



ADHD

Parent Information Guide

Information provided by:



How to empower Children with ADHD

People with ADHD have many strengths, like empathy, creativity, and quick thinking. Empowering them means helping build resilience and emotional awareness to better manage life's challenges.



Practice positive role modelling

As adults suggesting that our children behave or react in a certain way, we need to consider whether we role modelling this too? By setting a good example, we're enabling our child to build up relationships that have connection, understanding, and respect at the very core of their progression, with a sense of purpose and hope for what they can achieve.

Pause, reflect, and win in their game of life

Allow time throughout the day to pause for a moment and reflect on what your child's strengths are and what makes them special. This can shift the mindset away from any feelings of self-doubt or negative thoughts, and helps them to celebrate their 'little wins' that may have gone unrecognised.

Set routines and give choices

Think about when you were growing up, and how 'unfair' it felt to be told where to go, what to eat, and how to dress. On top of that, for ADHD children, a feeling of not being in control of racing thoughts or impulsive actions, and the resulting consequence, can lead to stress and anxiety.

What opportunities are there for your child to have some choice over their day?

This could be as simple as choosing what goes on the TV, or which activity they would like to do, potentially even choosing at what time they do their homework. With choices comes a sense of control and ownership, allowing a calmer mindset. This also helps your child learn different types of good and poor decision-making, which builds responsibility skills.

Managing and Self-Regulation

Everyone, regardless of neurotypicality or neurodivergence experiences dysregulation. Young people with ADHD often have less-developed executive functioning therefore their high cognitive load can cause them to experience dysregulation much more frequently.



Self Regulation

There are 5 principles which brainstem soothers must have, these are regulation, rhythm, relation, respect, reward, and repetition.

Great examples of brain soothers include: walking, dancing, running, aerobics, tapping, singing, breathing e.g. box breathing.

Sensory Processing

At all times, we are interpreting 8 types of sensory information, filtering it, organising it, and deciding how to respond to it. Of the 8 systems, there are three primary sensory systems which have a vital role in regulation. These are:

Vestibular- our balance & movement sense (movement receptors located in the inner ear)

Tactile- (touch receptors in the skin such as pressure, texture, hot/cold, pain)

Proprioception- bodily awareness (messages from muscles, joints, tendons)

These three senses work together with the other senses to influence how alert we are and contribute to effective sensory processing. When these systems are being over or under-processed by the brain, the consequence can be dysregulation or difficulties processing other sensory information. For this reason, to support a person who is experiencing sensory processing difficulties, we may need to provide them with more or less (depending on the person) of the three primary senses, proprioception being the exception (we can't have enough, so can only ever need more of this one).

Not all neurodivergent people (autistic, ADHD, DCD, Dyslexic, etc) have sensory processing difficulties, AND individuals can experience it without being neurodivergent. However, sensory processing difficulties are more prevalent within the neurodivergent population.

Sensory Circuits

Focusing on the three primary senses is the key to meeting children's sensory needs.

Sensory circuits are a great strategy for this and they have just 3 components:

Alerting - vigorous movement such as running, jumping, burpees, star jumps

Organising - balancing & coordinating activities such as obstacle courses, target throwing

Calming - yoga, Pilates, rocking, swinging, push-ups against the wall.

Sensory activities are not always active, passive activities such as receiving a massage or using a weighted blanket for pressure is a good example of a passive regulating activity.

What is important is that regulating activities are practised regularly. This is referred to as a sensory diet; a self-regulation strategy such as a sensory circuit might not be effective if a child is already feeling dysregulated. However, performing a regular sensory circuit can help maintain self-regulation as a proactive strategy.

Self Regulation and ADHD

People with ADHD, experience low levels of dopamine in the brain, which often leads to seeking activities which release dopamine. The brain tries to boost dopamine using the easiest possible route such as listening to music, gaming, scrolling on a phone, or spending money. However, people are often left feeling guilty, bored and empty afterwards. So, practicing meaningful self-regulation strategies can be helpful in releasing dopamine and self-regulating simultaneously.

Evidence suggests that endorphins from regular exercise help you to maintain dopamine levels, so for someone with ADHD, it is incredibly useful to build regular opportunities for physical exercise into their daily routine. Other examples of self-regulation strategies can consist of creative activities, such as drawing or painting, playing music, and using fidget toys.

Managing Risk-Taking Behaviour

Adolescence can be a challenging stage, especially for young people with ADHD who may be more prone to impulsive decision-making and risk-taking behaviour.



Proactive, assertive, positive approaches

Get ahead of challenges by setting clear expectations and boundaries before they arise. Communicate with confidence and positivity, making sure your messages focus on what your teen can do, rather than what they should avoid.

Establish an open and positive relationship

Teenagers are more likely to listen and cooperate when they feel understood and respected. Create space for honest conversations, show empathy, and take an interest in their world. A strong relationship makes it easier to guide them through difficult moments.

Praise and reward positive behaviours

ADHD can sometimes mean challenging behaviours get more attention. Flip the balance by noticing and praising the positives, no matter how small. Rewards don't have to be material; a smile, a kind word, or recognition of effort can go a long way in praising good choices.

Be a role model

Teens are quick to pick up on tone, body language, and consistency. Model calm, respectful behaviour and think about the 'lens' through which you are interpreting their actions. Avoid labels or assumptions and use language that is supportive and solution-focused.

Review strategies

What worked once may not always work again. Regularly review your strategies and be open to adapting them. ADHD is dynamic, and flexibility is key to maintaining effective support.

De-escalate situations

Risk-taking behaviours can escalate quickly. Stay calm, keep your voice low, and give space if needed. Avoid power struggles, and instead, redirect energy towards safer, more constructive activities once the moment has settled.

Play to their strengths

ADHD often comes with a whole host of strengths and skills. Encourage your teen to channel these strengths into hobbies, sports, or projects that give them a sense of purpose and achievement. This reduces the pull of risky behaviour while boosting confidence.

Anticipate problems and develop coping routines

Identify patterns. What situations regularly trigger impulsive reactions? Together, plan routines or strategies to cope when these moments arise. For example, role-playing alternatives to risky behaviour can give your teen tools they can use in the heat of the moment.

Allow for processing time

Impulsivity often means words or actions come out before thoughts. Give your teen time to process, reflect, and calm down before pushing for explanations. Avoid taking initial reactions as a true reflection of their feelings; patience here preserves relationships and reduces conflict.

Supporting teens with ADHD and risk-taking behaviour requires patience, flexibility, and encouragement. By focusing on their strengths, guiding them calmly through challenges, and building open, respectful relationships, we can help them develop the skills to make safer choices and grow into confident, resilient young adults.

Nutrition and Diet

Starting the day with a healthy nutritional diet is key to children with ADHD



Protein

Protein is found in foods such as eggs, meat and beans. Proteins prevent rises in blood sugar which can lead to poor concentration and distractibility. Proteins also support brain chemicals, with alertness, organisation and motivation and can also help to build strength.

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are found in foods like sweet potatoes, chickpeas and whole grains. These are our bodies' main source of energy. Processed or refined carbohydrates impact concentration and can make us feel tired. Complex carbs also release energy slowly, giving us a nice supply of energy throughout the day, promoting alertness and the ability to focus.

Iron

Iron is found in foods like nuts, spinach and broccoli. It is scientifically proven that children with ADHD have 50% less iron in their bodies. Not having enough iron in our bodies can make us feel tired, and affect our memory. Eating foods that are rich in iron can help our brains to focus and concentrate.

Fatty Acids

Omega-3 fatty acids are found in foods, such as fish and flaxseed, and in dietary supplements, such as fish oil. Fatty acids pass messages around the brain that support concentration and impulsivity.

Magnesium

Magnesium is often found in foods such as leafy greens, seeds, bananas and dark chocolate. Children with ADHD are known to have lower levels of magnesium in their bodies. Magnesium lowers stress levels, improves focus, promotes better sleep and helps us to stay happy. It can also reduce hyperactive behaviours.

Zinc

Foods like eggs, wholewheat breads, and Greek Yoghurt contain Zinc. Zinc helps to protect us against harmful bacteria and germs. If ADHD bodies don't get the correct amount of zinc, they can have difficulties in concentration.

Water

We need around 2 litres of water a day. Drinking a glass of water before taking a test or a working task allows the brain to recharge and improve cognitive skills, making it more focused and attentive.

Managing Burnout

Burnout is a state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress. Neurodivergent burnout specially refers to the overwhelming exhaustion experienced by individuals due to navigating day-to-day tasks, social expectations and sensory overload.



Spotting the physical signs

Burnout can present in many different ways, and it's so important to be informed of the different characteristics so you are able to support your child from the off-set and prevent further challenges. Key characteristics can include:

- Fatigue and low energy
- Increased sensory sensitivity
- Frequent headaches, muscle tension and aches
- Digestive issues
- Sleep issues
- Outward behavioural responses
- School attendance problems
- Identifying the cognitive signs

As well as physical signs, burnout often presents with cognitive indicators that are noticeable changes or difficulties with mental processes such as thinking, remembering, reasoning, learning and problem solving. Some of the key characteristics of cognitive signs can include:

- Emotional outburst or emotional numbness
- Increased irritability or frustration
- Decreased motivation
- Trouble concentrations, forgetfulness and brain fog
- Feeling disconnected or isolated

As many of these signs might not be as easy to physically identify with your child, be sure to ask them if they are feeling any of the above to help them understand and label how they might be thinking or feeling.

Spotting the behavioural signs

Behavioural changes can be a key indicator of burnout, particularly behaviours which are considered out of the ordinary for your child. Some key behavioural characteristics of burnout can include:

- Withdrawal from social activities or responsibility
- Functional language
- Negative, hostile or oppositional behaviours
- A decline in personal hygiene or self-care
- Loss of interest in hobbies or activities

Understanding external causes that can be triggers

There are several external factors that can contribute to mental and physical exhaustion. Sensory overload, such as exposure to bright lights, strong smells, or uncomfortable textures, can be particularly overwhelming. Environmental demands, like constant expectations from others or being required to sit still for long periods, can also contribute to burnout. Social challenges, including difficulty reading cues or sustaining conversations, can lead to significant emotional drain, especially for those who find social interactions taxing. Struggles with time management, homework demands, and difficulties with focus, often linked to executive dysfunction, can compound feelings of overwhelm and exhaustion.

Understanding the internal causes of burnout

Burnout can also start from within. As we know, children can mask or camouflage their feelings all day in school, which can lead to intense emotional and mental fatigue. If our children experience emotional dysregulation, this can also contribute to feelings of burnout due to the levels of emotional exhaustion. Difficulty in transitions is another contributing factor, as sudden changes in routine or unexpected demands can be overwhelming, particularly for autistic and ADHD children.

Executive functioning fatigue

Executive function challenges can play a huge part in neurodivergent burnout. From frequent transitions and managing multiple demands, to the mental effort required to organise, plan and complete daily tasks, this can become overwhelming and can lead to decreased functionality. Particularly considering the executive functioning demands of children, balancing schoolwork, social and personal responsibilities without adequate support creates a high-risk environment for burnout.

Top tips for reducing demands to help navigate burnout

One of the best ways we can support children with burnout is to reduce the demands and expectations we are putting on them. Some of the best, most practical ways we can do this, are:

- Avoid or amend emotionally proactive situations
- Limit social interaction during burnout
- Encourage routine: predictability helps reduce anxiety and create a sense of control
- Break large tasks into smaller, manageable steps
- External reminders: visuals, alarms, reminders or apps
- Schedule regular breaks throughout the day

How to support sensory regulation in relation to burnout

Sensory management techniques such as reducing exposure to sensory overload by creating a calm, quiet environment, can greatly impact a child experiencing burnout. For example, using noise-cancelling headphones, soft lighting or fidget tools. Have a toolkit of sensory regulation techniques, such as crunchy snacks, cold drinks, weighted blankets and sensory toys can help to keep your child calm, in control and regulated.

ADHD Advice & Support

Frequently asked questions, advice and support, case studies, and more.



For further information on ADHD:

<https://www.witherslackgroup.co.uk/advice-and-support/adhd/>

Information provided by <https://www.witherslackgroup.co.uk/advice-and-support/resources/what-is-adhd/>