



Understanding ADHD: A Comprehensive Guide

RANi Need to Know Guides | Diagnosis Advisory sheet 2

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Information, Support & Useful Organisations for Families and Young People

What is ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a **neurodevelopmental condition** that affects both children and adults. People with ADHD may experience differences in attention, activity levels, and impulse control. ADHD is a recognised medical condition that can have a significant impact on daily life, education, relationships, and wellbeing.

There are three main types:

1. **Predominantly inattentive** (difficulty concentrating, distractibility)
 2. **Predominantly hyperactive-impulsive** (restlessness, impulsive actions)
 3. **Combined type** (both inattentive and hyperactive traits)
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Key Characteristics of ADHD

Inattention:

- Difficulty concentrating or staying on task
- Making careless mistakes or losing things
- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty following instructions or completing tasks
- Avoiding sustained mental effort

Hyperactivity and Impulsivity:

- Fidgeting or squirming
- Talking excessively
- Interrupting others
- Acting without thinking
- Struggling to wait their turn
- Feeling constantly “on the go”

Not all individuals with ADHD are hyperactive. Many present as daydreamy, withdrawn, or anxious, especially **girls** and **young people who mask** their symptoms.

Recognising ADHD – When to Seek Support

You might consider seeking an assessment if a child or young person:

- Is consistently struggling at school or home

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- Has difficulty concentrating or following routines
 - Acts impulsively or appears constantly restless
 - Finds it hard to manage emotions
 - Is falling behind academically or socially
 - Is often misunderstood or labelled as 'naughty' or 'lazy'
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How to Get an ADHD Assessment

1. Speak to Your GP

Ask for a referral to a specialist, such as a **community paediatrician**, **CAMHS** (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), or **neurodevelopmental service**.

2. School Involvement

Speak to the SENCO or pastoral lead. They may carry out initial observations and complete screening tools (e.g. Conners questionnaire) and support your request for referral.

3. Private Assessment (Optional)

Some families opt for private assessments due to long NHS waiting lists. Be aware: some local authorities and schools may require NHS confirmation before acting on private reports.

The ADHD Assessment Process

Typically includes:

- Parent/carers and teacher questionnaires

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- Developmental and behavioural history
- Observations at school/home
- Input from psychologists, paediatricians, or psychiatrists

Diagnostic tools may include:

- **Conners Rating Scale**
- **SNAP-IV**
- **Vanderbilt Assessment**

A diagnosis is based on **clear evidence** that symptoms:

- Have been present for at least 6 months
 - Appeared before age 12
 - Are present in two or more settings (e.g. home and school)
 - Significantly impact everyday life
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Treatment and Support

ADHD is lifelong, but it can be managed with the right support.

1. Medication

Often offered as part of a wider support plan:

- **Stimulant medications** (e.g. methylphenidate – Ritalin, Concerta)
- **Non-stimulant options** (e.g. atomoxetine)

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Medication can:

- Improve focus and concentration
- Reduce impulsivity and hyperactivity
- Support emotional regulation

2. Behavioural Strategies

- Clear routines and structure
- Positive reinforcement and praise
- Visual aids and reminders
- Chunked instructions
- Quiet, distraction-free spaces

3. Educational Support

- SEN support in school
- Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan if needed
- Reasonable adjustments (e.g. rest breaks, fidget tools, extended time)

4. Parenting Courses

Evidence-based courses can help manage ADHD positively:

- Triple P
- The Incredible Years
- Parent Plus ADHD

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Legal Rights and SEN Support

Children and young people with ADHD may be considered to have **Special Educational Needs (SEN)** under the SEND Code of Practice.

They may be entitled to:

- SEN support in school or early years settings
 - A **needs assessment** for an EHC plan if needs are significant
 - Disability-related reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010
 - Access arrangements for exams (extra time, rest breaks, etc.)
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Common Co-occurring Conditions

Many children with ADHD also have:

- Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC)
- Dyslexia or other learning difficulties
- Anxiety or depression
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)
- Sensory Processing Difficulties
- Sleep problems

Support should always take a **whole-person approach**, not just treat the diagnosis in isolation.

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FAQs

Can ADHD be “outgrown”?

No — ADHD is a lifelong condition. However, many people learn strategies that help them manage it more successfully over time.

What if school refuses to support my child?

You can:

- Ask for a school-based SEN review
- Request a needs assessment for an EHC plan
- Contact, **RANi**, **SENDIASS** or **IPSEA** for help

Can girls have ADHD?

Absolutely. Girls are often underdiagnosed due to different presentations (e.g. inattention, anxiety, masking behaviours).

Useful Organisations and Resources

National ADHD Support:

- ADHD Foundation – www.adhdfoundation.org.uk
- ADDISS (UK ADHD Information Service) – www.addiss.co.uk
- YoungMinds ADHD resources – www.youngminds.org.uk

Support and Resources for Parents and Carers:

You can get further support from:

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- **RANi** – For help with understanding your rights and the process
- **SENDIASS** – Local impartial information and advice service for parents and young people www.iasmanchester.org
- **IPSEA** – Independent Provider of Special Education Advice: www.ipsea.org.uk
- **Contact** – A national charity supporting families with disabled children: www.contact.org.uk

If you'd like help preparing your request or understanding your appeal options, RANi can provide guidance and templates.

ADHD-Friendly Tools and Strategies:

- Visual schedules and checklists
- Movement breaks
- Task timers (e.g. Time Timer app)
- Noise-cancelling headphones
- Fidget tools

Summary

Step	What to Do
Notice signs	Keep a log of behaviours and needs
Speak to GP/school	Request a referral for assessment
ADHD assessment	Multidisciplinary input, questionnaires
Diagnosis & support	Consider medication, education help, parenting support
Ongoing	Monitor needs, seek regular reviews, update support plans

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Remember:

Always keep a copy of all correspondence you send, along with proof of postage or delivery. If you send documents by post, we recommend using a **signed-for** service. If sending by email, request a **read receipt** if possible.

Get in Touch

If you need more information or have a question, we're here to help.

Email us: info@rani.org.uk

Please include:

- Your name
- Your child's name
- Your child's date of birth
- Your query

Or, if you prefer, you can fill out our online **contact form** and we'll get back to you as soon as possible.

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