

Finally, as teachers, we question if it is fair on the other pupils when they see the pupil with ADHD getting so much attention and being rewarded for the simple things that they do naturally every day. We should, however, always consider the following statement to guide us in supporting all our pupils.

“Fairness isn’t giving everybody the same;  
it’s giving everybody what they need.”

#### REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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## Supporting Pupils with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in School



## Three sub-types of ADHD have been identified by the American Psychiatric Association (1987), as follows:

- predominantly inattentive
- predominantly hyperactive and impulsive
- a combination of both

An early onset of severe, pervasive and chronic hyperactivity is thought to be genetic in origin and affects aspects of brain function. It is this group of children who are most likely to respond to medical treatment, which improves the self-control function of the brain. Unfortunately, there is no medical test that can reliably diagnose ADHD. Instead, professionals depend on the knowledge and experience of childhood problems, information provided by parents and teachers, and careful observation of the child to make a diagnosis. Exact prevalence figures for ADHD in the Republic of Ireland are difficult to ascertain at present.

## What we as teachers typically say about pupils with ADHD:

".....like a whirlwind, always in trouble, just won't wait, shouts out all the time, never settles down to work, never thinks about consequences, forgets the rule minutes after being told, books are all over the place, always being told on by the others, can be really loving, playtime is a nightmare, complete lack of self-control....."

## Sound familiar? But what can we do to help?

### Whole-School Tips

Having just one pupil with ADHD in a classroom can present as a major challenge for teachers and the most effective way of supporting the pupil is to ensure that the teacher is supported.

- Discuss the pupil's needs as a whole-school issue (or a group issue in large staffs where all personnel in contact with the child are present).
- Adopt a whole-school approach to reinforcing agreed rules and providing positive encouragement. The class teacher should inform other staff if he/she is modifying a particular behaviour.
- Ensure the class teacher never feels isolated. Colleagues should be aware when support is needed during school assemblies or at large school events. Someone should be available to step in and help if backup is required.
- Encourage all members of staff to try to catch the pupil being "good", through acknowledging when the pupil's behaviour in the playground and/or corridor is appropriate, and rewarding the behaviour in a positive manner.
- Adopt a positive commitment to supporting the pupil with ADHD.

### Classroom Management Tips

It is very important to adapt the physical environment to suit the needs of the pupil with ADHD.

- Clear all clutter from around the pupil. Provide the pupil with a large box for his/her belongings if necessary. Have a separate set of pencils, rubber etc. available for the pupil to avoid conflict in group situations.
- Mark a space with clear tape on the ground around the pupil's desk and chair and explain that this is his/her working area. Use coloured tape on the floor to indicate specific areas of the classroom and use templates of footsteps to show where walkways are. Use a red line on walls to indicate STOP and THINK. This could be used at all the transition areas, i.e. leaving and entering the room.
- Avoid all distracting stimuli. Try not to place the pupil near heaters, doors, windows or any other high traffic areas in the room.
- Seat the pupil near to you, but always include him/her as part of the regular class during all activities. Maintain proximity without being intrusive. Ensure the pupil is in a row or a group desk where he/she is looking directly at you without facing other pupils.
- Have a desk or area designated as a quiet area where the pupil can work independently, if possible. The pupil with ADHD may need a quieter environment than others. Use this area for other pupils also when required. Be careful not to use this particular area as a sanction. Use a visual cue to indicate that this is a quiet area. Ask the pupils to design labels for the area.

- This area can also be used to provide opportunities for pupils to listen to music on headphones and relax. It should be noted that some pupils with ADHD prefer to work with background noise. Headphones with the pupils' choice of music or experimentation with different types of music can be used for this purpose. Surround the pupil with good role models. Select a peer buddy. Pupils with ADHD work better in pairs than in groups, as it puts less pressure on them socially.
- Use small picture cards for work tasks on desks to remind the pupil to stay on-task. Use Velcro strips on the desk for younger pupils.
- Scan the covers of the class books and make a visual cue chart where you can display the cover of the book that is required for each task. This can also be used for identifying the books required for homework.

### Teaching Tips

- Always be precise and clear when communicating with the pupil.
- Give the pupil an unobtrusive object to fidget with during listening times, e.g. a small piece of play-doh or a stress ball.
- Pupils with ADHD often display particular learning styles. Establish the pupil's learning style and their strengths. Make sure tasks fit within the pupil's learning abilities.
- Make tasks interesting to hold the pupil's attention. Vary your delivery. Where a pupil is faced with a large amount of work on a page, e.g. maths, break the page into smaller units as this will ensure that there is an element of success for the pupil. Check that disorganisation isn't the reason for non-completion of assigned tasks.
- Allow the pupil to present his/her work in various ways, i.e. computer, dictaphone, mind maps, diagrams or pictorial format etc. Make use of computers as they provide immediate feedback for the pupil. Ask the pupil to rehearse instructions or provide them with written or visual versions. Use cooker timers/clocks so that the pupil does not forget the time available for a task.
- Colour-code the pupil's books into different subject areas and arrange them for him/her. If necessary, arrange for a buddy to organise the pupil's work space before leaving school each day.
- Teach the pupil to make checklists or schedules. Try to follow a structured timetable and be close by to supervise the pupil at transitions from one setting to another, e.g. going to the hall at PE times.
- Try to minimise the amount of time the pupil is left waiting with nothing to do. Encourage the pupil to ask a "study buddy" for help. Consider allowing the pupil out for a run or walk during the day with an adult supervisor.
- Anticipate and prepare for school trips. Always seek out extra supervision.

### Behaviour Management Tips

- At all times, make sure the pupil and class know that you like him/her even when the behaviour is not acceptable.
- Display, discuss and reinforce class rules. Use visual cues in displaying class rules.
- Encourage a problem-solving approach in which the pupil is encouraged to generate solutions to his/her own difficulties. The pupil is more likely to respond to this constructivist approach than to punishing the behaviour. In fact, punishment is more likely to lead to even more oppositional/defiant behaviour.
- Take time to observe the pupil's behaviour during whole-class, group lessons and on the playground. Elicit support from the Resource Teacher to allow you to observe the pupil and also give the Resource Teacher opportunities to observe the pupil's behaviour while you teach. Identify the trigger or antecedent for the behaviour that you wish to change.
- Focus on modifying one behaviour at a time. Prioritise the most disruptive behaviour. Try a clear and consistent behaviourist approach with a definite target in mind, e.g. give the pupil five smiley stickers or stars at the beginning of each day. All he/she has to do to keep them is not to shout out when the teacher is talking. Each failure merits the loss of one sticker, but if three stickers are retained, the pupil gets a reward. Collaborate closely with the child's parents when using any merit reward system, as reinforcement at home can lead to more success.
- Try to use merit certificates and praise as rewards. Provide feedback and consequences as quickly as possible following the target behaviour.
- Allow pupils with ADHD preferential access to computers. It is a fact that pupils with ADHD are able to concentrate significantly longer on computer-based tasks than on pencil and paper tasks.