



UNIT-8

Supporting Children with ADHD

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Understand the challenges faced by school-age children with ADHD
- ✓ Discuss the various steps that can be taken to support the education of ADHD pupils
- ✓ Outline the importance of personalised support for each pupil affected by ADHD



Unit 8

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Introduction

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is characterised by a wide variety of symptoms – impulsivity, hyperactivity and inattention being the most common. ADHD can be problematic at any age, though presents particular challenges for school-age children. As the key to a quality education lies in focusing on the subject matter and concentrating on tasks, children with ADHD encounter a wide variety of difficulties in the classroom.

However, the academic performance and overall educational experience of a child with ADHD can be significantly improved with appropriate instructional methodologies and interventions. Working as a teacher or a teaching assistant, it is your responsibility to contribute to the development of an inclusive and flexible classroom environment – one that caters to the unique requirements of *all* pupils without exception.

Identification and Diagnosis of ADHD

It's estimated that approximately 3.5% of all children (and 2% of adults) in the United Kingdom have ADHD. Research has shown that boys are more likely to be affected by ADHD than girls, though the exact reason for this disproportionate gender bias is unknown. On average, a boy is up to nine times more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD than a girl of a similar age.

For some time, it was theorised that ADHD was a disorder exclusively confined to childhood. While it was possible to diagnose a case of ADHD in a child as young as three, it was presumed that the condition would disappear of its own accord by adolescence. In reality, we now know that ADHD is by no means a childhood issue exclusively – it can also affect adults of all ages. Most importantly, many of those affected by ADHD cannot be expected to simply 'grow out of it' as they approach adolescents.

The signs and symptoms of ADHD change with age, and can be quite different when comparing a case of childhood ADHD with an adult case. Children of preschool age often show signs of obvious overactivity, with the inability to focus on one activity for long. Restlessness and fidgeting are common signs of ADHD in older children, who may be prone to 'fiddling' with anything in the vicinity and being easily distracted.

As children with ADHD approach adolescence, they may become detached, uninterested with what's going on around them and reluctant to communicate. They may also appear impulsive and unreliable, working carelessly and failing to fulfil the requirements placed on them (homework, chores etc.)

ADHD Defined

Formally defining ADHD is difficult as no two cases are ever the same. However, a publication from the American Psychiatric Association in 1994 attempted to narrow down the most common behaviours associated with ADHD, in order to make identification and diagnosis slightly simpler.

These signs, symptoms and behaviours recognized by the American Psychiatric Association are as follows:

- Fidgeting with hands or feet or squirming in their seat (adolescents with ADHD may appear restless)
- Difficulty remaining seated when required to do so



- Difficulty sustaining attention and waiting for a turn in tasks, games, or group situations
- Blurting out answers to questions before the questions have been completed
- Difficulty following through on instructions and in organizing tasks
- Shifting from one unfinished activity to another
- Failing to give close attention to details and avoiding careless mistakes
- Losing things necessary for tasks or activities
- Difficulty in listening to others without being distracted or interrupting
- Wide ranges in mood swings
- Great difficulty in delaying gratification

Source: The American Psychiatric Association

It's important to remember that by no means do any of these behaviours (or any combination thereof) confirm a case of childhood ADHD. Children who find it difficult to concentrate or exhibit unusual behaviour are often assumed to have a recognised attention deficit disorder, when in fact this isn't the case. Only by way of a formal assessment can an accurate diagnosis be made, after which a plan of action can be devised, and the appropriate interventions be made.

Teaching Children With ADHD

The key to successfully working with children with ADHD as a teacher or teaching assistant lies in taking a three-stage approach to the teaching process. An approach that begins with the identification of the child's unique requirements and difficulties, such as the triggers that cause them to be impulsive, what distracts them and why they become hyperactive.

After which, the appropriate interventions and accommodations can be planned – an activity usually carried out in conjunction with the child's parents and other educational personnel. The third and final step is to put the child's individualised educational programme into practice, continually monitoring its appropriateness and making adjustments where necessary.

Here's a brief overview of this three-step process:

1. **Carefully assess the pupil's strengths and requirements.** Each and every child with ADHD has 100% unique requirements and demonstrates strengths in unique areas. The assessment process will involve informal classroom observations and formal diagnostic assessments, planned and performed in conjunction with the child's parents or guardians.
2. **Plan the appropriate interventions and accommodations.** The information and insights gathered during the first step can then be used to work out which interventions and accommodations will be necessary, in order to meet the child's requirements and support their education.
3. **Implement and continuously improve the child's action plan.** The individualised educational program (or action plan) you devise for the child should include clearly defined and measurable goals. The plan should be revisited on a regular basis to ensure all predetermined objectives are being achieved, with alterations and improvements being made where necessary.

Again, it is vital to remember that all cases of childhood ADHD are unique. Therefore, the educational programmes or action plans for two pupils with ADHD should never be alike.

Successful Strategy Implementation



The most effective strategies for assisting pupils with ADHD are built around three primary components:

- Academic Instruction
- Behavioural Interventions
- Classroom Accommodations

Developing a detailed knowledge and understanding of each of these three components (individually and as a contributor to a complete personalised educational plan) is essential for all teachers and teaching assistants working with children with ADHD.

1. *Academic Instruction*

Modifications to conventional academic instruction norms may be necessary, in order to support children with ADHD. Whether introducing, conducting or concluding a classroom session, teachers and teaching assistants can and should make provisions for those who may struggle with conventional academic instruction.

Introducing Class

For example, research has shown that pupils with ADHD benefit from structure and a clear explanation of the purpose of the lesson. This means providing something of a preview of the lesson or classroom session to follow, outlining what the pupils will be learning about, what activities will take place and how they are expected to behave.

A few helpful tips and guidelines from ADHD experts for introducing lessons:

- **Create a schedule in advance.** The further in advance you can inform pupils of the content of upcoming classes, the better. At the beginning of each week or month, consider creating a schedule your pupils can use to find out what will be happening in each subsequent session.
- **Briefly revisit the prior lesson.** If following on from a previous lesson on the same topic, provide a brief summary of what was learned and what took place during the session. This can be useful for helping pupils see things in context this time around.
- **Establish clear expectations.** This means telling pupils what they will be learning during the lesson. For example, you could be teaching them how to use a formula to solve simple maths problems, or introducing them to new words to boost their vocabulary.
- **Tell them how to behave.** Rather than expecting your pupils to behave as they should, tell them in simple terms how you expect them to behave. If they are allowed to converse quietly with those sitting next to them but mustn't leave their seats without permission, make sure this is clarified at the start of the lesson.
- **Discuss the materials needed.** Again, rather than expecting pupils to work out which materials are required for any given task, tell them exactly what's needed. If wax crayons are to be used instead of pencils, make this clear before the task commences.
- **Keep your instructions simple.** Simplification of instructions and explanations is essential when working with pupils with ADHD. Keep things as concise and easy to understand as possible, though ensure everything important is explained fully.
- **Additional help and support.** Tell pupils exactly what they should do if they require additional help and support. Whether it's referring to a textbook or raising their hand to ask a question, make sure they know what to do if they struggle with the task.



These are just a few of the ways by which the average classroom session can be made less daunting and more productive for ADHD pupils.

Conducting Class

Once the lesson is underway, it is essential to consult with ADHD learners on a periodic basis to gauge their understanding of the tasks set and the resources being used. Pupils who find it difficult to concentrate for any reason may become frustrated, angry or upset due to their inability to grasp any given task on the same level as their peers.

Helpful strategies that can help build towards a productive and proactive classroom environment when working with ADHD pupils include the following:

- **Avoid the unexpected.** Consistency, structure and predictability are essential for pupils with ADHD, who in most instances do not respond positively to surprises or unexpected changes. Avoid last-minute changes to planned tasks or unannounced subject changes at all costs.
- **Promote an inclusive environment.** Give all pupils with ADHD the opportunity to participate in discussions and answer questions like the rest of their peers. Though be sure to inform them subtly ahead of time that they will be called upon – don't put them on the spot or spring surprising questions on them.
- **Use audio-visual aids.** ADHD pupils often find it easier to focus on a lesson, task or topic when audio or visual aids are utilised. By contrast, pupils with ADHD may find it extremely difficult to focus on purely verbal or written instructions – particularly if the task is complex, or the subject is new to them.
- **Ask for explanations.** Irrespective of whether the answer given is right or wrong, it can be helpful to ask the pupil how they arrived at this specific answer. This can be a great way of gaining insights into the pupil's thought processes, though of course should be kept discreet to avoid potential embarrassment.
- **Give plenty of time.** Ensure that pupils with ADHD know that they have as much time as they need to give their answers, when asked questions in class. If they're clearly struggling with the question asked, move on and come back to the same question later.
- **Try the buddy system.** This is where pupils of different academic ability levels are paired for specific tasks and activities. In many instances, pupils with ADHD perform more confidently when working alongside one or more of their peers, rather than on their own.
- **Watch for signs of distraction.** If a child with ADHD (or suspected ADHD) loses focus and shows signs of distraction, friendly encouragement can be offered as appropriate. Follow-up directions can either be given to the child directly, or directed at the whole class.
- **Keep things quiet.** Excessive noise can be extremely distracting for pupils with ADHD, making it difficult or impossible for them to focus. The requirement for a low-noise lesson should be communicated when first introducing the class, followed by subsequent reminders if and when noise exceeds an acceptable level.
- **Break up larger tasks.** Being presented with a long and complex task can be overwhelming for pupils with ADHD. It can therefore be helpful to break up larger tasks into smaller and more digestible activities, with subsequent tasks only being presented when the initial exercise has been completed successfully.



- **Highlight key points.** Pupils with ADHD can also be overwhelmed by long passages of written text, or written instructions that may be difficult to follow. In which case, teachers and teaching assistants can highlight the most important words and phrases in the text, helping direct the pupil's attention at these key points/instructions accordingly.
- **Remove time limitations.** A child with ADHD may need significantly longer to complete any given task than a pupil with no identifiable focus or concentration issues. This is why timed tests and assignments should be avoided or eliminated entirely. ADHD pupils should never be made to feel they are being rushed – it is a counterproductive strategy.

Concluding Class

Ending a lesson without providing prior warning isn't advisable when working with pupils with ADHD. Instead, it is preferable to give a certain amount of advance warning, check what kind of stage your pupils are at with their tasks and provide the support they need to conclude the activity and/or move confidently on to the next lesson.

- **Inform pupils in advance.** Around 5 to 10 minutes before the lesson comes to an end (or the time allotted to any specific activity is reaching its conclusion), let your pupils know how much time they have left and remind them what's coming next.
- **Check pupils' progress.** When the lesson comes to an end, this is also the time to check the work of at least some of those in the group, in order to see what kind of progress has been made and provide additional support when necessary.
- **Discuss the next lesson.** Concluding one activity or lesson should also include a brief preview of what's to come next. In doing so, you should also provide clear instructions – for example, to put away certain textbooks and materials, while preparing the materials required for the next activity.

Again, making every effort to avoid springing surprises upon pupils with ADHD is important. A few simple adjustments to the way you introduce, conduct and conclude each class often makes all the difference.

2. *Behavioural Interventions*

Component number two is behavioural intervention, which means taking a direct and hands-on approach to observation and assistance with ADHD pupils in mind. It is important to remember that pupils with ADHD often encounter challenges forming friendships and controlling their impulsiveness, which can make it difficult for them to feel like a cohesive and valued part of the group.

Behavioural interventions should be seen not as a form of punishment, but instead an opportunity to provide the support and encouragement the pupil needs to fulfil their potential. If and when the behaviour of a pupil with ADHD is considered unacceptable by conventional standards, it is important to remember that they may be acting entirely on impulse and beyond their direct control.

Behavioural Intervention Tips and Techniques

Teachers and teaching assistants are required to bring a wide variety of behavioural intervention techniques into the classroom, in order to support ADHD pupils accordingly. The simplest and often most effective form of behavioural intervention is positive verbal reinforcement – simply telling pupils you're happy with their efforts and they're doing a good job.

The idea being that rather than focusing disproportionately on negative and challenging behaviour, the



effective teacher looks for every opportunity to praise the pupil's positive behaviour. Positive reinforcement being exponentially more motivating than punishment.

A few tips and guidelines for the effective provision of positive verbal reinforcement:

- **Ensure the behaviour is defined.** This means avoiding ambiguousness when offering praise, which can make it difficult for the child to fully understand what they have done right and why you're praising them. Always praise something defined and specific – praise the learner for completing an assignment on time, not simply for 'doing well today' in a more general sense.
- **Offer praise at the right moment.** The right moment to offer praise is as soon as possible after the event that warrants it. This way, it is easier for the pupil to associate the praise with the specific behaviour in question, increasing their likelihood of repeating the same positive behaviour in future.
- **Use varied language.** Even the most genuine and sincere positive praise can lose its impact and appeal, if the same words and phrases are used repeatedly. Try to think of different ways of offering verbal reinforcement, varying your choice of language and using different statements regularly.
- **Always be sincere.** Any detection (or even suspicion) of insincere or forced praise will have the exact opposite of the intended effect on the pupil in question. Praise should only be given when it is 100% sincere and meaningful – never simply because it is something you *think* you should be doing.

Getting into the habit of focusing on praise over punishment is essential. Extensive research has shown that while punishment can bring about a short-term change in a pupil's behaviour, it can actually have a negative long-term effect. The intensity and frequency of the pupil's inappropriate or acceptable behaviour is more likely to increase and decrease, where punishment is prioritised over praise.

More importantly, it is vital to remember that negative consequences only teach pupils what they *shouldn't* be doing. It doesn't give them any direct indication as to what they *should* be doing. By contrast, praising positive behaviour not only motivates the pupil in question, it also empowers them with the knowledge and confidence needed to repeat the same positive behaviour.

Here are several additional behavioural intervention guidelines, which in all instances have been effective in supporting the needs of ADHD pupils:

- **Avoid being overly critical.** Roughly translated, it is more or less essential to overlook certain examples of inappropriate behaviour at certain times. If the behaviour question isn't disrupting the pupil's classmates, is unintentional or is unlikely to be repeated, it does not necessarily need to be addressed. Doing so could therefore prove unnecessary or counterproductive.
- **Eliminate distractions and triggers.** Rather than repeatedly telling a pupil with ADHD not to fiddle with nuisance items, it's far easier to keep them out of reach where possible. Examples of which include things like paper clips, rubber bands and so on, which are common distraction triggers for ADHD pupils in the classroom.
- **Offer calming alternatives.** It can sometimes be surprisingly soothing for both children and adults with ADHD to grasp a 'stress squeezer' or similar soft object in challenging situations. Where a pupil with ADHD experiences difficulties concentrating or staying calm, providing them with stress squeezers (or an appropriate equivalent) could help.
- **Encourage brief breaks.** Where a pupil with ADHD becomes agitated, overstimulated or unable to focus for any reason, it can be extremely helpful to encourage a brief break from the classroom setting. Something as simple as asking them to return a book to the library or run a brief errand of any kind can give them the brief escape needed to clear their head and restore their focus.



- **Meetings with parents.** Regularly consulting with parents of ADHD pupils is essential, as all caregivers and educators involved in the child's life will play an important role in their development. Comparing experiences and sharing tips for supporting the child in question through regular meetings and conferences is a mandatory part of the process.
- **Peer support.** It can also be extremely helpful to pair ADHD pupils up with responsible peers from their class, who can help them with their activities and provide the support and encouragement needed to boost their motivation and confidence.

Along with the above, behavioural prompts should be used strategically to provide ADHD pupils with reminders about behavioural expectations in the classroom. A silent index finger before the lips to indicate the need to quieten down, hand gestures and gesticulation for more expressive verbal communication, even something as simple as a thumbs-up and a smile from time to time for reassurance.

Seating Arrangements for Classrooms with ADHD Pupils

The question as to where a pupil with ADHD should sit when sharing a classroom with peers who aren't affected by focus or concentration issues is open to interpretation. However, there are three primary seating arrangements that are favoured by most experts, as follows:

- **ADHD pupils sit near the teacher.** The most obvious approach is to seat the pupil with the attention deficit disorder as close as possible to the teacher, without making an example of them in a strange spot in the room. This enables the teacher to keep a close watch over the pupil and provide plenty of support as required.
- **ADHD pupils sit with a peer role model.** This involves assigning one or more of the pupil's classmates the responsibility of working closely with them and providing support as required. This can be a great way of encouraging a child with ADHD to socialise with their peers and become a confident, cohesive part of the classroom group.
- **ADHD pupils sit in a distraction-free space.** Without segregating them from the rest of the class, a pupil with ADHD can be strategically seated in a spot with as few distractions as possible. A separate room or workspace could also be prepared to allow for quiet, private and distraction-free study, if appropriate.

Finding the ideal configuration may be a case of experimenting with several different layouts, taking note of how the ADHD pupil reacts and performs in each position accordingly.

Additional Tools and Resources of Value

There are also several relatively minor adjustments that can be made to the classroom environment itself, in order to create a more appropriate and supportive environment for pupils with ADHD. Again, a certain amount of experimentation may be necessary, in order to determine what is and isn't effective for the pupils they work with. Remember – all cases of ADHD are 100% unique.

Just a few additional tools and resources that may prove useful include the following:

- **Visible Timers** – This ensures all pupils in the class know exactly when each task or lesson comes to an end, and when the next begins. Knowing how much time they have available and being alerted prior to the end/beginning of a task is often important for pupils with ADHD.



- **Adjustable Lighting** – You may find that the lighting level in the classroom has an effect on the capability of an ADHD learner to concentrate on any given task. A classroom that's too dull or too bright rarely makes for a conducive learning environment. In addition, flashing the lights on and off to indicate that the lesson will end in 5 or 10 minutes can also be helpful.
- **Background Music** – The appropriateness of background music in the classroom environment will be determined by the extent to which it may distract the ADHD pupils you teach. However, there are instances where quiet classical or instrumental music can set a calm and relaxing ambience for lessons and activities, relieving stress for pupils who struggle to remain focused.
- **Comfortable furniture.** In almost all instances, a child who experiences concentration difficulties will find it practically impossible to focus on the task at hand if they are physically uncomfortable. This is where an investment in comfortable classroom furniture can pay dividends, ensuring all learners are provided with a comfortable learning environment they can enjoy.

The tools and resources that prove effective for one pupil with ADHD may prove *counterproductive* for another, so don't be discouraged if any of the changes you make along the way don't have the intended effect. There's a certain amount of trial and error to the whole thing, which calls for plenty of patience on the part of teachers and teaching assistants alike.

Conclusion...

Pupils with ADHD have the same rights and entitlements to a quality education as anyone else. Until relatively recently, most (if not all) children with ADHD in many classroom environments were assumed to have the same difficulties, face the same challenges and require the same support to progress successfully through their education.

Today, it's acknowledged and understood that the only effective approach when working with pupils with ADHD is to treat each learner's situation as 100% unique. Only then can an appropriately tailored program be devised and implemented for their benefit.

For this action plan to prove effective, it must be devised as a collaborative effort between the pupil's teachers, teaching assistants where present, parents and other specialist support staff.

Further Reading: