

Understanding ADHD

What it is, how it affects learning, and how extra tutoring can help

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder · for parents and carers of primary aged children

ADHD is a **neurodevelopmental condition**: the brain develops and works a little differently, particularly the parts that manage attention, activity levels and self control. It affects around **1 in 20 children**, often runs in families, and is **not caused** by parenting, diet, sugar or screen time. It has nothing to do with intelligence. Children with ADHD are frequently bright, curious and creative, but find it much harder than their classmates to show what they know in a busy classroom.

Three ways ADHD can show

Every child is different, but clinicians describe three broad presentations.

Mainly inattentive

Easily distracted, loses things, drifts off, seems not to listen, struggles to finish tasks. Often quiet and dreamy rather than disruptive, so it is easily missed, especially in girls.

Mainly hyperactive and impulsive

Fidgety, finds sitting still very hard, talks a lot, calls out, acts before thinking, struggles to wait their turn.

Combined

A mix of both, and the most common presentation in children.

Attention in ADHD is **inconsistent rather than absent**. A child who can build Lego for two hours but cannot manage five minutes of spellings is not choosing to misbehave; interest switches attention on in a way that effort alone does not.

How it can affect learning

- Gaps in reading, writing and maths where instructions or whole lessons were missed.
- Written work that is slow, short or messy, even when ideas are good.
- Difficulty with tasks that have several steps, such as long division or story planning.
- Homework battles and tiredness after holding it together all day at school.
- Falling confidence, after years of hearing “try harder” and “sit still”.

What is going on underneath

Most of the day to day difficulty comes from **executive function**, the brain’s management system. In ADHD it develops more slowly, often by a few years. This shows up as:

- **Working memory**: holding an instruction in mind long enough to act on it.
- **Getting started**: knowing what to do but struggling to begin.
- **Planning and organising**: breaking a task into steps and keeping track of things.
- **Sense of time**: “in ten minutes” feels much the same as “later”.
- **Managing feelings**: frustration and disappointment arrive fast and big.

Strengths worth noticing

Energy, enthusiasm, curiosity, humour, creativity, quick and original thinking, and the ability to focus intensely on things that interest them. Good support builds on these.

Often found alongside

ADHD commonly occurs with dyslexia, autism, dyspraxia (DCD), anxiety and sleep difficulties. If something else seems to be going on, it is worth raising.

“Every child learns, some just need a different path.”

Nicola, Moss Grove Tutoring

Why one to one makes a difference

A classroom of thirty is one of the hardest places for a child with ADHD to learn: noise, movement, long instructions and long periods of sitting still. Working one to one, or in a very small group, removes much of that. The pace can follow your child, mistakes are picked up straight away, and there is time to build a trusting relationship, which matters a great deal for children who are used to feeling they are getting things wrong.

What sessions look like

- **Short, focused bursts** of around 10 to 15 minutes, with movement or brain breaks in between.
- **A clear visual plan** for the session and a visible timer, so your child knows what is coming and when it ends.
- **Hands on, multisensory activities:** moving, building, drawing and talking, not just worksheets.
- **One instruction at a time**, checked back, with key steps written down.
- **Frequent, specific praise** for effort and strategy, not just right answers.
- **Your child's interests** used as a way in, whether that is dinosaurs, football or Minecraft.
- **Filling gaps** in core reading, writing and maths, starting from what your child already knows.

Skills that last beyond the session

The aim is not only to catch up but to give your child tools they can use in class: checklists, chunking big tasks into small ones, simple planning frames for writing, memory aids and ways to recognise when they need a break. Success in small steps rebuilds confidence, and confidence is often the biggest change parents notice.

Working together

A short update after each session lets you know what was covered and what to praise at home. With your permission, Nicola can link with your child's class teacher or SENCo so that the same strategies are used in school, and can support targets in an SEN support plan or EHCP.

Being realistic

Tutoring does not treat or cure ADHD, and it is not a substitute for medical advice or the support your child is entitled to at school. Progress is steady rather than instant. **Consistency matters most:** the same day and time each week helps more than occasional longer sessions.

Small things that help at home

- Keep routines predictable, with a picture checklist for mornings and bedtimes.
- Get attention first (name, eye contact), then give one instruction at a time.
- Break homework into short chunks with a timer and a movement break between each.
- Notice and name the good moments; aim for far more praise than correction.
- Protect sleep and daily exercise, both of which help attention.
- Remember that a hard day is the ADHD, not your child being naughty, and not you failing.

If you are looking for a diagnosis

Start with your GP or your child's school SENCo. Assessment is carried out by a specialist, usually a paediatrician or child psychiatrist, and waiting times can be long. **Your child does not need a diagnosis to receive SEN support at school;** support should be based on need.

Where to find out more

NHS: [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk), search "ADHD in children"

ADHD Foundation: adhd.foundation.org.uk

ADDISS, the national ADHD information service: addiss.co.uk

SENDIASS: free, impartial advice on SEN support in school. Search "SENDIASS" with Gloucestershire or Herefordshire.

About Nicola

Nicola has worked in primary schools since 2003 and has been a Higher Level Teaching Assistant since 2008, specialising in special educational needs, including running nurture groups.