

TALKING ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION SERIES

VOLUME 6

ATTENTION DEFICIT / ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVE DISORDER

INFORMATION BOOKLET



This pamphlet is one of a series of resources prepared by the First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) and First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) to share information about how to support all First Nations students, regardless of their needs.

FNSA MANDATE:

to collaborate with First Nation schools to create nurturing environments that develop learners' pride and competence in their First Nations language and heritage and equip them to realize their full potential within self-governing First Nations communities.

FNESC MANDATE:

to facilitate discussion about education matters affecting First Nations in BC by disseminating information to and soliciting input from First Nations. FNESC's primary goal is to promote and support the provision of a quality education to First Nations learners.

We hope that these pamphlets provide a useful overview of key special education topics, representing an introduction to issues that some people may want to investigate in more detail. Anyone who requires more information or has specific questions is welcome to contact the FNESC/FNSA special education staff.



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What is Attention Deficit / Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder?

Attention Deficit / Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (referred to as ADHD in this pamphlet) is a disorder that makes it difficult for a person to pay attention and control impulsive behaviours. A person with ADHD may also be restless and almost constantly active.

Students with ADHD may:

- find it hard to pay attention;
- feel the need to move constantly during times when they shouldn't; and/or
- find themselves constantly interrupting others.

ADHD is not just a childhood disorder. Although the symptoms of ADHD usually begin in childhood, ADHD can continue through adolescence and adulthood.

In particular, even though hyperactivity tends to decrease as a child becomes a teen, challenges with inattention, disorganization, and poor impulse control often continue through the teen years and into adulthood.

What To Look For?

People with ADHD show an ongoing pattern of three different types of symptoms:

- Difficulty paying attention (inattention)
- Being overactive (hyperactivity)
- Acting without thinking (impulsivity)

These symptoms get in the way of their functioning and/or development.

People who have ADHD have combinations of the following symptoms. They may ...

- overlook or miss details, make careless mistakes in schoolwork, at work, or during other activities.
- have problems sustaining attention in tasks or play, including conversations, lectures, or lengthy reading.
- often seem to be daydreaming.
- seem to not listen when spoken to directly.

- not follow through on instructions, fail to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace.
- start tasks but quickly lose focus and get easily sidetracked.
- have problems organizing tasks and activities, such as doing tasks in sequence, keeping materials and belongings in order, keeping work organized, managing time, and meeting deadlines.
- avoid or dislike tasks that require sustained effort, such as schoolwork or homework, or for teens and older adults, preparing reports, completing forms, or reviewing lengthy papers.
- lose things necessary for tasks or activities, such as school supplies, pencils, books, tools, wallets, keys, paperwork, eyeglasses, and cell phones.
- become easily distracted by unrelated thoughts or stimuli.
- be forgetful in daily activities, such as chores, errands, returning calls, and keeping appointments.

- have strong emotions that come on quickly.
- sometimes be prone to anxiety or depression.

Symptoms of hyperactivity are indicated when a child is more active than other children of the same age, becomes frustrated easily, acts impulsively, and constantly blames others. According to many experts, the part of the brain responsible for self-control is working differently, which affects the child's ability to control his or her behaviour.

Signs of hyperactivity and impulsivity may include:

- Fidgeting and squirming while seated.
 - Getting up and moving around in situations when staying seated is expected, such as in the classroom or in the office.
 - Being unable to play or engage in hobbies quietly.
 - Talking constantly.
- Blurting out an answer before a question has been completed or finishing other people's sentences.
 - Having trouble waiting for a turn.
 - Interrupting or intruding on others, such as in conversations, games, or activities.

Showing these signs and symptoms does not necessarily mean a person has ADHD.

What is significant in determining whether a student may have ADHD is the behaviours occurring in a wide variety of situations and regularly over time. Other concerns, such as anxiety, depression, and certain types of learning disabilities, can also result in similar symptoms.

A formal diagnosis of ADHD can be made by a mental health professional, such as psychiatrist or clinical psychologist, primary care provider, or pediatrician.

What Can Help?

Although there is no cure for ADHD, medication, training, therapy, or a combination of treatments can help reduce symptoms and improve functioning. Specialists are needed to determine what types of interventions are right for each individual.

Children and adults with ADHD need guidance and understanding from their parents, families, and teachers to reach their full potential and succeed. Specialists can help parents of a child with ADHD understand the condition and how it affects a family. They can also help families develop new skills, attitudes, and ways of relating to each other that can be beneficial for everyone.

People supporting students with ADHD can also focus on the many positive attributes of students who have ADHD, including their humour, creativity, caring attitudes, sensitivity, and willingness to help.

WHAT ARE SOME GOOD THINGS ABOUT HAVING ADHD?

Students who have ADHD often:

- Are courageous, willing to try new things, and take risks
- Have significant energy
- Can do several things at the same time
- Are smart
- Have a good sense of humour
- Are good with younger children
- Are spontaneous
- Often see details that other people miss
- Are sensitive, compassionate, and understanding about other people's differences
- Often volunteer to help others
- Are generally happy and enthusiastic
- Are imaginative and creative
- Are eager to make new friends
- Are warm and loving and care about their families

Nine Suggestions for Families Living with a Hyperactive Child

Accept Your Child's Differences. Your child will likely be active and energetic. Rather than trying to eliminate hyperactivity, try to manage it. Your child's behaviours are not intentional. Be tolerant, patient, and low-key.

Provide Outlets for Excess Energy. Use daily outside activities such as running, sports and long walks to help your child burn off energy.

Keep Your Home and Lifestyle As Organized As Possible. Consistent routines and structures can help people with ADHD stay ordered. Predictable mealtimes, bedtimes, and playtimes are helpful.

Avoid Fatigue. When children with ADHD are exhausted, they have less self-control and their symptoms usually worsen.

Avoid Settings That Are Too Difficult. When possible, avoid very formal settings or places where your child will be expected to behave in ways that are very difficult for them, such as situations where they will be expected to sit quietly for extensive periods of time. Making a child unnecessarily uncomfortable or embarrassed will not help them develop their self-esteem.

Maintain Firm Discipline. ADHD can be difficult to manage, and children with ADHD need careful, planned discipline to ensure that they do not harm themselves or anyone else. Aggressive behaviour cannot be tolerated, although it is critical to remember that it is not a child's fault. Negative comments will not help children learn self-control. Clear rules that are consistently enforced are important. Positive comments and noting a child's strengths are also priorities for an effective approach to discipline.

Use Non-Physical Consequences.

If sharing your disapproval for a behaviour or rule breaking does not work, a “time-out” might help. A child can be sent to a quiet place to calm down, and encouraged to come back as soon as the problematic behaviour has changed.

Stretch a Child’s Attention Span. It is often beneficial to reward positive behaviours, giving praise when a child can quietly engage in age-appropriate behaviours such as coloring, listening to stories, playing with toys and games etc. Families can try to use toys and games that are safe and relatively unbreakable, and new toys and activities can be introduced gradually to help children increase their attention span over time.

Take Breaks! Be Patient With Your Child and Yourself.

Take some time for yourself to maintain your own mental health. Having children with ADHD can be exhausting. Do not expect too much of yourself. Parents need to manage their own stress so that they can maintain their ability to deal with frustration and respond calmly to their children’s behaviours and high energy levels.

Suggestions for the Classroom

Teaching children who have ADHD can be challenging, but also very rewarding. Teachers, Educational Assistants and other professionals can play an important role in helping students with ADHD find success in the school and classroom.

The following suggestions may help.

PROVIDE STRUCTURE

- Have a minimal number of classroom rules that are clear, concise and positive.
- Use easily enforced and immediate consequences for breaking rules.
- Provide a written schedule so all students know what to expect.
- Structure class times to avoid waiting periods and to make quick transitions.

GIVE INSTRUCTIONS

- Use clear, specific and simple instructions.
- Avoid giving instructions in the form of a question, such as “would you ...” or “could you ...”
- Make instructions short, specific, and direct, and avoid multi-step directions.
- Make sure you have a child’s attention before giving instructions. You may want to have eye contact with the student, but do not force this. Some students may concentrate more on maintaining eye contact than on what is being said. Some students are also uncomfortable with eye contact, and making them uneasy will not help them listen to your instructions.
- Be prepared to repeat directions when needed.
- Check to make sure your instructions were understood. If you are unsure, ask a student to repeat the instructions using his or her own words.

USE CUES AND REMINDERS

- Instructions are more effective when they are accompanied with a cue or reminder. For example, point to your eyes while saying “look,” or point to your ears when saying “listen.”
- Do not rely on a student’s memory of rules; post the classroom rules and consequences, and provide visual cues throughout the classroom.
- Review rules periodically, especially after school breaks.
- Perhaps develop a “secret” signal to remind a child about something they find challenging.

HELP STUDENTS WHO HAVE SHORT ATTENTION SPANS

- Provide a variety of work in short periods.
- Intersperse very high and low interest tasks.
- Involve students with ADHD when possible, such as having them help with technology equipment, write information on the board, etc.
- For students who need it, reduce the length of assignments or put fewer problems on a page. Emphasize quality over quantity for students when appropriate.

- Provide feedback about accuracy immediately.
- Reduce monotony with a variety of materials and presentations, using novel and interesting strategies when possible.
- Teach note-taking strategies directly to increase the benefits of instruction and increase comprehension.
- When possible, let students with ADHD set their own pace for task completion.

MITIGATE HYPERACTIVITY

- Give a student with ADHD a reason to move around, by passing out papers or bringing a message to the office.
- Try to alternate quiet and stimulating activities.
- Recognize that students with ADHD find quiet on-task activities easier earlier in the day, and schedule more active tasks for the afternoon.
- Allow for transitions periods after recess and lunch time, when some students have difficulty settling down.

ADDRESS DISORGANIZATION

- Break assignments into smaller pieces.
- Help students understand how to break down assignments into sequential steps.
- Limit desk materials. Distribute materials when they are needed to avoid children losing them.
- Help students learn to use folders to stay organized.
- Keep materials in a specific location, gradually allowing students more responsibility for accessing them independently at an appropriate time.

REDUCE DISTRACTIONS

- Seat a student with ADHD near the teacher's desk and way from distracting locations.
- Stand near the student when they are struggling.
- Provide a quiet place for completing assignments and tests.
- Try to keep visual distractions minimal and in the same place, such as activity centres, aquariums, etc.
- Structure lessons carefully, with key points clearly highlighted and the main items identified.

HELP WITH HOMEWORK

- Be realistic about amounts of homework. If appropriate, communicate with other teachers to ensure a child's homework is manageable.
- Remind students to take home materials they will need, or provide a second set of resources for the home.

USE TECHNOLOGY TO HELP

- Allow students to use calculators if needed, especially to check answers.
- Encourage students to record important classes if that will assist them.
- Allow students to use computers and other devices to complete their work.

BE FLEXIBLE AND POSITIVE

- Try different approaches with different students and for different tasks.
- Increase and decrease the amount of structure provided for students as their needs change over time.
- Use encouragement, positive feedback, praise, and affection as much as possible, and use a variety of rewards to increase motivation. Ignore troubling behaviours if they are not disruptive or dangerous.
- When negative consequences are necessary, never put down or deliberately embarrass students. When possible, talk through behaviour problems one-on-one, and monitor frustration levels by checking in with students often.
- Remember that all students are unique - and all individuals who have ADHD are different. Do not expect the same strategies to work for everyone. Apply effective approaches consistently, set realistic expectations, and recognize students for their successes.

REFERENCES

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Disabilities. Child Development Institute. childdevelopmentinfo.com

OTHER VOLUMES AVAILABLE IN THE
TALKING ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION SERIES:

VOLUME 1: AN OVERVIEW

VOLUME 2: AN INTRODUCTION FOR PARENTS / FAMILIES

VOLUME 3: INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS

VOLUME 4: A PARENT'S GUIDE TO INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS

VOLUME 5: SPEECH AND LANGUAGE ISSUES

VOLUME 6: ATTENTION DEFICIT / ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVE
DISORDER

VOLUME 7: FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS

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