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## Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

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### What is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) children are defined as inattentive, impulsive and hyperactive. However, not all ADHD children are hyperactive. While it is normal to be inattentive, impulsive and hyperactive at some point, ADHD children have these symptoms very severely and in all situations.

### What causes it?

Many factors contribute to ADHD. There may be a genetic cause, as it seems to run in families. Many ADHD children often have a close relative with similar problems. It may be due to the social, environmental or familial influences. It is not due to incompetent parenting.



### Diagnosis

*Problems generally arise in the first few years of school. ADHD children may have the following problems:*

- Often fails to give close attention to detail
- Often has difficulty sustaining attention
- Does not seem to listen when spoken to directly
- Does not follow through instructions and fails to finish school work
- Often has difficulty organising tasks
- Is easily distracted
- Often fidgets or squirms
- Often has difficulty playing quietly
- Talks excessively

- Often blurts out answers before questions have been completed
- Often has difficulty waiting for their turn

### Treatment

Some children will grow out of ADHD but about 60% will carry it with them into adulthood. There are 4 types of treatment available:

#### Medication

The main types of medication prescribed are stimulants and antidepressants. The most commonly used stimulant is Ritalin. It acts on the nervous system although how it actually works is unknown. It enables the child to feel calmer and more focused and therefore better able to benefit from other treatment methods.

#### Behaviour management

Positive behaviour reinforcement is used to promote the behaviour the parents want to see. Parents are encouraged to notice when a child is being good and to reward them. ADHD children benefit from praise given often, enthusiastically and clearly.

Other techniques are also used, for example, avoiding the use of stop instructions. Instead of telling a child to "stop shouting", say to them "Please speak more clearly".

#### Counseling

Counselors are trained to provide a structured and supported way for children to talk through the reasons for and consequences of their behaviour. It can assist in self-control, attention focusing and organizational skills.

### Practical Suggestions for Coping with ADHD

**Educate yourself:** Perhaps the best treatment for ADHD is understanding ADHD and how it affects your child.

**Structure:** Structure helps provide focus for a child with ADHD and can be equally useful with adults. Make use of lists, notes, colour coding, rituals,

reminders and files. Colour coding deserves emphasis. Many people with ADHD are visually oriented. Take advantage of this by making things memorable with colour: files, texts and schedules.

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**Plan your days:** Plan each day's activities the night before. Allocate an amount of time for each task and break larger tasks into separate time slots.

**Time out:** Take time out for yourself. Recharge your batteries.

**Expect depression after success:** People with ADD commonly complain of feeling depressed, paradoxically, after a big success. This is because the high stimulus of the chase or the challenge.

**Notice how and where they work best:** Children and adults with ADD can do their best under rather odd conditions: in a noisy room, on the train, wrapped in 3 blankets, listening to music, whatever. Let them work under whatever conditions are best for them.

## Where to go for Support

### ADHD Support Group

The ADHD Support Group was formed by the parents of children with ADHD. It aims to provide support, information and practical help to parents dealing with ADHD. They hold monthly informal coffee mornings and guest speaker evenings.

For more information phone 03 379 5636

### Caring for Carers

Joining a carer support group can relieve some of the stress you are under as a carer. The constant tasks, the concerns, grief, drama, moments of joy, frustration and exhaustion are all part of the day to day existence of a carer.

Feelings of helplessness, fear, anger, guilt and despair are all normal. It is important that the carer has an outlet for these feelings, like having someone to talk to. The chance to share with others who understand and are also, or have been carers lightens the load and may be all that is needed. *Caring for Carers* provides support to carers by providing a way to communicate feelings that it would not be appropriate to discuss with friends, family or the caree.

*Caring for Carers* has a Newsletter and several support meetings each month and ongoing telephone support. These services are provided to help make your job easier.

*Caring for Carers* is situated:

4<sup>th</sup> floor, Securities House  
221 Gloucester Street, Christchurch.  
Postal address: P O Box 13 167, Christchurch

*Frustrated, upset and anxious parents do not cause their child to have ADHD but having a child with ADHD is frequently the cause of upset parents.*