers, teachers, health visitors, general practitioners, psychiatrists and educational psychologists.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ADHD

Positive Aspects:

Affectionate, intuitive, quick thinking, witty, easy to motivate, creative eg; art, design, language, drama, music, poetry.

Behavioural Symptoms:

Inconsistency, sensation seeking, poor social skills, aggressiveness, impulsiveness, insatiability, daydreaming, disorganisation.

Mental Symptoms:

Inattentiveness, poor concentration, obsessive thinking, poor short term memory, learning difficulties, mood swings, poor self-esteem.

Physical Symptoms:

Hyperactivity, sleeping problems, poor concentration, enuresis (bed wetting).

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Giving the child positive signals is the most important part of behaviour management. It establishes a good relationship between all concerned and is successful with every age group.

- ◆ Accept that the child's behaviour is different. Don't compare him/her with anybody else.
- ◆ Be aware of all the things that the child can do and does well.
- ◆ Comment on these things frequently and immediately.
- ◆ Don't mix positive with negative messages i.e. "You have cleaned your bedroom really well. Maybe next time you will get all the dust off the shelves".
- ◆ Be sincere and specific about your compliments. Avoid generalised feedback such as "Good girl" or "Well done".
- ◆ When you give negative feedback, focus on the unwanted behaviour and never on the person.
- ◆ Be motivating when you give instructions. Say "When you have calmed down, then you can watch your TV programme". Instead of "If you don't calm down, then you can't".
- ◆ Give the child plenty of opportunity to succeed and therefore build up his/her self-esteem.
- ◆ Make sure the child knows that you believe that he/she can be successful.

NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

Planned Ignoring

Sample Behaviours: Interrupts parent's conversations, is never satisfied, doesn't drop an issue, swears (for attention), burps or makes other rude noises, sulks, begs, clowns around, stamps feet, complains constantly, talks excessively.

- ◆ Ignore the behaviour but keep your eye on the child.
- ◆ No verbal contact: don't get drawn into an argument.
- ◆ No eye-contact: turn away in case you smile or frown.
- ◆ Don't overdo it, this will take quite some time to be affective.
- ◆ If you find it difficult to ignore the child, try using a personal stereo.
- ◆ Especially at first be prepared for even worse behaviour.
- ◆ Respond immediately when the desired behaviour is presented and give praise.
- ◆ Be consistent and patient, it's not easy. This method is suitable for all age groups.

WITHDRAWAL OF PRIVILEGES

Sample Behaviours: Leaves room in a mess, doesn't listen to instructions, loses everything, doesn't come home on time, doesn't get ready for appointments/school, doesn't stay at the dinner table, lies, is persistently defiant.

- ◆ Give clear statements of what you expect. Don't say "Let's clean up your room", if you don't intend to help. Or "Would you like your lunch now?" if there is not really a choice.
- ◆ Don't choose unrealistic lengths for the withdrawal. The younger the child, the shorter the time.
- ◆ Make the older child responsible for their actions. If he/she doesn't get ready in time, don't offer to drive him/her. If the child loses something, don't replace it straight away.
- ◆ Once you have decided on a measure, make sure that you stick with your decision.
- ◆ The withdrawal method should only be used for one misbehaviour at the time, not for a whole bunch of offences.

TIME - OUT

Sample Behaviours: Hits, bites, kicks, spits, scratches, makes fun of parents, threatens parents and/or siblings, damages property, acts dangerously, pushes others, throws objects, mistreats pets, swears (to hurt), breaks out in sudden rages.

- ◆ Never use physical punishment or ridicule the child.
- ◆ Don't confuse 'Time-Out' with 'Grounding'. Grounding restricts you as well as the child. It is not effective and causes high levels of tension.
- ◆ Put the child in a different room, preferable not their bedroom. Just do it for a short period of time.
- ◆ Don't shut the door on young children and never lock a child in.
- ◆ Be calm and 'matter of fact'. If the child leaves the room and the behaviour is still present, put him/her back without showing any emotion. You may have to do this many times.
- ◆ Use an egg timer for young children who can't read the clock, so they know when their 'Time-Out' is over.
- ◆ When the child returns, don't give a lecture. Let him/her start with a clean slate.

- ◆ If you have a defiant teenager, remove yourself from the scene. It is not advisable to engage in a power-struggle at this level.

OUTINGS WITH ADHD - CHILDREN

Possible problems: running away, getting into dangerous situations (roads, water, escalators), leaving with strangers, refusing to move, temper tantrums, creating havoc in shops.

- ◆ Avoid any long shopping trips if you can. Try and involve the child as much as possible.
- ◆ You **must** ensure that the child is safe, even if you have to put him/her on reins.
- ◆ Teach your child from an early age to be wary of strangers.
- ◆ Stay calm during temper tantrums and non-compliance. Don't engage in lengthy arguments and ignore unhelpful comments by other people.
- ◆ Motivate your child with "When you do, then you can" messages.
- ◆ Don't nag about unimportant issues.
- ◆ Reward and praise any desired behaviour immediately.
- ◆ Don't expect too much. If the child is very anxious, leave.

RELAXATION IDEAS FOR PARENTS/CARERS

- ◆ Take time for yourself. Give yourself rewards if things have gone well.
- ◆ Do regular exercise (swimming, cycling, jogging).
- ◆ Use the self-talk technique. Tell yourself repeatedly that you are doing a good job. It is strange at first, but it works.
- ◆ Take up singing, either with or without your children.
- ◆ Join your local support group and organise social outings and babysitting circles.
- ◆ Use a pillow or a punchbag to release pressure.
- ◆ Give family therapy a go if things get too bad.
- ◆ Do relaxation exercises. For example this one:
 1. Sit up straight in a comfortable chair.
 2. Breathe in from the abdomen and through the nose.
 3. Breathe out slowly through the mouth.
 4. Visualize yourself in a calm, relaxing place.

POSITIVE HABITS

- ◆ Don't allow ADHD to dominate the family. Make a conscious effort to spend time as a whole unit.
- ◆ Try to look objectively at the way you react to the behaviours.
- ◆ Accept that different people have different approaches. Find some strategies that you are both comfortable with.
- ◆ Spend some time alone with your partner. You need to know that you are a couple as well as parents.
- ◆ Have regular family meetings, where you discuss the ground rules and any acute concerns.
- ◆ Use the co-parenting technique. Don't give your child a quick answer to any demand. Check with your partner first if possible.
- ◆ Split the children up between the parents and rotate. This is especially important if you have unaffected children as well.

HOBBIES AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

- ◆ The ADHD - child's best friend is the computer, whether it is a PC, a games console or a game boy. These devices will keep the child occupied for hours and teaches him/her valuable skills.
- ◆ The most recommended sports activities are Swimming, Judo, Tae Kwan Do, Boxing and Football if the child can stay on task.
- ◆ Cycling is a great way to gain some independence and to burn off excess energy. Make sure the child cycles in a fairly safe area and teach him/her basic road skills.
- ◆ If you live near water, give Fishing a go. The quiet and non-competitive atmosphere does wonders for some ADHD - children.
- ◆ Gymnastics, Dancing and Athletics are good if the emphasis is not on style and performance.
- ◆ Many ADHD sufferers love to cook. If you can, join in and help with the cleaning up.
- ◆ If your child shows any artistic tendencies, give lots of encouragement. Many people with ADHD are successful artists in all fields.

SIBLINGS AND ADHD

- ◆ There is a high level of rejection from siblings of ADHD sufferers. Older ones are usually more negative than younger ones.
- ◆ Siblings often find your treatment of the ADHD - child unfair. "**We** would never get away with that!"
- ◆ The ADHD - child taunts, pesters, interrupts and annoys his/her sisters and brothers.
- ◆ He/she destroys their work or their toys.
- ◆ Family outings get ruined for everyone. "**We** didn't do anything. Why do **we** have to leave?"
- ◆ Siblings feel that they don't get enough of their parent's time, because it is all devoted to dealing with the difficult child.
- ◆ Siblings will frequently get their sister or brother with ADHD into trouble. They know exactly how to trigger the desired response and then force the parent to pay them attention.

TIPS TO COMBAT SIBLING RIVALRY

- ◆ The brothers and sisters must learn that ADHD is a form of disability and that their sibling doesn't do things on purpose all of the time.
- ◆ They must be taught that the child with ADHD has to be treated differently at times.
- ◆ The sibling's room/s has to be off limits for the child. If they are sharing, then you have to establish clear personal spaces, e.g. curtains or shelves as dividers.
- ◆ Get locks for cupboards and doors if necessary to protect personal belongings.
- ◆ Give extra rewards if the siblings have handled a situation well.
- ◆ Make an older ADHD - child responsible for the damage that they have caused, e.g. cleaning up or paying towards replacement.
- ◆ If there is trouble, keep the children apart. Otherwise implement the "Time - Out" method.
- ◆ Beware of placing the blame on anybody. If you didn't see it, don't say anything.