

So you think your child may have ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) manifests itself in the form of emotional and behavioural difficulties. The condition affects approximately 5-6% of the population and, according to many researchers, is caused by the failure of the brain to produce certain chemicals. These chemicals can be replaced with drugs like Ritalin, which stimulate the brain to produce them. When these chemicals are produced, behaviour often becomes calmer and more predictable.

Bad parenting or bad teaching does not cause ADHD! However, thoughtful handling and teaching can reduce many of the secondary problems.

If your child has ADHD you will notice that s/he has difficulty in maintaining concentration and listening to instructions. Also a child may be very active, often in inappropriate situations and seem unable to control their behaviour. Also a child may find it difficult to listen to, and act upon, instructions from those in authority. The condition can make children extremely difficult to manage, day symptoms include:

- Being very impulsive and inclined to "fly off the handle"
- Not worried about or unaware of consequences
- Unpredictable behaviour, mood and performance

The effects on learning include:

- Poor organisational skills and underachievement
- Poor language skills
- Poor memory

- Often poor handwriting/presentation

Children with ADHD often experience problems developing and maintaining relationships with other children and adults. Problems can include:

- Rejection by classmates and other children in the neighbourhood
- Frustration at poor performance, which can turn into aggressive behaviour
- Feeling useless and worthless
- Anxiety and depression

What can parents and teachers do to help?

- "Ignore the negative and praise the positive"
As far as possible, try to ignore negative behaviour and praise behaviour, which is wanted.
- Tell the child what you want her/him to do, rather than the opposite - eg try saying "Please sit down" rather than "Stop running around"
- Give clear instructions and be consistent
- Accept that attention is likely to be poor just before lunch and later in the day
- Don't let the child control situations - make guidelines clear as well as consequences
- Remember that behaviour management is about "certainty not severity" - but be consistent!

Remember that most children with ADHD do not want to behave in that way - often they cannot help themselves.