

A photograph of two children, a girl and a boy, running happily in a grassy field during sunset. The girl is on the left, wearing a light blue shirt and dark shorts, pointing towards the right. The boy is on the right, wearing a red shirt and light shorts, running towards the left. The background is a bright, hazy sunset over a park-like area with trees.

# ADHD: ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

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*Information for Families*

## What is ADHD?

ADHD is a disorder that:

- Causes you to be easily distracted in certain situations. Some, but not all, children with ADHD are impulsive, hyperactive, and find it hard to manage their emotions.
- Is brain-based. The brain may have lower levels of certain chemicals.
- Is highly genetic. If someone in your family has ADHD, you are more likely to have it.
- Can range from mild to severe.
- Impacts school and learning, relationships, self-esteem and safety.
- Affects about 5-9% of school age children; about two-thirds of these children continue to show difficulty in adulthood.

## What are the Symptoms?

Most children with ADHD:

- Get bored quickly when a task is repetitive.
- Lose concentration during long tasks.
- Can't finish routine tasks or school assignments without supervision or reminders.
- Are easily distracted.
- Switch from one activity to another, or is not able to switch activities easily.
- Can focus and pay attention when interested but not able to control the attention.
- Are not consistent in work or behaviour.
- Have difficulty recalling what they've listened to, and in remembering, understanding, organizing and following instructions.

Some children with ADHD also:

- Don't stop and think before acting or speaking.
- Are fidgety or restless.
- Are very talkative or interrupts a lot.
- React quickly when upset or excited.

### THERE ARE 3 PRESENTATIONS OF ADHD

- 1) Inattentive ("ADD")
- 2) Hyperactive/Impulsive
- 3) Combined

# Assessment and Diagnosis

There are no tests, brain scans or blood tests for ADHD. A medical doctor or psychologist who specializes in ADHD can make a diagnosis. They base the diagnosis on information from an interview with caregivers, and the ratings of a child's behaviour in different settings on standardized questionnaires.

The rating scales help to assess the child's level of inattention and hyperactive and impulsive behaviour at home and school compared to other children of the same age.

At the interview, a clinician gathers information about the child's symptoms, history and other challenges. The interview includes questions about:

- Symptoms
- Strengths, skills and challenges
- Family background and medical history
- Pregnancy, birth, and development
- Developmental milestones
- School history and learning problems
- Behaviour problems
- Mood swings, anxiety, sadness
- Relationships, confidence, self-concept
- Muscle movement
- Sleep, exercise
- Tics - movements or noise making the child can't control
- Sensitivity to touch, sounds, smells, textures
- Drug or alcohol use, screen time

Many children with ADHD will not show symptoms or behaviours at the interview. But that will not determine the diagnosis or treatment. The most important factor is how much ADHD symptoms are causing the child difficulty in everyday life.

## After Diagnosis

ADHD can range from a mild, hardly noticeable disorder, to one that is very severe. Some families and children feel relieved when they learn it is a disorder that is causing their difficulties. Other families are upset when they find out their child has a condition they must learn to live with. Most families feel a mixture of both.

After diagnosis, many parents worry their child will be “labeled”. But often the child is already dealing with other wrong labels. Children with ADHD often know that they are different from their peers. They may label these differences as “bad” or “stupid”. Sometimes parents and teachers think the child is “lazy” or “unmotivated”. These are labels that misinterpret the symptoms. The child is not acting this way on purpose.

Once a diagnosis is made, people can begin to understand that ADHD symptoms require treatment like any other disorder, such as diabetes. With support and treatment, children with ADHD can cope and live with a good quality of life. Families and teachers can learn about ADHD and find ways to help children develop to their highest potential.

There are many people and organizations that offer emotional support, practical skills and guidance for living and coping with ADHD. We have listed several in our resource guide.

### TREATMENT

4 key treatment approaches that help manage ADHD are:

- 1) Education about ADHD  
(this guidebook is a good first step)
- 2) Medications
- 3) Parenting Strategies
- 4) School Accommodations

# Medications

## ADHD MEDICATIONS MAY HELP YOUR CHILD TO

- Concentrate and focus
- Make less impulsive decisions
- Stop and think before acting
- Cooperate
- Get more work done at school
- Improve handwriting
- Be less aggressive

Sometimes ADHD symptoms have a significant effect on a child's daily life at home, school and with friends. If that is the case, your doctor may suggest a trial of medication to see if it will help make things better. A trial lets you see how a medication affects your child so you can make an informed decision about whether it is useful or not. It is not a lifelong commitment. Medication should be re-evaluated every year because it may need to be adjusted as the child grows.

The goal of medication treatment is to deal with the symptoms that are preventing children with ADHD from reaching their potential. There are two types of medication for ADHD: stimulant or non-stimulant. Some children also have other disorders or illnesses that require medication such as antidepressants.

Most children adapt to these medications easily. But if the medication causes problematic side effects, it may need to be decreased or changed. Talk to the doctor if a medication seems to make your child more irritable, quieter, or more tearful than usual or if it seems to disrupt your child's appetite or sleep. Your child may need a second medication trial. We do not know in advance which one will work best for your child.

After taking a medication for some time, it may seem to be not working as well. This often happens if your child has taken the medication for years without a break and has built up a tolerance to it. It may help to have a medication holiday for at least 4 weeks or more in the summer, as long as it won't put the child in danger or too much stress on the family. You can discuss this with your clinician.

There is no research that shows "natural" diets or products can successfully treat ADHD, and some may be unsafe to take with ADHD medication. Check with your doctor before taking any over-the-counter medication or herbal treatments.

Medications for ADHD are prescribed with caution. It is important to tell your doctor if there is an immediate family member with a history of heart conditions or symptoms. Contact your doctor immediately if you notice a significant change in your child's mood, or the start of suicidal thoughts or actions.

**For more information on ADHD medication:**  
[keltymentalhealth.ca/finding-help/medications/adhd](http://keltymentalhealth.ca/finding-help/medications/adhd)

# Behavioural Parenting

## HERE ARE TEN GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF PARENTING A CHILD WITH ADHD

- 1) Give more immediate and frequent feedback and consequences
- 2) Use incentives instead of punishment
- 3) Give visual reminders of what to do next and how much time is left to do it
- 4) Make thinking and problem-solving more concrete
- 5) Be consistent
- 6) Act, don't yak
- 7) Plan ahead for problem situations
- 8) Keep a disability perspective
- 9) Don't personalize your child's problems or disorder
- 10) Practice forgiveness

There are effective ways to manage the challenging behaviour of children with ADHD. These skills are often taught in weekly group sessions for parents that last from 8-12 weeks.

Here are ten guiding principles of behavioural parenting:

### 1) GIVE MORE IMMEDIATE AND FREQUENT FEEDBACK AND CONSEQUENCES

Children with ADHD are often "in-the-moment", so become part of their moment to have more effect. Use praise and incentives to help them learn positive behaviours. For example, during homework, give praise for being on-task, and if your child gets distracted, quickly redirect back to the task. Do this several times during the homework period. Don't just say it once, and don't wait until the end before giving feedback.

### 2) USE INCENTIVES INSTEAD OF PUNISHMENT

Children with ADHD already receive more punishment than others. It is not very effective at changing behaviour. Catch your child being good. For every penalty, find a way to also give at least 2-3 rewards to motivate rather than punish your child. Do not expect children with ADHD to be self-motivated to do things that are boring, difficult or require effort. Allow your child to earn points or tokens for positive behaviour that can later be traded for an incentive like a later curfew time, a movie rental, or a toy at the dollar store.

### 3) GIVE VISUAL REMINDERS OF WHAT TO DO NEXT AND HOW MUCH TIME IS LEFT TO DO IT

Children with ADHD have a different sense of time, so they need reminders like visual timers, alarms, alerts and tweets. Break large tasks into small steps. For example, make a checklist in words or pictures of each step in your child's morning routine (getting dressed, eating breakfast, brushing teeth, etc). Set a countdown timer that gives your child 5 minutes to complete each step.

### 4) MAKE THINKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING MORE CONCRETE

It is difficult for children with ADHD to mentally think through a problem, so help them to see it in visual and "hands-on" ways. Use pictures, diagrams, and blocks when teaching. Also, help your child learn something by watching you do it and then guide them when it's their turn to try.

### 5) BE CONSISTENT

Children with ADHD do best with structure and routine. Parents and caregivers need to use the same ways to manage the child's behaviour at all times and in all places. Try a strategy for at least 1-2 weeks before giving up.

**6) ACT, DON'T YAK**

Children with ADHD respond much more to action consequences and feedback, and much less to parental talking and reasoning. Tell them to turn off the TV or they will lose a privilege, rather than lecture about screen time.

**7) PLAN AHEAD FOR PROBLEM SITUATIONS**

Think about where your child is likely to misbehave and develop a plan to manage the situation. For example, if going grocery shopping is hard for your child, think about the reasons why it's hard, and come up with ideas to make it easier. If boredom is the problem, ask your child to be a helper by finding or counting the next grocery items. If your child is sensitive to the noise and crowds, have your child listen to music using headphones. Share the plan with your child, and then follow through.

**8) KEEP A DISABILITY PERSPECTIVE**

The way we think about what causes a child's behaviour affects how we respond. Instead of thinking the child is being manipulative or lazy, remind yourself that your child has a disability. Your child behaves differently because your child doesn't have the skills to behave any other way. It will help you to react more calmly and use more helpful strategies for your child.

**9) DON'T PERSONALIZE YOUR CHILD'S PROBLEMS OR DISORDER**

Your sense of worth and dignity is not based on whether you "win" an argument or a difficult encounter with your child. Your best intentions and effort in parenting is what's important.

**10) PRACTICE FORGIVENESS**

Let go of destructive emotions like anger, guilt, and disappointment with your child, yourself, and others who may misunderstand. Try to accept the things you cannot change (your child having ADHD), but have the dedication to use strategies to change what you can (how you react and give feedback to your child).

**REMEMBER THE BASICS:**

- A well-balanced diet
- Regular exercise
- Getting enough sleep

These are the foundations to a child's success, and are particularly important for kids and youth with ADHD.

**Counselling and Family Therapy:** Your family may find it helpful to work with a family therapist on issues of communication and expectations. Individual therapy can help with issues that are not directly caused by ADHD but are complicated by it. Individual or group counselling may be helpful for the child with ADHD who struggles with anxiety or depression or has had a traumatic life.

# ADHD and School

Children with ADHD usually have academic and social difficulties in school. At the beginning of the school year, share your knowledge about ADHD and your child with the teacher, school and others. Provide teachers with a one-page summary of key points.

Below are some common behaviours or problems that interfere with a child's learning. A comprehensive list of problems and detailed strategies can be found at [www.caddac.ca](http://www.caddac.ca).

- They are **distracted**. Children with ADHD have a hard time paying attention and staying focused on their work. The gaps in attention make it difficult to learn. Classroom distractions need to be reduced. School work needs to be broken down into chunks of time that are reasonable for the child's attention span.
- Children with ADHD have **trouble organizing** their thoughts and belongings. They have difficulty breaking assignments into smaller parts and keeping track of time. They may misplace things or forget important steps. They often forget or are not aware of deadlines and the consequences of not handing in work. They need a lot of help with organization and planning. They need help breaking tasks down into manageable chunks.
- They have trouble **remembering information**. They need more repetition than other children. Verbal explanations need to be backed up with visual information (lists, charts, pictures).
- The amount and the quality of their **work is not consistent**. Children with ADHD are often accused of "not trying" because their work effort and output varies from day to day. Their effort often depends on their interest in a task. Increasing the interest level of tasks by giving children choices can help. Teachers and parents need to remember that inconsistent effort is part of ADHD.
- Children with ADHD often have **more energy** than other children. They need more opportunities for movement during and between tasks.
- They have problems with **self-control**. Children with ADHD often act without thinking. They need more supervision and help "in the moment".
- They may have **learning disabilities**. Children with ADHD often have learning disabilities that may make learning to read and develop writing and math skills more difficult. They may need to be assessed for a learning disorder by a psychologist.

## SOME GREAT RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

### Awareness of Students with Diverse Learning Needs, What the Teacher Needs to Know

(Ministry of Education)

[www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/awareness](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/awareness)

### Teach ADHD

[www.teachadhd.ca](http://www.teachadhd.ca)

### Focusing on Success: Teaching Students with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (Alberta Education)

[education.alberta.ca/media/385137/focus-on-success-teaching-students-with-adhd-2006.pdf](http://education.alberta.ca/media/385137/focus-on-success-teaching-students-with-adhd-2006.pdf)



## Homework

Homework is very challenging for children with ADHD. At the end of the day, children with ADHD are often tired from the efforts at school and the family may be coping with rebound from medication. Here are some tips:

- Expect about 10 minutes of homework for each grade, and one hour per day in high school. You may need to lower homework expectations if it causes a lot of family stress.
- Children with ADHD are often forgetful. Get your child a planner and show how to put important information in it. Ask if the teachers use e-mail to communicate about assignments and due dates.
- For elementary school, have one master binder with sections for each subject (Math, Reading, Writing). In high school, have a master binder with sections for each class. At the front of the binders have a folder for homework “To Be Completed”, and a folder for assignments that “Need To Be Handed In”.
- A complete set of textbooks at home and at school can be helpful for forgotten supplies.
- Set a daily routine for homework. Some children with ADHD prefer to work in a quiet space with no distractions. Others work best in a setting with background noise or soft music.
- Give a reward for using time efficiently. For example, if your child concentrates on homework for 15 minutes, the reward could be 15 minutes extra play time before bedtime.
- Tutoring may help to reinforce learning and raise confidence. It is better to schedule tutoring on the weekend when the child is fresh. If possible, choose a tutor with experience working with children with ADHD.

## Friendships

Help your child develop social relationships that are not just with friends from school. Children with ADHD are often friendly and want to socialize, but may have problems getting along with their peers or interacting with teachers and other authority figures. Find smaller groups that offer organized, well planned social activities. Look for a leader who will help your child learn social skills in a safe and friendly environment. Many children with ADHD get along better with those who are younger or older than them.

# Resources for Parents

## Provincial ADHD Program

[www.bcchildrens.ca/our-services/mental-health-services/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-\(adhd\)](http://www.bcchildrens.ca/our-services/mental-health-services/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-(adhd))  
[www.cfri.ca/adhd](http://www.cfri.ca/adhd)

## Provincial Resource Centre for Mental Health

Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre  
Phone: 604-875-2084  
or Toll-free: 1-800-665-1822  
[www.keltymentalhealth.ca](http://www.keltymentalhealth.ca)

## Books

### Child or Teen ADHD

Taking Charge of ADHD (Barkley)

Teenagers with ADD and ADHD (Dendy)

The ADHD Parenting Handbook (Alexander-Roberts)

Understanding Girls with ADHD (Nadeau)

### Executive Functioning/ Study Skills

Smart But Scattered (Dawson & Guare)

Smart But Scattered Teens (Guare & Dawson)

Late, Lost, and Unprepared (Cooper-Kahn)

### Child Noncompliance

The Incredible Years (Webster-Stratton)

The Explosive Child (Greene) / [www.livesinthebalance.org](http://www.livesinthebalance.org)

Defiant Children (Barkley)

## Websites

### General ADHD Websites

Canadian ADHD Resource Alliance (CADDRA)  
[www.caddra.ca](http://www.caddra.ca)

Centre for ADHD Awareness, Canada (CADDAC)  
[www.caddac.ca](http://www.caddac.ca)

Children and Adolescents with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)  
[www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org) or [www.chaddcanada.org](http://www.chaddcanada.org)

ADD Warehouse  
[www.addwarehouse.com](http://www.addwarehouse.com)

National Institute of Mental Health – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder  
[www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-easy-to-read](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-easy-to-read)

ADDitude – Living Well with Attention Deficit  
[www.additudemag.com](http://www.additudemag.com)

ADHD Families  
[www.adhdfamilies.ca](http://www.adhdfamilies.ca)

Free Printable Behavior Charts  
[www.freeprintablebehaviorcharts.com](http://www.freeprintablebehaviorcharts.com)

You Tube: search - “Russell Barkley”  
(e.g., Essential Ideas for Parents)

### Books about ADHD for Kids

My Brain Needs Glasses: Living with Hyperactivity (Vincent)

Learning to Slow Down and Pay Attention (Nadeau)

Girls Guide to ADHD (Walker)

## ADHD Parent Programs

**ADHD Parent Program** (Vancouver residents only)  
Group for parents of children and teens with ADHD  
Child must have an ADHD diagnosis  
Tel: 604-675-3895

### Confident Parents Thriving Kids

Telephone support for behavioural problems  
[www.confidentparents.ca](http://www.confidentparents.ca)

## UBC Research Labs on ADHD

### Parenting Lab – Dr. C. Johnston

[parentinglab.psych.ubc.ca/](http://parentinglab.psych.ubc.ca/)

### Peer Relationships Lab – Dr. A. Mikami

[peerlab.psych.ubc.ca](http://peerlab.psych.ubc.ca)

## Websites with Information on Co-Existing Conditions/Issues

### Sleep

[www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)

### Bullying

[www.prevnet.ca](http://www.prevnet.ca)

### Diet/Nutrition

8-1-1 (Dial-a-Dietician)

### Physical Activity

[www.csep.ca/guidelines](http://www.csep.ca/guidelines)

### Learning Disabilities

[www.ldonline.org](http://www.ldonline.org)

### Substance Use

[www.ccsa.ca](http://www.ccsa.ca) (alcohol)

[www.niaaa.nih.gov](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov) (alcohol)

[www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov) (drugs)

### Anxiety

[www.anxietybc.com](http://www.anxietybc.com)

[www.ldav.ca](http://www.ldav.ca)

### Screen Time

[www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/Children-And-Media-Tips-For-Parents.aspx](http://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/Children-And-Media-Tips-For-Parents.aspx)

# Adult ADHD

## Adult ADHD Books

More Attention, Less Defecit (Tuckman)

Driven to Distraction (Hallowell & Ratey)

The Disorganized Mind (Ratey)

Taking Charge of Adult ADHD (Barkley)

Is It You, Me, Or Adult ADHD? (Pera)

The Mindfulness Prescription for Adult ADHD (Zylowska)

## Adult ADHD Websites (Specifically for Adult ADHD)

Totally ADD

[www.totallyadd.com](http://www.totallyadd.com)

National Resource Centre on ADHD

[www.help4adhd.org](http://www.help4adhd.org)

