

A Quick Guide to ADHD

For teachers, SENCos and families

What is ADHD?

ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) is a neurodevelopmental condition characterised by persistent patterns of inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity that affect everyday functioning. Traits begin in childhood, usually before age 12, and are evident across more than one setting. ADHD may present predominantly through inattentive traits, hyperactive and impulsive traits, or a combination. A diagnosis requires a comprehensive assessment by an appropriately qualified healthcare professional.

What this may look like in the classroom

Energy and enthusiasm	High energy, particularly during active, practical or fast-moving tasks.	Impulse control	Acting quickly, interrupting or taking a risk before considering the outcome.
Creative thinking	Original ideas, rapid connections and a willingness to try a different approach.	Task completion	Starting readily but losing track during a task with several stages.
Eager contribution	Frequent answers, conversation or movement before the expected turn.	Organisation	Difficulty planning work, managing homework or keeping track of equipment.
Attention regulation	Strong focus on an engaging task, while routine instructions may be missed.	Emotional regulation	Feelings may become intense quickly, particularly after frustration or correction.

Remember: These features are not proof of ADHD. Sleep, anxiety, stress, language needs, autism and learning differences can sometimes look similar. Support the observed need while appropriate assessment is considered.



How to help: practical strategies

Small and consistent adjustments can make a meaningful difference. Support should respond to need and does not require a diagnosis.

01 Make expectations visible Use clear routines and brief visual reminders. Apply boundaries calmly and consistently.	06 Allow take-up time Pause after a request. Repeating too quickly can add to the processing load.
02 Secure attention respectfully Gain the pupil's attention before speaking. Avoid calling them out publicly.	07 Reduce avoidable distraction Agree a helpful seating position without isolating the pupil from peers.
03 Give one step at a time Use short instructions and check understanding before adding the next step.	08 Prompt before difficulties grow Use quiet cues and planned check-ins rather than waiting for failure.
04 Plan movement and pauses Break longer periods of listening or working into manageable sections.	09 Give specific feedback Notice effort, strategy use and successful self-regulation as well as completed work.
05 Externalise organisation Use checklists, timers, visual timetables and clearly labelled storage.	10 Support emotional regulation Use predictable responses, recovery time and calm reflection after difficult moments.

ADHD and dyslexia

ADHD and dyslexia can co-occur. Difficulties with attention regulation, working memory and organisation may increase the literacy load. Neither condition should be assumed from the other.

Screening and diagnosis

Defining Dyslexia can explore educational indicators through an ADHD traits screening and can assess for dyslexia or another SpLD. An educational screening is not an ADHD diagnosis. Medical diagnosis sits with an appropriately qualified healthcare professional.

Further support

Defining Dyslexia: screening and SpLD assessment	NHS: ADHD in children and young people	ADHD UK: information and support
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For local diagnostic pathways, speak with the SENCo or GP and consult your local authority's SEND Local Offer.

