



# Tourette syndrome and ADHD in the classroom

**About half of children with Tourette syndrome (TS) also have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). This information explains the condition and shares some tips for managing children with ADHD (with or without TS) in school. We realise that the child with ADHD may not be the only child in school with special needs, but hope that some or all of the following suggestions will be achievable.**

## What is ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a condition where a child or young person has trouble paying attention, is a great deal more energetic than others of a similar age and cannot control certain impulses. In everyday life, these children often get labelled as 'difficult' or 'out of control' and their parents are regarded as 'bad parents'. We know that this is not the case as ADHD is caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain and is not simply bad behaviour. However, specific approaches in working with a pupil with ADHD may be useful for the child themselves and others at school and home.

## What problems could ADHD cause at school?

The main symptoms of ADHD and potential problems they could cause at school are:

### Attention deficit

- Difficulty paying attention in class
- Seeming not to listen to instructions
- Forgetting equipment, such as games kit, books, pens and so on
- Having trouble completing tasks, especially if they last for more than a few minutes
- Easily distracted
- Disrupting other students' work

### Hyperactivity

- Always 'on the go' and rarely able to sit quietly for more than a few minutes
- Fidgeting when sitting down
- Making a lot of noise, especially in situations where quiet is preferred

### Impulsivity

- 'Butting in' to give answers before question is finished
- Having problems with waiting in line or taking turns with other students
- Interrupting conversations or activities
- Talking at inappropriate times
- Having trouble with controlling behaviour, for instance, 'flying off the handle' with little provocation

## How can teachers help?

Children and young people with ADHD will benefit from early identification of their particular problems, before they are labelled as 'difficult' or 'uncontrollable'. You may have concerns before others because you are seeing the student in a controlled setting where certain standards of behaviour are expected.

Students with ADHD may find it difficult to ask for help as it can draw attention from classmates and make them feel stupid. Many children and young people with



ADHD are unaware of their behaviour and difficulties, and how these are leading to underperformance. They have difficulty with thinking through processes so may not have connected one to the other.

Although it is undoubtedly challenging to teach a child or young person with ADHD, simple adjustments as described below can improve their experience of school and achieve better outcomes than previously expected.

## **Suggestions for helping children and young people with ADHD**

We realise that the child with ADHD may not be the only child in school with special needs, but hope that the following are helpful for all your students, not just those with ADHD.

### **Arranging the classroom**

- Seat the student with ADHD where there are as few distractions as possible. Often this is towards the front of the class and closer to you and the board.
- Display timetables in a highly visible area, highlighting specific activities with images or symbols.
- Keep an extra supply of pens, pencils and paper for students liable to lose or forget them.
- Allow a larger 'personal space' for student with poor impulse control, especially if they tend to bump into or jostle other students.
- Have a routine for finishing one class and moving to the next. This could include a stepped approach perhaps starting a few minutes before the bell goes. Steps could include packing away, tidying desk and checking location of next class before leaving the classroom.

### **Organising tasks and activities**

- Show students an example of a completed task so that they can understand the aim of the task.
- Teach students to break large tasks down

into smaller steps leading to completion of the task. Emphasise accuracy and quality of work over quantity so the student concentrates on doing the task well.

- Set a deadline for each smaller step as well as the final completion date for the large task. Make sure deadlines are clearly marked on handouts or worksheets and reinforce regularly.
- Colour code or highlight important instructions or priority pieces of work.
- Use a mind map to help students organise their thoughts about a particular task. Mnemonics (aide memoires) can be useful if key pieces of information need to be remembered.
- During question and answer sessions, say the student's name and pause before asking the question so that it is clear that his or her attention is required.
- Use worksheets with enough space to accommodate sloppy or large handwriting. Use gridlines so that text and numbers can be aligned.
- Teach study skills, such as note taking, 'to do' lists and time management, so that the student can become more self-sufficient in organising him or herself. Encourage self-testing throughout the course - BBC Bitesize has plenty of sections relevant to most curricula.

### **Homework**

- Work with parents to establish a homework routine, specifying when the homework will be started, for how long it will be done and possible rewards for completing a task.
- If homework is difficult for the student to complete at home, suggest attending a homework club or something similar.
- Home-school diaries be useful as parents will be able to see what homework should be done and by when, and initial when task is completed.
- Have a routine way of giving out homework tasks, explaining what will need to be taken home, perhaps asking the student to pack



required items at that point, rather than later in the day. Suggest using a timer to complete homework in a reasonable time. This also helps prepare for exams.

### **Discipline**

- Use rewards for good behaviour rather than punishment for bad behaviour, wherever possible.
- Avoid public criticism but work out a system of visual cues so the student is aware of his or her misdoings.
- Work with parents to ensure that methods of discipline and reward used at school do not contradict those used at home. Perhaps a joint 'reward scheme' where good behaviour at school is rewarded at home could be instituted.
- Unstructured times, such as lunch break or playtime, may be difficult for the student with ADHD, so extra supervision may be needed. This is also true of less structured activities, such as watching audio-visual materials or going on outings.

### **Further reading**

The following books have particularly helpful suggestions for supporting a pupil with ADHD at school.

*Packer LE and Pruitt SK (2010)*

**Challenging Kids, Challenged Teachers: Teaching Students with Tourette's, Bipolar Disorder, Executive Dysfunction, OCD, AD/HD and More**

*Woodbine House Inc*

*ISBN 1 890 627 828*

*Steer J et al (2009)*

**Helping Kids and Teens with ADHD in School: A Workbook for Classroom Support and Managing Transitions.**

*Jessica Kingsley*

*ISBN 1 843 106 639*

### **A final word**

Partnership between teachers, parents and other professionals involved in the student's care is the key. Consistent messages need to be given to the student at school and at home. Working with a student with ADHD can be challenging, but managing the student's behaviour so that he or she can work towards full potential can be very rewarding too.