

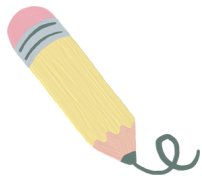
≡ ADHD: ≡

What Parents Need to Know



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ADHD: What Parents Need to Know

ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and it is a neurodevelopmental disorder that impacts a person's thinking, feelings, and behaviour. ADHD affects 5% of young people around the world.

ADHD has three presentations:

- 1 'Inattentive':** It may seem like the young person does not hear instructions, they have difficulty staying focused on some tasks, they tend to lose things, and they have struggles staying organized.
- 2 'Hyperactive-Impulsive':** These individuals are easier to spot because they are often moving or fidgeting and find it difficult to stay seated. They may also be very talkative and tend to interrupt others.
- 3 'Combined':** These individuals have both the 'Inattentive' and the 'Hyperactive-Impulsive' characteristics.



All children have some of these symptoms from time to time, but children with ADHD have many symptoms most of the time.

Medical professionals have identified ADHD for more than one hundred years by a variety of terms and it has been studied extensively for over five decades. We can see some difference between brains with, and without, ADHD through neuroimaging. When we look at pictures of an ADHD brain we can see differences in size and activity in certain areas, compared to a brain without ADHD.



ADHD is a **highly genetic** disorder that runs in families. Other factors that may play a role in the development of ADHD, are early injuries to the developing brain or exposure to toxins.



ADHD is **not caused by poor parenting**, too much sugar, too much television, not enough exercise, or playing video games.



There may be regions in which ADHD is over-diagnosed due to poor diagnostic practices. However, there are many young people with ADHD who **do not get identified** and, most importantly **do not receive treatment**.



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To diagnose ADHD, a thorough investigation is necessary. This may include an examination by a medical doctor, the completion of rating scales by parents and teachers, and/or a psychoeducational assessment by a psychologist.

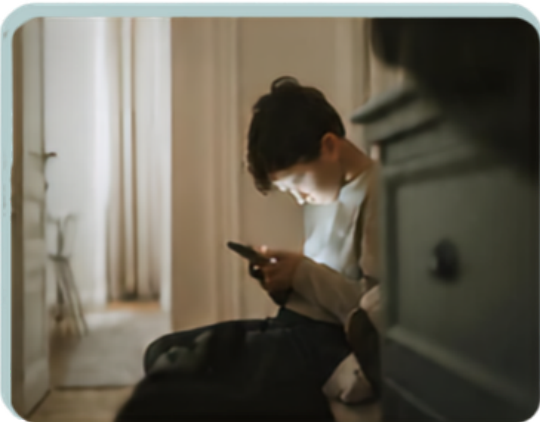
HOW DOES HAVING ADHD IMPACT MY YOUNG PERSON?

- ✓ ADHD is a “brain boss” problem. It is primarily a disorder of self-regulation, affecting behaviour, thinking, and emotions.
- ✓ Young people with ADHD often appear less mature than their peers because they have more difficulty controlling impulses, emotions, and attention.
- ✓ This can make meeting expectations at home, school, and in the community much more challenging.

ADHD is a self-regulation challenge, not a measure of intelligence.

One of the hallmarks of ADHD is that the individuals are ‘**consistently inconsistent**’. A young person with ADHD may have the ability to do a certain task, but their performance on that task **varies from day-to-day or even moment-to-moment**. Their performance depends on their interest in the task, how fatigued their brain is, and factors in their environment (such as the amount of structure, the distractions, and the rewards).

We see the young people struggle with staying focused on a task, especially one that is difficult for them or one that they think is boring. On the other hand, sometimes we see them focus (or ‘hyper-focus’) for hours on something that is particularly interesting or rewarding to them, such as video games. The difficulty is in regulating, or shifting, their attention.



Young people with ADHD, particularly those who are not receiving treatment, **face daily struggles, and even failures, in many areas of their life; impact the way they feel about themselves**. Young people with ADHD may have difficulty getting along with others their age because of their impulsivity and immaturity, and **as a result = they feel rejected and lonely**.

Because children with ADHD are ‘**consistently inconsistent**’ in terms of their performance it can be frustrating to those around them and it can be easy for adults to incorrectly assume that the young person is being lazy, oppositional, or manipulative.

HOW LONG DOES ADHD LAST?

The ADHD symptoms a young person experiences tend to shift as they age. For example, the **hyperactive symptoms tend to decrease** as a child becomes a young adult but, the **problems associated with their attention may worsen as the demands of school work or employment increase**.



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Approximately **two-thirds of young people with ADHD** continue to have enough symptoms to **meet the criteria for the disorder into adulthood**. The extent to which ADHD impacts their life will vary depending on the severity of their symptoms, the supports in their environment, the coping strategies they learn, and the context in which they live (such as being able to find a career that they love).



WHAT ARE THE INCREASED RISKS FOR A YOUNG PERSON WITH ADHD?

Research shows that the impulsivity of young people with ADHD puts them at greater risk for many issues such as:

- Increased risk for substance use
- Increased risk for driving accidents
- Increased risk for unplanned pregnancies
- More likely to experience anxiety
- More likely to experience depression
- More likely to be diagnosed with Learning disorders and Eating disorders
- Sleep problems



These outcomes are **not inevitable**. Proper diagnosis and treatment of ADHD are important ways to decrease the risks your child will face.



TREATING ADHD

Learning more about ADHD is an important way to reduce stress for everyone in your child's life. When teachers, coaches, and caregivers learn about ADHD they are less likely to be frustrated with the young person, and more likely to have appropriate expectations and implement helpful strategies. A child is less likely to feel bad about themselves if the people around them understand their struggles, as well as the best ways to support them. A young person is also more likely to advocate for themselves (such as request accommodations or use strategies they have been taught) if they understand the disorder.



There are many items (such as supplements and programs) which are marketed to treat ADHD. Unfortunately, most of these options have not yet been supported by sufficient research. There are a few lifestyle factors which have been proven to help to decrease ADHD symptoms, such as: sufficient sleep; a healthy diet; and aerobic exercise.



There is no "cure" for ADHD, but decades of research has shown that there are two forms of treatment that are the most effective are: **behavioural interventions and medication**.



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BEHAVIOURAL INTERVENTIONS

'Behavioural interventions' can be very helpful for young people to manage their ADHD. Adults set up the child's environment to help them overcome their challenges and make the rewards and consequences of the young person's behaviour more clear to them. These interventions may be referred to as 'behavioural therapy' or 'parent training' approaches.

Sometimes we can feel like we are constantly reacting to our children's behaviour by frequently reprimanding them or losing our temper. Reactive parenting is exhausting and it is generally more likely to be successful if we **stop being reactive** to our children's behaviour and work at being **more proactive** by structuring the young person's environment to be most successful.

In general, young people with ADHD will learn best by doing (and experiencing natural consequences or rewards), rather than discussing strategies at length.



Build Predictable Routines

When we have consistent expectations and routines that are clearly set out and visible (such as a schedule on the wall, or checklists for various times in the day) the young person is more likely to follow through.



Use Praise and Rewards

One of the best ways to increase a young person's compliance is to catch them doing well and provide them with specific praise (such as "Wow, I really appreciate that I only had to remind you once to set the table tonight!"). Young people, especially those with ADHD, are far more likely to respond to rewards (such as earning stickers toward a preferred reward) and consequences (such as, the loss of a privilege) if these things are something that is really important to them and they are used immediately after the behaviour.



Support Transitions

Young people may not have the same sense of time or urgency, which can contribute to frustrations in the parent-child relationship. We can help by giving advance warnings (e.g., "In three minutes, we'll start cleaning up!"), using visual timers or countdown clocks, and setting smartphone alarms to support transitions and important events.



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Give Clear and Effective Instructions

Young people with ADHD can often become distracted or sidetracked. If we are giving the young person instructions, we want to:

- Make sure that we truly have their attention before we start speaking
- Give one instruction at a time
- Have your child repeat it back
- Use checklists

We can also help them by making the information more captivating and easier to remember such as using a visual chart/list, a joke, a rhyme, or song. In general, young people with ADHD will learn best by doing, rather than discussing strategies at length.



Review Strategies Regularly

As parents, we need to periodically re-assess the plans we are implementing. Sometimes a reward program or other intervention works really well for a period of time and then seems to become less effective. Behaviour interventions need to evolve as the young person grows, new challenges appear, or the novelty of a plan fades.



Teach Self-Advocacy

We also need to advocate for our child, and teach them how to advocate for themselves; to incorporate strategies in other areas of their lives, such as school and extracurricular activities.



Additional Support

It is important for parents to know that 'talk therapy' may be valuable for young people with ADHD if they have also developed another problem such as excessive worries, and/or feelings of depression, which are most likely to respond to Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (or CBT). CBT involves working on both changing behaviours AND combatting unhelpful thought processes that the young person may have.

You don't have to do this alone. Support makes a big difference.



MEDICATION

As a parent, deciding whether or not to put your child on medication can be very difficult, especially with so much contradictory information in the media. Parents need to know that most individuals diagnosed with ADHD do benefit from medication. The success of medication begins with a proper diagnosis and a knowledgeable prescribing doctor who collaborates with you and your child's school to identify the medication and dose that provides the young person with the **most benefits and the least side effects**. The two main categories of ADHD medication are **stimulants and non-stimulants**.



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 Topic	 Key Information
 Do medications work?	Most young people diagnosed with ADHD benefit from medication when it is prescribed following a proper diagnosis and monitored by a knowledgeable doctor.
 Types of medication	Stimulants: have been prescribed for over 50 years. Many studies have been conducted during that time to demonstrate their effectiveness and safety in treating ADHD symptoms. They tend to work quickly and can be immediate-release (which last a short period of time) or extended-release (which can last up to 14 hours). Non-stimulants: some research suggests that their effectiveness may not be quite as strong as it is for stimulants. However, they may be a better fit for some youth, such as those with anxiety.
 How they work	Medication helps stimulate under-active areas of the brain, improving attention, focus, and self-regulation. Different medications and doses work differently for each individual.
 Common side effects	Reduced appetite and sleep are most common. Other possible side effects include headaches, tics, or mood changes. Side effects vary depending on the medication, dosage, and may subside over time.
 Finding the right medication	Medication is usually started at a low dose and gradually adjusted to maximize benefits and minimize side effects. Parent and teacher feedback through rating scales can help monitor symptoms and guide adjustments. For some, finding the right fit is quick; for others, it can take time and some trial and error.
 Long-term considerations	Research supports the long-term safety and effectiveness of stimulant medication. Medication does not increase the risk of substance abuse. However there are significant risks to not treating ADHD (such as higher rates of school failure, conflict with authorities, and dangerous behaviours).
 Best outcomes	Pills don't build skills. However, medication helps the brain become more receptive to learning and self-regulation skills but does not teach these skills directly. The most effective treatment combines medication with behavioural interventions.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Foothills Academy Society

<http://foothillsacademy.org/community>

Centre for ADHD Awareness Canada (CADDAC)

<http://caddac.ca/adhd/>

Canadian ADHD Resource Alliance (CADDRA)

<https://www.caddra.ca/>

Understood

<https://www.understood.org>



This information was prepared by Dr. Karen MacMillan (Registered Psychologist), Executive Co-Director and Uma Vandekerckhove (Registered Psychologist), Staff Psychologist of Foothills Academy, a full-time School and Community Services.



Community Services at Foothills Academy assists individuals of all ages with Learning Disabilities and/ or ADHD in the Calgary community and well beyond. We are open year-round and have a wide-range of financially accessible services and programs. Our goal in Community Services is to offer wrap-around support to individuals and families (whether they are in our School or not) in order to help them thrive in the face of LD and ADHD!



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