

LIVING WITH ADHD

A Guide for Parents

*This pamphlet has been produced by
Clyst Vale Community College Counselling Service.
This is not intended to be a definitive guide, but does hope to provide support to
student and families affected by ADHD.*

ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

ADHD is usually identified as a mix of behaviours that exhibit impulsivity, hyperactivity and inattention. This means someone with ADHD tends to act without thinking (on impulse), is often agitated or 'on the move' (hyperactive), and lacks the ability to focus and remain on task (inattentive). The latest information suggests that 3 people in every 1000 Britons are receiving treatment for ADHD.

There are other symptoms often associated with ADHD, but not used as a diagnosis:

- Non-compliant behaviour
- Motor tics
- Sleep disturbance
- Mood swings
- Aggression
- Unpopularity with peers
- Temper tantrums
- Clumsiness
- Literacy and other learning problems
- Immature language

How do you get ADHD?

Researchers believe there are two main factors: genetic and environmental. There appear to be many genes involved; if there is a family history of epilepsy or ADHD itself, this might indicate a higher risk. In terms of environmental conditions that may lead to ADHD, it is thought that pre-natal influences such as a mother smoking, drinking, taking recreational drugs, the presence of lead or the lack of zinc while pregnant, can contribute to the condition. Anything that might lead to the baby's brain being injured may be a link to the condition.

Does diet affect ADHD?

Research into whether diet, namely E additives in foods, contribute to or worsen the condition is inconclusive, though in some cases reducing additives in food can make a huge difference for a few children suffering from ADHD.

Parenting

An unhappy relationship with a parent and a harsh parenting style are risk factors for developing poor behaviour in ADHD sufferers and can lead to further difficulties developing.

Treatment

Children and Adolescent Mental Health Team

There is a wide variety of treatments used to support both the child and their family including CAMHS referral, social services intervention and family therapy.

The most common drug used to treat ADHD is Ritalin. Side effects of this drug can include insomnia, nervousness, headache, decreased appetite, abdominal pain and other gastrointestinal symptoms, cardiovascular effects such as tachycardia, palpitations and minor increases in blood pressure. Growth can be affected, at least in the short term, so height and weight are monitored regularly and plotted on growth charts.

ADHD's link with criminality

Owing to the nature of the condition it has been reported that a possible link exists between a person suffering ADHD and an increased risk of criminal behaviour.

Lack of understanding

One of the main difficulties faced by someone suffering ADHD is the lack of understanding for their condition in the community. ADHD is a genuine medical condition, but is often perceived as general poor behaviour, or a lack of self control. This is made worse when people in authority (such as teachers) hold the belief that ADHD is an excuse, and not the reason for the behaviour.

ADHD's impact on family life

ADHD can have a huge impact on the quality of family life. Caring for the sufferer can lead to less parental attention being given to other family members. As a result brothers and sisters of an ADHD sufferer can feel less important, neglected, and always having to fit around the sufferer, rather than having their turn in the centre. Brothers and sisters of an ADHD sufferer may be asked to look after their sibling and this can be a very difficult, draining and aggravating task. If you have a brother or sister with ADHD come and see the counsellors; talking about it may help you to cope better. We can also act as a go-between with parents so you can express how you feel to them.

How to work with a child who has ADHD

Help the child to identify unhelpful behaviour and set up a system of goals and rewards. Avoid setting huge or optimistic goals. Keep it real.

Negative reinforcement

This is a useful technique that can be used to tackle the more antisocial or disruptive symptoms of ADHD and should be no more severe than a verbal reprimand and a reduction of rewards.

Time out

Removing the child from the attention of others for a short time can be an effective punishment.

Praise

Praising the child for good behaviour is a known and effective method of promoting good behaviour.

Counselling

A cognitive approach to counselling may also help, namely training and encouraging the child to adopt a four-point plan when faced with a problem or task:

1. What is the problem?
2. What is my plan?
3. Can I... Should I... Did I...use my plan?
4. How did I do?

Relaxation technique

This is another effective means of helping the child to remain calm. Please see the information about relaxation on the Clyst Vale Community College Teen Health website. The counsellors will be happy to teach this technique to ADHD sufferers, supporting siblings and parents too.

Support for siblings of an ADHD sufferer

It is important to recognise the strain a young person can experience when they have a brother or sister with ADHD. Try to create a regular time where the siblings can experience quality and fun times with one or both parents free of the disruptive influence of the ADHD sufferer. We all need a break!

Further information can be found on the web:

<http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/pdf/ADHDFullGuideline.pdf>

(This is an extremely detailed document.)