



## Supporting a Child with ADHD – Family guide

ADHD is a specific learning group difficulty resulting from a lack of neurotransmitters in the brain. It occurs commonly in the population - in fact many of us have features of ADHD. The purpose of assessment and diagnosis is to look for the 3-5% of the population who are severely affected and are impaired by the condition. It is important to say that not all children with ADHD have behaviour issues, in the same way as all with behavioural problems will not have ADHD. Children with ADHD learn differently than others, often being very visual in their learning rather than auditory and respond better to visual information - a key message for schools. They are usually creative and are often more visual or Kinaesthetic in their learning style, which often makes a classical education system more difficult for them.

### **Co-morbidity**

There are many conditions that occur more commonly in young people with ADHD. Every child or young person is an individual and should be thought of as such. Understanding these co-morbidities helps with treatment and helps those around them to understand them and to help them. These are some but not all of the co-morbidities seen with ADHD.

**ASD:** 40% of children with ASD also have ADHD and this group are unique in their response to treatment. A balance needs to be established with medication to ensure optimising the ADHD symptoms doesn't exacerbate any of their ASD symptoms. It is thus a fine balance to find a treatment that suits them best and requires feedback between school and parents and their treating clinician. This can then be very successful and helpful to the young person and their family.

**Anxiety:** It is important to decide if anxiety is the source of the inattention or indeed the inattention causes a young person to become anxious. If the latter is the case treating the ADHD can increase self-confidence and reduce anxiety. If the former is the underlying problem, it is important to remember that ADHD medication improves concentration on everything and can thus exacerbate anxiety and indeed may not be the answer.

**Tics:** Can coexist with ADHD and can occasionally be exacerbated by medication. Equally they can relate to anxiety and if this improves with ADHD medication the tics may also improve.

### **Ways to support a child with ADHD at home:**

- Firm consistent boundaries and routine are really important for these children.
- Help with organisation - for instance helping them to get their bags ready the night before and in a set place or having their uniform set out the night before school.
- Choosing your battles and deciding which ones are important can help prevent home life becoming a battle.
- It is important for these young people to realise that ADHD is not an excuse but they do need to adhere to the same rules as others. It is important to be positive and to set realistic achievable goals for young people so that they get positive feedback as well.

- Close down arguments quickly by walking away. This can be difficult but staying and continuing an argument means the young person has your undivided attention which positively reinforces the behaviour. It is an important part of treatment (improving self-esteem) for these young people to reduce negativity as much as possible.
- Sleep: We know sleep deprivation makes ADHD symptoms worse and also know that children with ADHD find it harder to sleep than their peers. Poor sleep adversely affects ADHD but these children and young people can frequently struggle to get to sleep. Sleep deprivation and ADHD have very similar symptoms this is why we do not diagnose or treat ADHD until they establish a good sleep pattern. Knowing this means that you can usefully engage in trying to positively affect sleep before the initial appointment. Children / young people who are awake until the early hours of the morning will be restless and inattentive due to tiredness. Excellent sleep hygiene is really important which sadly means nothing electronic for at least an hour before bedtime and a strict bedtime regime.
- Electronic Games: Young people with ADHD do not react well to hyper stimulating games and are often angry and aggressive while playing and even more so afterwards. They need to only play age appropriate games and the time they play must be restricted sensibly and if you find that their behaviour is impossible afterwards consider further restrictions and look for other ways of engaging them.

### **Websites:**

- Local Offer page under ADHD:  
<https://stockport.fsd.org.uk/kb5/stockport/fsd/results.page?familychannel=999&qt=ADHD&term=&sorttype=relevance>
- ADDITUDE (Canadian website): [www.additudemag.com](http://www.additudemag.com)
- ADHD Foundation: [www.adhdfoundation.org.uk](http://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk)
- SPACE Stockport: [www.spacestockport.org](http://www.spacestockport.org)

### **Publications:**

- The Incredible Years (Caroline Webster Stratton)
- Step by Step Help for Children with ADHD (Cathy Laver-Bradbury, Margaret Thompson et al.)
- Starving the Anger Gremlin (2 age ranges. Useful strategies for anger management) (Kate Collins-Donnelly)

### **Local Support Networks:**

- Parent Support/ information: Stockport ADHD service Drop in sessions
- Space - meet ups take place at The Dog and Partridge on the A6 in Stockport.  
<https://www.spacestockport.org/#:~:text=SPACE%20Stockport%20is%20a%20support,who%20have%20children%20with%20ADHD.>