

IMPROVING SOCIAL SKILLS IN ADHD

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CARERS



This resource guide was developed by Ms Laura Kiln, an internationally recognised parenting expert with over 20 years' experience working with children, adolescents and their families.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a group of behavioural symptoms that include inattentiveness, hyperactivity and impulsiveness.

Diagnosis and Causes of ADHD

ADHD is normally diagnosed in young children, although in some cases it may not be until much later. Now that your paediatrician has diagnosed your child with ADHD, I believe that it is important for you to undergo psychometric testing to help you better understand your child's unique strengths and areas of difficulty as well as your role in supporting your child.

Although the exact cause of ADHD is not known, research shows that it tends to run in families. Some research also shows that there may be differences in the way the brain works in people with ADHD.

Potential risks include: male gender, premature birth and being exposed in-utero to alcohol, illicit drugs or nicotine.

How common is ADHD?

ADHD is a common behavioural disorder in Australia. It is estimated the condition affects 2-5% of school-aged children and young people. ADHD can be a lifelong condition, and many children continue to have symptoms as teenagers and adults.

"Developing good social skills is an important part of the management of ADHD"

Being able to foster relationships is crucial in helping your child develop those social skills. The relationships that your child has with other children is also an important indicator of how they will develop as an adult. Try to ensure that your child has the opportunity to play sports after school or on weekends as this will help to develop friendships and also helps with controlling all that energy and to practice impulse control.

Your doctor may advise you that it is necessary to give extra doses of medication in order for your child to join in with after school activities. These are essential for your child's social and emotional development which might have been hindered prior to starting medication. Some schools encourage parents to use medication to help academically, however the socially mature and able child will benefit more in future life if school results and friendships are treated as equally important!

The following information may help you and your child diagnosed with ADHD.

Firstly it is important to know that all ADHD children are different, just the same as non ADHD children are all unique. You may find yourself saying "No!" a lot, in response to your child's impulsiveness, attention seeking misbehaviour or them winding up their siblings.

There is no such thing as 'one size fits all' but the following strategies can help your child:

- 1. Set 10 minutes aside every day to have 'Special time' with your child.**

This should be one on one, a game of their choice, but nothing with a plug / batteries i.e. no screens of any sort. This time is 'Special'; it should be timed so that your child begins to learn about limits that you set. Ideally this should be uninterrupted by other family members. What we are trying to do is teach your child that he / she can have your undivided attention without being naughty to get it. When the time is up, it is essential that you tell him/her how much you enjoyed it, that you will do this again tomorrow and you then leave the room. Your child can carry on the game/activity. Despite how stressed or cross with your child you are, their 'Special time' must happen daily. Do not remove it as a punishment, otherwise it reinforces the child's belief that they need to be naughty to get your attention. This time is also a good time to help your child practice concentrating; this is a skill that can be learnt! You can find a list of such games on my website (www.laurasplace.com.au)
- 2. Praise your child's efforts, don't wait for perfection.**

ADHD children need a lot of positive reinforcement with encouraging words and gestures such as 'thumbs up' and hugs. Look for reasons to praise your child and do so immediately when they do something good. Children also love to hear you praise them when speaking to others. You can download a copy of '101 Praise statements' from my website to assist you.
- 3. Try telling your child what it is you want them to do, rather than what you don't want.**

e.g. Try saying "walk next to me"....rather than yelling "don't run!" or "put your feet on the floor", instead of "stop kicking my chair."
- 4. Unless it really is a "no" situation use "when – then" instead.**

If every time you say "no" your child has a meltdown and you end up in an argument with them, try this great tip. Unless it really is a 'no' situation use "*when – then*" instead. This strategy is useful as parents often say "no" when actually they mean "not right now". For example, "*When* you have put away your toys, *then* we can go to the park" or "*When* you have had your shower *then* you can watch T.V." "*When* you have finished your meal *then* you can play." "*When – then*" is fantastic as it isn't saying no and the child is getting to do what they asked to do while you are getting the behaviour you wanted in the first place.

The last piece of advice is to trust your instinct. You are the parent and therefore the expert on your child, you just find some of their behaviour difficult to manage. You must be your child's advocate, show them you believe in them and they will grow up happy, with good self-esteem and go far.

Further information about ADHD can be obtained from the following resources:

- Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (www.chadd.org)
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Attention_deficit_hyperactivity_disorder?open)
- ADHD Support Groups – Every Day with ADHD (www.everydaywithadhd.com.au/adhd-support-groups.html)
- Laura's Place (www.laurasplace.com.au)
My website contains a lot of free information and also has tips for teachers to help in the classroom and games to build self-esteem and concentration. There is a board game to reinforce positive behaviour for all children in the family with a special set of cards to add to the game for ADHD children.

Please see your doctor for further information.