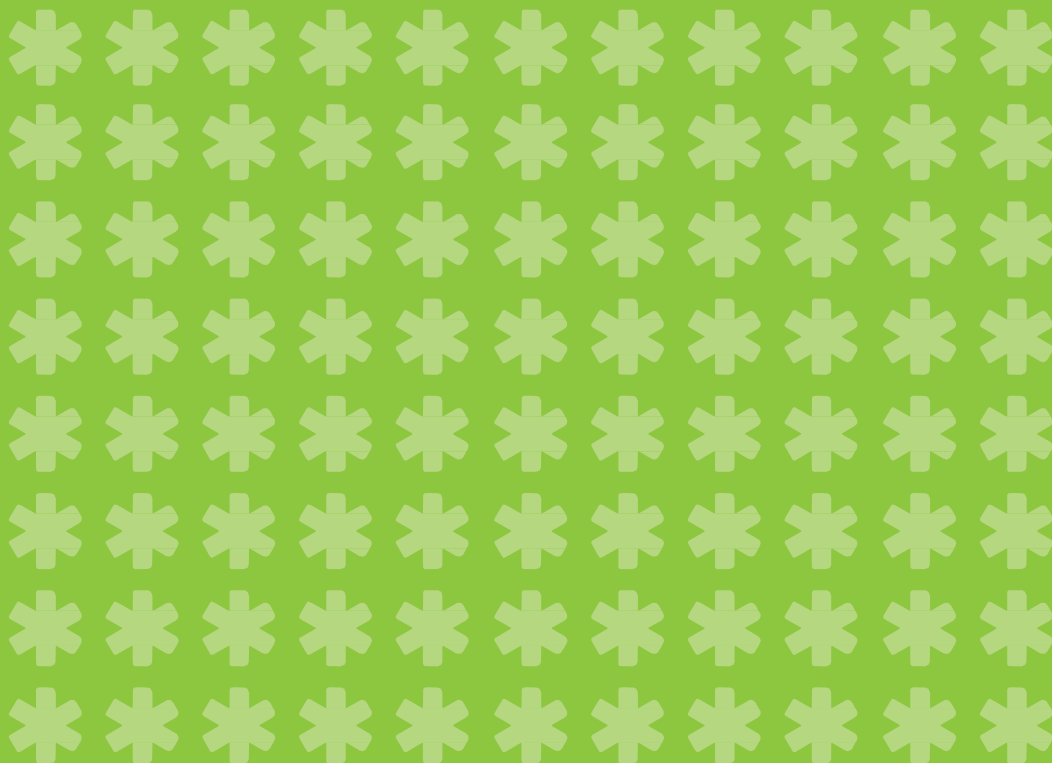


Service information guide

Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service

ADHD - information for families



Welcome to the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service

ADHD is a developmental disorder, often hereditary, and is thought to be caused by under functioning of the frontal lobe and an imbalance in the neurotransmitter chemicals, dopamine and noradrenaline.

What is ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is not a new condition; in fact it was first described 100 years ago, and affects between 2-5% of all young people. ADHD is a developmental disorder, often hereditary, and is thought to be caused by under functioning of the frontal lobe and an imbalance in the neurotransmitter chemicals, dopamine and noradrenaline. ADHD is more common in boys than in girls, and the boys tend to show more hyperactive and disruptive behaviour. Many girls, with ADHD, remain undiagnosed as they tend to be less disruptive than boys. These girls may appear to be 'in a world of their own'.

ADHD is a long-term condition which can affect learning and behaviour during their school years, as well as their behaviour at home and during play. But with the right support young people with ADHD can live happy and fulfilling lives. They can be intelligent and creative. The problems of ADHD may ease with time, although the condition can last into adulthood, but coming to terms with ADHD makes it easier to deal with.

ADHD is not an excuse for difficult behaviour but a biological condition which is caused by a subtle difference in the fine tuning of the brain. For some young people it is like trying to watch TV while somebody is constantly changing channels – there is a constant flow of changing images, sounds and information. For others it is like having part of the picture out of focus – it is as if the signal is not getting through properly. There are various studies looking into the cause of ADHD. Some suggest that certain areas of the brain are smaller, while others are larger, there can be an imbalance of transmitters in the brain or the chemicals don't work properly.

Some of the signals, in the brain, don't reach the part of the brain responsible for self-control. They act without thinking and don't know when to stop. It is hard to focus on anything. On average, young people with ADHD have a maturity level 2-3 years behind their peers.

The young person may have a parent or close relative with the same disorder. A parent/relative with ADHD may find it hard to manage their ADHD child consistently and calmly. Poor parenting is not the cause of ADHD. Most parents find their usual style of discipline needs adapting.

Main signs and symptoms

The main signs of ADHD are attention difficulties, impulsiveness, and hyperactivity:

- Inattention – doesn't listen, can't follow through instructions, difficulty being organised, loses things, easily distracted, makes careless mistakes, avoids or dislikes activities that require sustained mental effort (such as schoolwork and homework).
- Impulsive – the young person will speak or act without thinking, interrupt conversations and can't wait for their turn.
- Hyperactivity – the young person may fidget, fiddle and be restless. They can always be on the go and find it difficult to engage in quiet leisure activities.

These behaviours occur in many children, young people and adults so it is important to look at how the person with suspected ADHD is identified. The diagnosis looks at how strong the behaviours are, which predominates, and how well they are being handled. For young people, with ADHD, the symptoms cause significant problems at home and at school and have been obvious from a young age.

There isn't a simple test for ADHD and your specialist will have taken considerable care before diagnosing your child. Some young people with ADHD also have associated conditions such as poor co-ordination, and specific learning difficulties. The treatment for ADHD does not treat these problems but makes the young person more open to remedial teaching.

Each young person is individual and the signs and symptoms they show are unique to them, therefore their treatments needs to take this into account. Treatment involves behavioural advice, support at school and may include the use of medication.

How it feels for the young person with ADHD

Young people with ADHD seem to forget things almost instantly. They do things incorrectly, or not at all. They fall behind in class, and constant interruptions in the classroom cause frustration and upset. Their hyperactivity means that they often touch and break things. They are unable to predict the consequences of their actions, and when they are out, they may behave dangerously.

These young people are often in trouble and unpopular. They find it hard to focus on one thing because something new is always distracting to them. It can be bewildering and it is hard to keep pace.

From the young person's point of view nobody seems to understand. They keep getting told off by parents and teachers, and get wound up by other children. People always seem annoyed with them and it is hard to make and keep friends. They feel as if they get the blame for everything. Life seems pretty miserable and unfair. Nobody can see that their brain isn't receiving signals correctly so they don't get any sympathy.

Family

ADHD affects the whole family. It is confusing for the young person, stressful for the parents and difficult for brothers and sisters. It is often an ordeal being parents of a child with ADHD. It can be exhausting, frustrating, embarrassing and depressing. Parents often feel blamed for poor parenting and can blame themselves. They may feel angry and disappointed. They never know what is going to happen next and dread going to school in case there has been some disaster.

It is important for parents to realise that the young person with ADHD is different and therefore has to be treated in a slightly different way. Understanding the characteristics of ADHD helps to tell apart those behaviours the young person cannot help, as they are part of their make-up, and those which they can be helped to change. When parents start to use behaviour strategies, they may feel that they are repeating things that they have already tried. It is important to realise that change doesn't happen overnight, but with a new approach, parents often see a big difference in their child's behaviour. Young people, with ADHD, are easily distracted, so it is important to keep the home as calm and happy as possible. A stressful home environment can contribute to oppositional and aggressive behaviour.

If you have been trying a strict discipline route, it's time to change direction. If a child is constantly reprimanded there is a danger that they grow up to feel unloved and unaccepted. You will find it easier to draw up a new set of rules so that you all know where you stand. Focus on major misbehaviour and let the petty things pass. Your child will come to recognise the rules and live by them.

Brothers and sisters

Life is often not easy for brothers and sisters of a young person with ADHD. They find that the constant interruptions, nagging and teasing cause friction. The young person seems to hijack everything from doing homework to watching TV or playing with friends. Brothers and sisters may feel that the young person with ADHD gets much more time and attention from their parents and start to resent their sibling who seems to get away with all sorts of things.



It can lead to embarrassment at school if teachers or other pupils keep telling you about your brother or sister's wayward behaviour. For older children it can be serious if they are taunted or irritated while trying to study for exams. Despite all this most adapt and learn how to steer around explosive situations and avoid catching some of the blame.

Brothers and sisters need to understand that the young person with ADHD can be bright and creative but has a problem controlling their behaviour. The whole family needs to make a few allowances and new rules. Some of these rules will help to protect the brothers and sisters, such as not going into each other's bedrooms, or rules about things that cannot be touched.

Living with ADHD - top tips

There is no miracle cure for ADHD but there are some suggestions to help parents to deal with everyday issues. Clear communication of simple, small-step instructions, achievable and consistent rules, and a sensible reward structure can all go a long way to giving better results.

Be positive

- Praise your child when they are good. Tell them when you are pleased that they have done something well, or how pleased you are that they behaved well in a certain situation. Pick out something specific to praise. The improvement to their self-esteem can be enormous.
- Often the young person has something that they are good at. Make the most of the talent that they have by encouraging their feeling of achievement and success.

Keep calm

- Listen to your child with your full attention.
- When your child constantly tries to interrupt and tell you something, remain calm and tell them you are talking at the moment but will talk to them in a minute. If this doesn't work ask them to tell you in two or three key words what they want to tell you. When you have finished your conversation you can remind them of what they wanted to say.

- Young people with ADHD have difficulty expressing themselves as their thoughts are all over the place. Try getting them to explain something by asking what happened first, then what happened next, and so on. It also helps to teach them familiar tasks in sequence so that they can remember what to do next.
- Sometimes they can be quite tactless and appear rude socially. If they have upset someone, quietly take your child aside and explain how the person feels and ask how they would feel if someone said that to them. Remember to praise good behaviour.

Rules

- Establish consistent rules so that the young person knows exactly where they stand. Both parents (and any other carers) must stick to the same rules so that the young person sees a consistent response. Think about things that always cause trouble: annoying brothers and sisters, homework, mealtimes, playing and breaking others toys. Draw up the rules.
- Use a golden rule to ensure that mealtimes are not disrupted e.g. rudeness, insults or touching is not allowed at the table.
- Travelling on long journeys can be difficult. Set out rules for behaviour before you travel. Explain your travel plans and plan regular breaks. Use rewards for good behaviour, perhaps by using tokens for every 15 minutes of peace.
- The hyperactivity and impulsivity of young people with ADHD can lead to them being a danger when out riding their bikes. Make sure your child understands your rules about road safety and wearing a bike helmet and knows the consequences if they break these rules. If rules are broken put the bike away for a set period of time.

Routine

- Young people with ADHD respond well to routines and set sequences for their day. They will become upset, distracted or uncertain if their routines are disrupted. If you know the routines are liable to change, try explaining the changes clearly and simply beforehand so that your child has an idea of what to expect. The more you can keep to routines the calmer your child will be.
- Reminders and prompt lists can help your child learn to become better organised. You can draw up checklists e.g. items they will need for school the next day. Visual reminders such as pictures may help as memory prompts.
- Use regular routines for school days. Have memory joggers and lists to help your child get ready. Timers can be used as reminders to complete tasks, and for a 10-minute warning time before you are due to leave the house. Remind your child that it is their choice if they want to be late, but they will face the consequences at school.
- Make homework time part of your daily routine. Find a suitable place and time for homework. This may be after they have had some time to relax after school, and not late in the evening. Use a quiet place, with no distractions, such as television nearby. Support and encourage your child and allow short breaks between work. Some young people prefer to attend a homework club as they like to keep school and home life separate.
- Build exercise into their routine. Hyperactive children need to use up their energy. Try not to do exercise too near to bedtime.

Avoid the problems

- There are times when your child may constantly create havoc; such as when out shopping. Find a way around the problem; shop while they are at school or ask a friend/family member to come with you or stay at home with the children. Don't knowingly put yourself in a stressful situation.
- Children often copy adults' language and behaviour, so try and watch your own language so that they do not copy you. Sometimes children will try and goad their parents by using bad language. Don't rise to the bait. Make it clear that rudeness and bad language is not acceptable and praise them when they have been polite and show good behaviour.
- Messy bedrooms - try using small rewards, and provide plenty of storage. Clear out rubbish, unused toys and old clothes to reduce clutter.
- Poor sleep can make ADHD symptoms worse. Keep to a good sleep routine. Don't let your child use any gadgets 2 hours before bedtime. Further sleep advice can be given by your ADHD specialist.
- Asking your child to do something often results in arguments as they forget what they are supposed to do. Give instructions in small steps and repeat if necessary. Be very specific write it down, an alarm on a phone, use techniques that will jog their memory and is age appropriate. For example younger children benefit from pictures of how to get dressed. Keep referring them back to the pictures. Older children may be told to tidy their bedroom but tell them what needs tidying. Give them one task as a time.

Managing problem times

Dealing with difficult, disruptive behaviour is not easy. Children with ADHD don't set out to misbehave, but their impulsivity means they are unable to foresee the consequences of their actions, and often end up in trouble.

Boundaries

- Help your child accept responsibility for their own behaviour, and don't allow them to try and blame someone else. Ensure they know that their choice of behaviour has led to your response, whether it is to be discipline or rewarded.
- Give clear messages and look your child in the face, but don't demand eye contact. Turn off any distractions such as the television, and address your child by name. Speak clearly without mumbling, nagging or shouting, and give your instructions in simple steps.

Avoid an argument

- Avoid getting caught up in arguments. Remind your child of your clear rules and stick to them. Keep your voice calm and controlled.
- Pick your battles. If you know that confronting your child over an issue or not doing a chore will result in an argument, consider how important the issue is. It may be better to let this issue go and save your energy for more important issues. It is very easy to get into a cycle of nagging your child all the time. This either results in lots of arguments or the young person just switches off. Either way you don't win.
- Instead of criticising the child for their behaviour e.g. *"you behaved really badly"*, talk about how it affects you e.g. *"it really upsets me when you..."*
- Try to understand what triggers the behavioural response.

Rewards

- Use a reward scheme for good behaviour. You may choose to use it in the short-term for special events or longer term. Rewards can be in the form of praise, collecting stars or tokens towards a bigger reward or a regular smaller reward. Don't make your goals too big. If they only get a reward for being good all week, they are likely to fail. Instead, work on a day-by-day basis. If behaviour is particularly a problem you may need to break down further to morning and afternoon.
- Avoid penalising bad behaviour by taking everything away or things they prize, gadgets etc. If a child often has behaviour problems, they soon realise they have no chance of gaining back their gadget, so give up trying to be 'good'. The child is then likely to get into more trouble as they don't have the distraction of their gadget. Try using positive rewards for good behaviour instead.



Their feelings

- Remember that your child does not intend to be difficult. It can be easy for a child who is constantly told off to feel as if they are unloved. Let them know how much you love them, and how much they are part of the family. Sometimes another family member or a grandparent can be helpful in acting as a friend or confidante.
- Sometimes the child with ADHD overreacts to a situation and can end up breaking something, perhaps even their possessions. They can be very upset afterwards, and criticism of their behaviour often makes things worse. Try not to nag and remind them of their behaviour – they will be feeling bad enough about it.

Calming down

- Jumping on a trampoline or swinging are proven techniques to help with calming.
- Older children can be prompted to go to their bedroom or a space of their own. They should be encouraged to listen to music or do something they find calming. Using headphones can help the young person focus on the music.
- Make a plan with your child, when they are calm. Talk to them about what needs to happen if they start to get angry. They might say they want to be reminded to jump on the trampoline or gently told to go up to their room and play with Lego. Each child will be different. As a parent/carer be consistent and follow the plan. Share this plan with other people who spend time with your child. If Granny doesn't have a trampoline, create a different plan for her house.
- Some children need reminding every time, others might start to take themselves off when they notice they are getting cross.

Time out

Useful with younger children:

- Use the 1,2,3 counting technique: e.g.
"Please give the toy back to your sister"
"I'm going to count to three"
"One" (wait five seconds)
"Two" (wait five seconds)
"Three" (wait five seconds)
- If your child then gives the toy back, praise them for their response. If they do not respond you will need to use "time out" – this allows a difficult situation to be salvaged by removing the child from any attention for a period of time.
- Establish a special place – a chair, or step, or corner, where the child goes to cool off for a set period of time. It also allows you time to cool off. You can use a kitchen timer for the period of time, which should be 1 minute for every year of life.
- Don't pay attention to your child or talk to them. When the time is up don't discuss the problem – they have "served their time" and now start again with a clean slate.
- If your child has refused to go to "time out", warn of withdrawing a privilege such as computer time, and if necessary carry out this sanction. The sanction should be on the same day and for a set amount of time.

Medication

Some young people with ADHD respond well to methods which help to change their behaviour while others may need to take medication. The most commonly used medication is Methylphenidate, but Atomoxetine or Lisdexamfetamine are also be used.

Whilst medication is not a cure for ADHD it helps to improve the main symptoms of impulsivity, inattention, and hyperactivity. Doctors think that children with ADHD have an imbalance of certain chemicals in their brains and Methylphenidate works by stimulating the brain to produce the right amounts of these natural chemicals. The medicine starts working quite quickly so you can tell if it is having an effect.



School and medication

It is important school knows that your child is being treated for ADHD. They may want to complete an Individual Health Care Plan so that they know exactly what medicine they are supposed to give, and when. Copies of all ADHD reviews can be sent to school, with your consent. There is an information booklet available for schools, which gives advice on coping in the classroom. Please pass this on to your child's school.

Timing

The specialist will discuss with you the most suitable times for your child to take the medication. Most children will start with one dose in the morning, and one at lunchtime. Older children often take a long acting tablet, which is taken once a day. With time you will be able to notice when the effects are beginning to wear off. You can discuss the most effective dose with the specialist.

Regular monitoring

Once your child has been prescribed medication you will need to monitor how your child is reacting to it. We will review your child, in clinic, approximately every 6 months or by phone as required. We may ask for feedback from your child's teacher, so we can monitor the benefits of the medication.

Side effects

Some of the common side effects are loss of appetite, headache, drowsiness, tics, dizziness or blurred vision. You should make a note of these and let your specialist know. Nervousness and difficulty sleeping are common and may be a sign that the dosage needs adjusting. Don't adjust the dosage until you have spoken to your Specialist and discussed the side effects. When your child starts on a medication, you will be given an information leaflet about it.

Length of treatment

If the medication helps to improve your child's behaviour, they can take it for a long time. The specialist will review your child approximately every 6 months. At each visit your child's height, weight and blood pressure will be recorded and progress recorded. The specialist may suggest having a break from the medicine occasionally to see how they cope without it. If your child/young adult still benefits from medication when they are 18, they will be referred to Adult ADHD services.

Dosage

Some young people need a small dose, while others need a larger dose. The Specialist will plan the most suitable dose with your child.

Further information

Up to date information and resources be found on the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service website.

w: www.essexfamilywellbeing.co.uk/team/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd-nurse/

Recommended ADHD websites

Living with ADHD

w: www.livingwithadhd.co.uk

ADD-vance

w: www.add-vance.org

ADDISS

w: www.addiss.co.uk

CHADD

w: www.chadd.org

Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children

w: www.gosh.nhs.uk/conditions-and-treatments/conditions-we-treat/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd

Your notes

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