

## **What is 'Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder' (ADHD)?**

ADHD is one of a number of behavioural and developmental disorders that affect young children. The exact cause is still unknown but it is thought that the disorder is related to a deficiency in the neural conductor regulator dopamine, a naturally secreted chemical which regulates the neural conductors in the brain. Many children with ADHD say that they do not understand why they sometimes feel out of control or lonely. ADHD is not the child's fault.

The recorded incidence of ADHD is much higher amongst boys than amongst girls but it is uncertain as to whether there is a medical basis for this or whether girls tend to cope better socially with the disorder.

### **ADHD is not an illness.**

It is a behavioural disorder, not an illness or sign of an intellectual disability. With understanding, care and medical treatment, the ADHD child can live a normal life.

### **A child with ADHD has three main areas of difficulty to cope with:**

- Inattention - The child has difficulty with concentrating, forgets instructions and impulsively moves from one subject of attention to another.
- Impulsivity that present itself with the inability to let others have their space, talking over the top of others, having a 'short fuse' and being accident prone.
- Over activity - being constantly restless and fidgety.

All young children have a limited attention span and sometimes do things without thinking. However, only a few children have ADHD.

**A Diagnosis is made after a complex assessment.**

A diagnosis can only be made after a range of information is collected, especially from parents. The symptoms must be obvious in most areas of the child's life.

There is no single test. A paediatrician, child psychologist or child psychiatrist can make the assessment or arrange a referral.

**Consistency is important:**

Children with this condition can stretch the patience of all members of the family.

Parents need to try a range of strategies to help the child learn and develop, and reduce stress in the family.

It is important for parents to be consistent and work together and support each other as much as possible. Try to have regular breaks; it is valuable to get some respite from the demands of caring for a child with ADHD. It will help to:

- Keep rules clear and simple and calmly give reminders.
- Get physically close to the child and make sure you have the child's full attention when you talk.
- Give instructions only one or two at a time.
- Supervise closely as a child with ADHD may put themselves in dangerous situations.
- Try to ignore minor irritating behaviours.

- Be clear about discipline for behaviour you find unacceptable, e.g. use 'time out' (between the ages of 18 months to 6 years) and logical consequences (for older children.)

**Remember the child does not intend to be difficult.**

**Other helpful techniques:**

There are various techniques to help the child develop concentration and social skills. Counselling for the child and other family members may also be helpful. Some children may require medication to enable them to make use of their natural abilities. Medication must be supported by other learning strategies.

**Where to get help?**

- Your family doctor
- Child psychologist, psychotherapist or psychiatrist.

**Important Things to Remember:**

- Children with ADHD need support and understanding from family and teachers.
- Not all children who are inattentive, impulsive and over-active have ADHD.
- Medication, positive parenting strategies, school support and counselling can help children with ADHD and their families.
- It is important that a child who has ADHD understands that they are not a bad person. Self esteem is often battered by the experience of being unable to concentrate and this may be further damaged by negative reaction from peers and adults. Positive reinforcement is critical.

