

## FACT SHEET

# Supporting children with ADHD?



ADHD is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. It is a developmental disorder that begins in early childhood, affecting the brain's ability to pay attention, regulate emotions and behaviours, control thoughts, impulses, words and actions and energy levels.



### Cause:

The exact causes of ADHD are unknown. ADHD is not caused by poor parenting. It has biological and genetic foundations:

- **Genetics:** Strong hereditary component – often runs in families
- **Brain Structure & Function:** Differences in brain regions involved in attention and impulse control
- **Environmental Factors:** Premature birth, low birth weight, prenatal exposure to alcohol/tobacco
- **Other factors:** Lead exposure, brain injuries



### Diagnosis:

Diagnosis can only be given by a team of health professionals, following several months of assessment. Diagnosis is often not given until the child reaches school age and beyond, as it is clearer to see inconsistencies in typical age-related behaviours.

## There are three main types of ADHD:

### 1. Inattentive type

- Difficulty concentrating
- Forgetting instructions
- Often daydreams or gets easily distracted
- Has trouble organizing tasks and following through
- Frequently forgets daily activities or loses items
- Appears not to listen even when spoken to directly

### 2. Hyperactive-Impulsive type

- Fidgets and is often restless
- Has difficulty remaining seated
- Talks excessively or blurts out answers
- Has trouble waiting their turn or interrupts others
- Often acts without thinking
- Loses control of emotions easily
- Is accident prone

### 3. A combination of both types

This is where symptoms don't fall exclusively with the Inattentive or Hyperactive-Impulsive Types. It is when a child has a combination of symptoms from both types.



## ADHD in Early Education and Care (ECEC) and school settings:

Children with ADHD may present very differently depending on their type of ADHD (inattentive, hyperactive-impulsive, or combined), their age, and individual personality. They can also be impacted by other additional needs e.g. AuDHD, which is a combination of Autism Spectrum Disorder and ADHD.

### ADHD related behaviours that Educators may observe:

- Struggling to sit still during group time, constant movement or fidgeting
- Difficulty following multi-step instructions
- Easily distracted by sounds, sights, or other children
- Trouble transitioning between activities
- Forgetting belongings (hats, lunchboxes, notes)
- Risk taking behaviours
- Outbursts and impulsivity
- Difficulty engaging in activities

These behaviours aren't intentional they're due to the way the child's brain processes information and regulates impulses.

It's important to note that these behaviours can also be observed in a neurotypically developing child. This is why diagnosis by a team of health professionals is very important.

### Practical strategies that support children with ADHD in an ECEC or school setting:

- Provide calming, relaxation spaces: Create a low stimulation chill out space where children can reset. Resource with weighted lap toys, chewable toys, fidget spinners. Encourage relaxation and calming activities in the environment e.g. daily yoga, mindfulness, soft music time etc.
- Create visual routines / schedules: Use picture-based timetables or first-then boards. Predictability reduces anxiety and improves behaviour.
- Introduce timers: Sand timers, timer clocks, liquid timers, visual timers or visual countdown apps.
- Give positive reinforcement: Focus on what the child is doing right. Use specific praise ("Great job packing away the blocks!"). This will support the child's confidence building and self-esteem.
- Use effective communication: Get down to the child's level and say the child's name to encourage connection before giving information/directions. This will help with their understanding and concentration.
- Ensure clear, simple instructions: Break directions into small, manageable steps.

- Re-direct to another activity: If a child becomes over-active e.g., redirect to music and movement experiences or outdoor play.
- Begin transitions with warnings: Give 2-5-minute heads-ups before changing tasks or settings.
- Promote activities to support child's confidence and self-esteem: Reading social stories about sharing, turn taking, listening and role modelling appropriate body language can help develop social skills.
- Engage in regular physical play: This encourages gross-motor activity and assists with burning excess energy e.g. indoor or outdoor, obstacle courses, throwing and catching bean bags, team games etc.
- Integrate sensory play into daily routines (e.g., kinetic sand, fidget tools) and support turn taking by ensuring there are enough resources.
- Develop visual cues to support memory (e.g., photos of how the room should look when clean).
- Provide additional support when possible, during challenging parts of the day (like group time or pack-up).

### Strengths of children with ADHD

Children with ADHD often bring so much to the learning environment!

- Creative thinkers: Often approach problems from new angles.
- Curious explorers: Asking "why?" and wanting to dive deep into topics of interest.
- Energetic and enthusiastic: Can bring life and fun to group activities.
- Socially driven: May crave connection and form strong relationships with Educators, even if there is a struggle with social cues.

