



If your child has ADHD, or you think they might, we have information on professional help and diagnosis. We've also got practical advice on supporting them with their ADHD and mental health.

Guide Menu

Hide menu



Guide contents

On this page

1. [What is ADHD?](#)

2. [What to do if you think your child might have ADHD](#)
3. [ADHD diagnosis and support](#)
4. [What you can do to support your child with ADHD](#)
5. [The impact of ADHD on your child's mental health](#)
6. [Working with school if your child has ADHD](#)
7. [ADHD in teenagers and beyond](#)
8. [Useful helplines and websites](#)

[View our guide for young people](#)

What is ADHD?

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects behaviour and concentration.

Children and young people with ADHD often seem unusually restless, impulsive or distracted. They may speak or act without thinking, struggle with organisation, find it hard to focus or appear to be always on the go. Some people with ADHD do not experience hyperactivity. This used to be called attention deficit disorder (ADD), though this term is no longer used officially.

ADHD is not a mental health condition or a learning disability. But children and young people with ADHD may also have other



conditions or experience mental health problems.

Living with ADHD can be very challenging, for children and young people as well as for their parents and carers. But the right diagnosis and support can make a big difference to a child's learning, life skills and relationships, as well as making family life easier. There is also lots you can do as a parent or carer to help your child manage the things they find difficult.

What are the most common signs of ADHD?

A child with ADHD may:

- be easily distracted, finding it difficult to start or finish tasks
- often feel unable to concentrate
- often feel restless or fidgety
- be very talkative, often interrupting or blurting things out
- act impulsively, for example doing something before considering consequences or being prone to taking risks
- be easily angry or frustrated, or struggle to deal with emotions
- find making or maintaining friendships



It's important to understand that age and gender can also affect how someone with ADHD behaves. This can make it harder to spot signs of ADHD, particularly in girls. Girls are more likely to be undiagnosed or

difficult

- be disorganised, for instance often losing things or being late
- lack awareness of time

Every child or young person with ADHD is an individual and they may not display all of these behaviours. Many of these behaviours are normal in younger children. They can also be caused by traumatic experiences. So if your child is showing some of these signs, it does not necessarily mean they have ADHD.

wrongly diagnosed with other conditions.

Typically, the signs of ADHD develop in early childhood and they may become particularly noticeable at times of significant change, such as when a child starts or changes school.

What to do if you think your child might have ADHD

If your child frequently experiences some of these things and it's affecting their day-to-day life, discuss your concerns with your child's GP. Before doing this, talk to your child's teacher and the school special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) about what they have noticed.

The GP may want to refer your child for assessment, as ADHD can only be diagnosed by a specialist such as a child and adolescent psychiatrist or paediatrician.



Sometimes parents are reluctant to pursue assessment. They may be worried about 'labelling' their child or about stigma, or they may prefer to watch and wait. These feelings are normal. But parents and young people who do seek diagnosis can find it helps them access the right support, understand and manage challenges, and identify individual strengths.

We have more information about getting support from the GP, CAMHS and school in our guide.

**Getting support from
mental health services** >

ADHD diagnosis and support



ADHD assessment is usually done through the NHS mental health service for children and young people, known as CAMHS. Diagnosis is most commonly made in childhood. In the majority of cases, young people continue to experience ADHD behaviours and qualities into adulthood.

There is no single, definitive test for ADHD. Specialists will base a clinical diagnosis on their observations of your child, discussions

and questionnaires (with you and your child), and information from your child's school.

They will consider how long the behaviours have been present, how much they impact daily life and whether they might be due to another condition. The NHS states that around 60-80% of children with ADHD have at least one other condition (such as autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, anxiety or behaviour issues). In some cases, this means a child may be given more than one diagnosis.

You and your child should be offered support and advice to help you manage some of the challenges that might be affecting day-to-day life. Medication and talking therapies may also be offered. These options should be discussed with you when your child is diagnosed.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) provides guidelines for NHS treatments. The support they recommend for ADHD is outlined in the their guidelines. Your child may be offered:



Therapy

Therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can support children and young people with ADHD to understand themselves and find coping strategies when things are hard. For more information about therapy, see our parent guide to counselling and therapy.



Medication

Many children and young people with ADHD do not take medication. But medication may sometimes be offered to support someone in managing challenges that are affecting their day-to-day life. Medication should only ever be prescribed and overseen by a specialist.



Parenting support

You may also be offered ADHD-focused parent training. This does not mean your parenting is somehow wrong. It is designed to provide support and to empower you with specific strategies and skills that can help your family thrive.



“

Getting my ADHD diagnosis and medication meant I could concentrate, enjoy learning and actually do really well.

”

“

He was late, losing things. It was exhausting and frustrating but learning that a lot of it was due to his ADHD gave me more

realizing that a lot of it was due to his ADHD gave me more empathy.

”



“

Jack is still perennially late, disorganised and impulsive; but he's also energetic, original and creative. The medication is helping him make the most of all of that.

”

Why ADHD medication was the right decision for my son

What you can do to support your child with ADHD



Be understanding



Give simple instructions



Set clear boundaries



Involve the family



Build healthy routines



Help with organisation



Praise your child



Manage triggers



Recognise strengths





Find local support



“

My son has had times of feeling down about his ADHD, but increasingly he is able to recognise that it also part of his creativity, originality and energy.

”

The impact of ADHD on your child's mental health

Any child or young person can struggle with their mental health and wellbeing, whether or not they have ADHD. This might be caused by things like family change, bullying, exam stress or a traumatic event.

But having ADHD may also mean your child has extra challenges – such as social difficulties, struggling to manage their emotions or getting into trouble at school. This can leave them more vulnerable to low self-esteem, anxiety or depression.



Children and young people with ADHD frequently have other developmental or mental health conditions. It is important to ensure they have the appropriate support for these.

As a parent there is a lot you can do to support your child with their wellbeing and mental health:

- Encourage your child to talk about how they are feeling with you. Our [starting a conversation guide](#) has ideas for keeping communication open
- If you feel your child may have a mental health problem or another condition alongside ADHD, discuss your concerns with their GP or ADHD specialist.

“

Our son's challenging behaviour with ADHD had an enormous impact on the whole family, as we and his brothers bore the brunt of his anger.

”

“

The hardest thing for me is that I get angry so easily. I can't control it and it makes me feel awful afterwards.

”

Working with school if your child has ADHD

ADHD is a special education need (SEN), and it may be referred to as a specific learning difference (SpLD). Your child is entitled to appropriate support to help them thrive socially and educationally. This could include potential adjustments in certain situations, such as extra time or rest breaks for exams, movement breaks in lessons, written instructions for tasks and a seating plan that minimises distractions.

Discuss the diagnosis and needs with the school's SENCO, taking a list of your concerns and background information to the meeting.

Your child may be entitled to an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) which details the support they need and how it will be provided. (The National Autistic Society has helpful information about [EHC plans](#)).

Good communication between you and school can be really helpful in ensuring your child thrives in education and meets their potential. Our parent guide to support has more advice on talking to school or college.

Getting support from mental health services >

ADHD in teenagers and beyond

If your child is a teenager or young person, their needs and the support you give may well be different from when they were younger. They may like to read our [young person's guide to ADHD and mental health](#). But there are still many ways you can help.



Building independence





Managing their support



Supporting transitions



Understanding new challenges



Looking after your own wellbeing

Parenting a child with ADHD can sometimes be isolating, upsetting or exhausting. Sometimes parents feel judged or blamed by others (unjustifiably as parenting does not cause ADHD). It is entirely understandable if you are finding things difficult.

It's important to recognise the impact the situation is having on you, and think about ways you can take care of yourself – including getting support from other people so that you can take some time off. It's okay to ask for help when you need it, and to share your worries with someone you trust. We have advice on looking after yourself as well as your child.

Parents' guide to looking after yourself >

Useful helplines and websites

While we take care to ensure that the organisations we signpost to provide high quality information and advice, we cannot take responsibility for any specific pieces of advice they may offer. We encourage parents and carers to always explore the website of a linked service or organisation to understand who they are and what support they offer before engaging with them.



YoungMinds Parents Helpline



We support parents and carers who are concerned about their child or young person's mental health. Our Parents Helpline provides detailed advice and information, emotional support and signposting.

You can speak to us over the phone or chat to us online.

You can speak to us over webchat between 9.30am and 4pm from Monday-Friday. When we're closed, you can still leave us a message in the chat. We'll reply to you by email in 3-5 working days.

Opening times:
9.30am-4pm, Monday-Friday

0808 802 5544

Parents Helpline

ADHD and You



Provides information and resources including medication details, tips for parents/carers and checklists for school and medical appointments.

 **ADHD and You**

ADHD UK



Information and resources on subjects including diagnosis, medication, education and employment, as well as online support groups.

 **ADHD UK**

Scottish ADHD Coalition



A directory of local services supporting young people, families and adults with ADHD in Scotland.

 **Scottish ADHD Coalition**

ADDISS



ADDISS (The National Attention Deficit Disorder Information and Support Service) provides information, moderated online forums and local support groups.

Advice line: Tuesday – Thursday, 9:30am -5pm

020 8952 2800

info@addiss.co.uk



Contact



Provides support, information and advice for families with children with disabilities or other conditions including ADHD. Also runs family workshops and activities.

Free online chat service available.

Opening times:
9:30am - 5pm, Monday - Friday

0808 808 3555

helpline@contact.org.uk



YoungSibs



UK-wide online support service for siblings under 18 who have a brother or sister who is disabled or has special educational needs or a serious long-term condition including ADHD.



Parenting Mental Health



Digital support community and charity offering information, peer support, facilitated listening circles, mentoring and courses for parents of children with mental health difficulties.

Founder Suzanne Alderson's book *Never Let Go - How to Parent Your Child Through Mental Illness* (Penguin, 2020) outlines how she supported her daughter to recovery after she became depressed and suicidal.



This page was reviewed in March 2022.

It was created with parents and carers with lived experience of supporting their child or young person with ADHD.

We will next review the page in 2025.

YoungMinds is a proud member of PIF TICK – the UK's quality mark for trusted health information.



Help us improve our content



Website by **element**⁷⁸