

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

About attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Students with ADHD have different levels of attention and concentration. They may lose focus when doing tasks or listening to their teachers speak. It can seem like their mind is elsewhere; it may appear that they don't listen to instructions, or they may get easily distracted part way through a task. They may show reduced attention to detail, appearing to make careless mistakes. They can be forgetful and appear disorganised, such as when getting their things ready for a task and packing up.

Students with ADHD may also be hyperactive and impulsive. They may fidget, appear restless or move around the classroom when they are expected to sit still. They may talk a lot, interrupt others, and find it uncomfortable to wait their turn or play quietly. They can be highly active. Sometimes, this can make group work challenging and can impact a student's social interaction with others.

Strengths

What might be some strengths?

- Students with ADHD may have similar thinking and communication skills to other students.
- They may show creativity, such as coming up with more imaginative ideas or thinking “outside the box”. This may be shown non-verbally, using movement or drawing.
- Some have strong feelings of self-competence. They may become quite good at overcoming obstacles.
- Some students with ADHD may be good at doing what their teacher asks. A student may be able to answer back eagerly or help out with tasks quickly.
- Some students with ADHD may be excited to learn new things and might be more involved in their learning. They may be more willing to raise their hands and ask relevant questions.

Where you might provide support?

- Students with ADHD may sometimes look like they are ‘daydreaming’. It may appear that they are not interested in the activity. They may not respond straight away when their name is called.



- Some students may find extra support and time helpful as they read, write, do maths and learn new information.
- Give lots of guidance with assignments and homework. They may forget to write homework down or work on it at home. They may also lose worksheets or bring the wrong books and papers to class. They may not hand in finished homework on time.
- Sitting still at their desks for long periods of time can be uncomfortable. They may call out, fidget, leave their seats or talk to their classmates.
- They may need support to manage their emotions. Their relationships with other kids and teachers can be affected if they forget to follow rules or take turns.
- All these areas can affect how students with ADHD view themselves. They may need support and encouragement to help them feel positive about themselves.

Evidence-based strategies

Consider how you communicate

- **Get their attention before speaking.** Eye contact, gestures, touch or verbal prompts can be used to get students' full attention before giving instructions or speaking to them.
- **Speak clearly.** Give clear and direct instructions about the task, the behaviour expected, and how much time students have. These instructions may need to be repeated at the start of each new task.
- **Simplify instructions and learning.** Consider breaking down big tasks into smaller ones. For example, give step-by-step instructions or visual instructions (i.e. pictures). It may be helpful to check their understanding before moving on to the next step or activity. For example, ask them to repeat instructions or answer questions.
- **Vary teaching formats.** Consider using pictures, videos, PowerPoint presentation, objects, or demonstrations to explain concepts and tasks. Hands-on lessons can be very engaging.
- **Use computer software.** Multimedia educational software on the computer or tablet may help some students focus on complex lessons, such as mathematics or reading. Interactive software where students can answer questions and receive immediate feedback are good for practising these skills.



Modify the environment

- **Minimise potential distractions.** It may be helpful to sit students with their backs facing windows, doors, corridors or other busy areas of the classroom. Classroom materials that might act as distractions could be removed when not in use.
- **Consider seating.** Consider sitting students near friends who can model positive behaviours, or close to you so you can interact with them. Short seat breaks (e.g. run an errand, touch their toes), may improve focus and restlessness.

Structure classes

- **Set clear classroom rules.** A few short and simple rules that are reviewed regularly may be best. Teach them at the start of the school year, verbally and with the help of pictures. Students may respond well to rules that tell them what to do rather than what to avoid. Rules could be displayed where all students can see them.
- **Create a consistent daily routine.** Rules and routines help a student know what is planned for the day. Consider using a timer/clock to help teens learn to manage their time and routines. This can be useful if teens are learning to self-monitor their behaviours too.

Tailor activities to be as inclusive as possible

- **Match teaching to interests and abilities.** Consider what students like and can do to keep things interesting or relevant and manageable for them. As they become more capable, the workload or difficulty can be slowly increased.
- **Provide choices.** Giving students choices in their work can increase engagement. For example, a choice between different sets of maths problems or reading different texts.
- **Give extra help.** Some students may need help (e.g. prompts, demonstrations, praise) from teachers or other students when learning new skills. This help can be gradually reduced as they become more capable. They may need to be taught how to ask for help (e.g. raising hands, waiting for their turn to speak).
- **Give time to practise.** Consider providing students with lots of time to practise in different settings and with different materials to help them learn to use a skill in other situations.
- **Work collaboratively in groups or with buddies.** This will reduce distractions, making it easier for them to focus. Students can practise new skills, make friends, and learn by watching others. Buddies are also great for redirecting a distracted student.



Provide feedback

- **Give praise and correction immediately.** Students may respond well when their own and others' efforts and achievements are praised frequently. Brief and direct correction may be more successful than repeating instructions lots of times or paying attention to disruptive behaviour.
- **Use a reward system.** Punishment may not lead to changes in challenging behaviour. Instead, rewards can be used to encourage positive behaviours. Visual behavioural charts help students see their progress. Students may be motivated if they can choose their reward (e.g. extra time on the computer or free time).
- **Redirect rather than reprimand.** Consider asking a student to check displayed rules or redirecting a student who is distracted without causing embarrassment.
- **Use a home-school communication system.** Communicate openly and often with parents/caregivers. Use a daily or weekly school update to monitor how a student is going with their goals. Provide support and encourage behaviours similarly in school and at home.

Support students to self-manage

- **Set simple and clear goals.** Consider letting students choose goals. These could be short statements that describe positive and achievable behaviours that students understand. Check that the goals set include behaviours that can be seen and counted. Update goals as they progress.
- **Teach students how to self-monitor.** Consider giving students a checklist of behaviours that they would like to work on (e.g. raise hand to ask question). Prompt them to check off the list throughout the day.
- **Teach self-instruction skills.** Consider guiding students to problem solve so they can persist with school work instead of getting frustrated. For example, they can follow these steps mentally or think out loud: "What is the problem?", "What are my options?", "I think this is the best option", "Am I following my plan?" and "How did I do it?"
- **Guide students to self-evaluate.** Students can be taught to rate their choices and outcomes, and write down what has helped or stopped them from achieving their goals. Teachers can help students be more accurate in their evaluations by recording their own observations.
- **Teach time-management skills.** Help teens to manage their own time. Show them how to organise after school commitments using an evening schedule.



Teach academic skills

- **Teach organisation strategies explicitly.** Tools such as colour-coded folders, planners or checklists can be used to help students keep track of notes, books, homework, assignments and key dates.
- **Teach notetaking skills.** Students can be taught note-taking and summarising skills during a lesson through simple and direct instructions. Prompts and redirection may help students to take accurate notes. This support can be reduced when they can record information and write notes clearly and concisely without help.
- **Ask parents for support.** With parent support, teens can practise newly-learned skills outside the classroom.

Best practice tips

Alternate activities

- Consider giving tasks that require higher concentration earlier in the day. Mixing high- and low-interest activities throughout the day may help keep them interested. Breaks after finishing each small task may help with their attention.

Get student feedback

- Check in with students to see how they're travelling. Some students may need adjustments to the teaching pace, their goals or the level of support given.

Teach social skills

- Some students may want to be seen by others more positively. They may need help with how to express themselves and cope with conflicts. Consider teaching them how to read and respond to adults and peers. Role-playing different situations and giving feedback may help.

Coaching system

- Some students may learn skills and strategies better through one-on-one support, such as a dedicated teacher that meets with them frequently. Together, identify what works for the teen at school and at home. Do this with praise and encouragement.



Curriculum considerations

The Arts

- Students with ADHD may enjoy arts and music. They may find it easier to focus in these subjects than they do in other academic tasks.
- Some students with ADHD are very creative and may enjoy and excel in the arts. This is great for boosting their self-confidence.
- Music and drama can help students explore and express their feelings and behaviours.
- Refer to [AllPlay Dance](#) for more dance resources

English

- Students with ADHD may find reading and comprehension more manageable with additional support in written expression and spelling.
- Consider identifying what the student needs help with. For more specific strategies for literacy, refer to tips for teaching students with a [specific learning disability](#), including tackle underlying skills.
- Students may benefit from extra guidance with organising and expressing their ideas. Planning out ideas before writing, or using pictorial or word cues, can help them stay on track.
- Consider using computer software that teaches literacy skills.
- Reading and typing using a computer rather than writing on paper may work better for some students.
- To check for reading or listening comprehension, consider letting students respond in a variety of ways, such as writing, drawing, demonstrating, creating models or talking.

Health and Physical Education

- Most students with ADHD are as capable as other students in physical education. They may have varying levels of coordination and gross and fine motor skills.
- Consider using peer buddies or small groups to practise sports skills.
- Consider assigning team members randomly so that everyone gets a chance to play.
- Use clear verbal (e.g. start, game over, stop) and nonverbal (e.g. one whistle blow, music stops) instructions for learning skills (e.g. start, stop, freeze).



- Some students may like extra time to learn rules, structure and strategies in games. You may need to teach these more than once. Check understanding frequently.
- Impulsive behaviours during a game may impact performance on the field. Students may make careless errors, show aggression and risk being disqualified from team sports.
- Consider teaching and modelling skills that students may need during sports games. Have them practise social and problem-solving skills, managing conflict, sports skills and good sportsmanship.
- Encourage positive behaviours, and give feedback to students straight away when needed.
- Refer [AllPlay Footy](#) for more sports resources.
- Refer [AllPlay Dance](#) for more dance resources.

The Humanities

- Helping students make personal connections to what they are learning may increase their interest in the topic.
- Technology may make lessons more engaging.

Languages

- Students with ADHD and a specific learning disability may find learning new phonetics difficult. If the new language uses a non-phonetic alphabet (i.e. Chinese characters) they may benefit from extra support.
- Reading, writing or speech abilities can affect the way some students with ADHD learn languages. You may need to refer to tips for teaching students with a [specific learning disability](#).

Mathematics

- Computer software can help students learn and practise numeracy skills.
- Problem-solving, organisational and various learning skills (e.g. note-taking, studying) may help some students with ADHD improve their mathematical skills.
- Refer: Simplify instructions and learning, teach self-instruction skills, adapt activities, and teach academic skills.



Science

- Students may remember and engage in lessons better if they can see it in real life. Consider excursions to see science in action.
- Refer: Adapt activities, and vary teaching formats.

Technologies

- Some students may be motivated by technology.
- Refer: Adapt activities, and vary teaching formats.

Other considerations

Safety

- Some teens with ADHD may display more impulsive behaviours and take extra risks that may put themselves or others in danger.
- Some may need extra support to manage their emotions. Strategies for calming down or self-monitoring may be helpful. See AllPlay Learn's [emotions page](#).
- Prompts and cues may help students to stop and calm down.
- Refer: Consider how you communicate and modify the environment.

Behaviour

- Some students might show challenging behaviours. It's important to remember children are most likely trying to communicate a need or want that is not being met.
- Refer to the [ABC approach](#) for more information on how to reduce challenging behaviour by supporting the young person and promoting more helpful behaviour, and our [emotions page](#) for more information about supporting a young person with managing their emotions.

Excursions/camps

- Some students may become overexcited and not respond to teacher instructions. Others may ask lots of questions or forget about the usual rules and instructions when placed in new environments.
- Explain the new structure and routine, special rules and expectations beforehand. Always ensure that they understand. This can relate to riding the school bus, behaving in a new place, staying in a group or not touching anything unless permission is given.



- Peer buddies may remind and model expected behaviours.

Friendships

- Some students with ADHD may need extra help in being assertive and making friends.
- Refer AllPlay Learn's teaching tips for social behaviours.

Homework

- Homework may be challenging for some students. When setting homework consider what types of activities they could complete within a set time or to a set standard.
- It may be helpful to teach students how to use a homework planner, and give them prompts when they need to write things down. Some students may need to be shown how to break down projects and study into smaller tasks, and to plan their time. Teachers can check and sign planners.
- Consider asking parents to use a consistent homework routine at home. This may be doing homework in a distraction-free area at a fixed time. They can also check that tasks in the planner are finished and provide encouragement and affirmation.
- Refer: Adapt activities, teach students self-management and academic skills.

Classroom transitions

- Some students may need extra support when transitioning between classrooms or different activities. Refer to Consider how you communicate, make classes structured and use class buddies.

Wellbeing

- Many students with ADHD can develop feelings of depression. This can further impact school work and relationships. Substance use is more common amongst adolescents with ADHD, such as tobacco and alcohol use. Look for any changes in behaviour and consider referral to the school wellbeing team if indicated.



Transitions

- For more information about supporting students with disabilities when transitioning across education settings, access AllPlay Learn's [transition page](#).
- Post-school transition to adult life should begin as early as possible in school.
- Aim to increase independence by working on organisational, social and problem-solving skills, and time- and self- management skills. Provide plenty of opportunities to practise them across a range of contexts.
- It may be helpful to identify skill gaps and develop a support plan to help them be successful (e.g. social skills, academic and/or employment skills).
- **Other co-occurring conditions**
Students with ADHD may also have challenges with [behaviour](#), [learning & memory](#), [social](#) and [thinking/cognition](#), or experience [specific learning disability](#) (reading, writing, or mathematics), [oppositional defiant disorder](#), or [Anxiety](#).
- Refer to information about these areas to help support the student.

Relevant resources

Visit our [resources page](#) for a range of resources that can help to create inclusive education environments for students with disabilities and developmental challenges. Some particularly relevant resources for students with ADHD include:

- Strengths and abilities communication checklist
- Student self-monitoring form
- Locker checklist
- Problem solving guide
- AllPlay Learn Story - How to be organised