



# ADHD Toolkit

A detailed resource guide for parents & caregivers

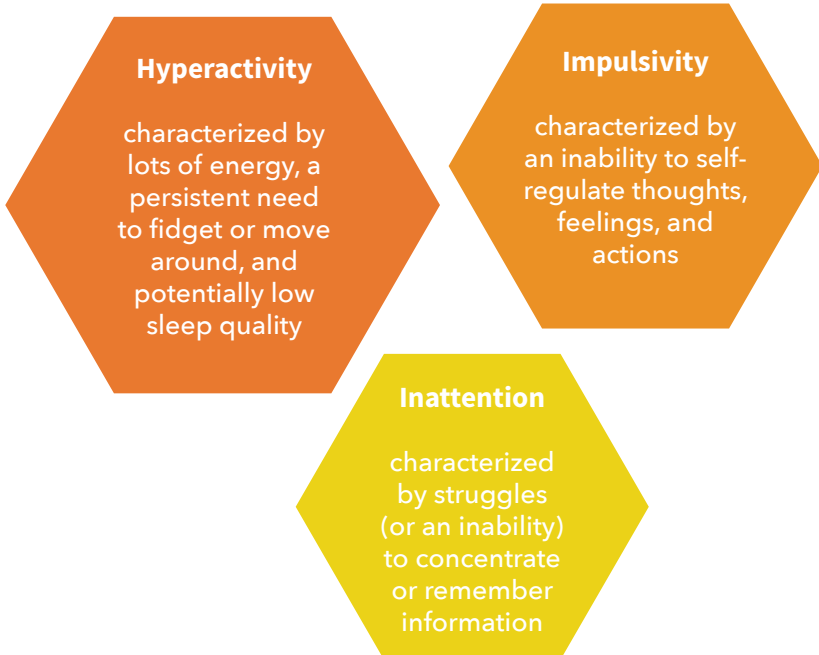
# What is ADHD?

ADHD is a thoroughly researched, internationally recognized neurobiological condition that affects an estimated 5.6% of the global population, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). In the U.S. alone, a national parent survey found that as many as 6.1 million children may be affected, a prevalence of 11% in individuals 4 to 17 years of age.

This common neurodevelopmental disorder is associated with hyperactivity, inattention, and learning difficulties; it also persists into adulthood in an estimated 50% of cases.

The expression of ADHD is unique to each person—it can present in mild, moderate, or severe forms.

ADHD is also a lifespan condition. However, by adulthood, many individuals have learned to live happy, healthy, and successful lives, leveraging a range of interventions and strategies—including medication, daily exercise, healthy nutrition, stress-management strategies, and what are known as executive functioning skills—to help them plan and organize their lives.



These are evident in all children but are present in a more extreme form in children with ADHD.

Most individuals with ADHD experience a combination of these three main characteristics. However, because every person is different, the expression of ADHD is equally diverse—it will present according to natural individuality, in a way that is unique to each body and personality. For example, hyperactivity is more pronounced and easily identifiable in some than it is in others. Some children with ADHD may display difficult behaviors while others don't. (The belief that all children with ADHD display difficult behavior is a common misconception.)

Scientists have discovered that there are subtle differences in the brains of people with ADHD. We know, for example, that there is a developmental delay in children, so they appear to be less mature for their age during their school years. The brain doesn't develop fully until we are in our early twenties, by which time we can learn how to self-manage our ADHD effectively.



ADHD is not caused by poor parenting or inadequate diet. In fact, the most common cause of ADHD is actually genetics; ADHD runs in families. It's important to note that parents don't have to have ADHD themselves to have a child who does. However, the parents' combined genetic material can result in the expression of ADHD in their children.

Environmental factors—including positive parenting, school, and adverse life events—can also influence the severity and expression of ADHD in children. Events such as low birth weight, premature birth, and difficulties experienced during labor can all increase the likelihood of ADHD—but they do not actually cause ADHD. However, brain injury or epilepsy can.

In general, knowledge and support from the family and school are key to ensuring that we learn to live successfully with ADHD, achieve our potential, and become psychologically resilient.

## Obtaining an assessment and diagnosis for ADHD

If you're concerned that your child may have ADHD, one of the first steps you can take is to talk to your child's teacher. Ask them if your child is having difficulty not only learning but also remembering what they have learned.

Keep in mind: difficult or poor behavior is not always a sign of ADHD. Poor behavior in school is often the result of children discovering how to behave appropriately in a school setting. They are bound to make mistakes along the way—learning is a trial-and-error process after all. In general, if a child appears to not be responding to what is asked of them, we then have to ask ourselves: what is the child's behavior communicating to us that they are not able to put into words?

For example, children with learning differences can grow easily frustrated, or lack self-esteem, because they find schoolwork more difficult to grasp or complete than their classmates do. This is known as learner anxiety, and it is the most common cause of inappropriate behavior in children with learning differences.

Act on your concerns by discussing the following key questions with your child's teacher:

- Is my child paying attention?
- Is my child showing any delay in learning?
- Is my child forgetting things?
- Is my child appearing tired or daydreaming in class?
- Is my child unable to be still when it is required?
- Is my child appearing anxious about learning and homework?
- Is my child unable to organize and plan their school work properly?
- Does my child frequently appear tired?
- Does my child find it difficult making and keeping friends?
- Have these difficulties been occurring for more than six months?

These characteristics and concerns must be evident in both the home and school.

## Obtaining an assessment and diagnosis for ADHD

After consulting with your child's teacher, you can also request that your child be evaluated to qualify for special education services and/or accommodations granted under Section 504 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This is a free service.

Families or schools can request a 504 plan in writing through the school district's 504 coordinator. This person may also be the IEP coordinator. The school will then hold a meeting to decide if your child qualifies and what resources are appropriate.

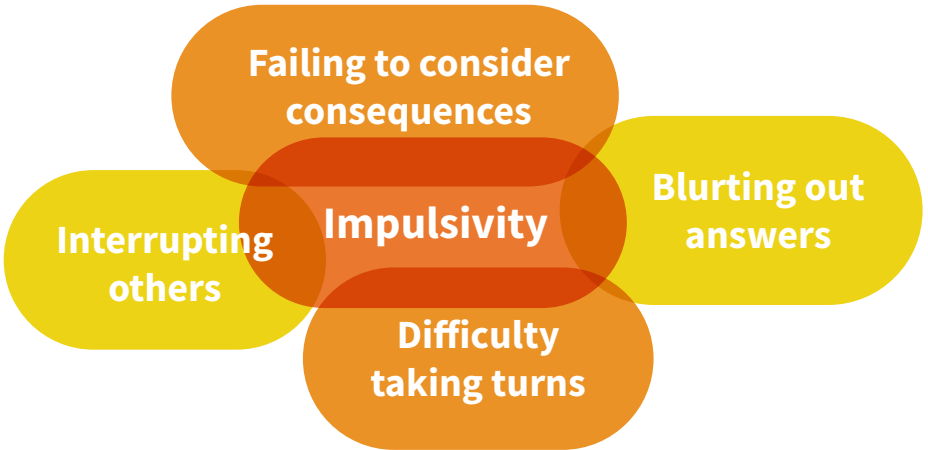
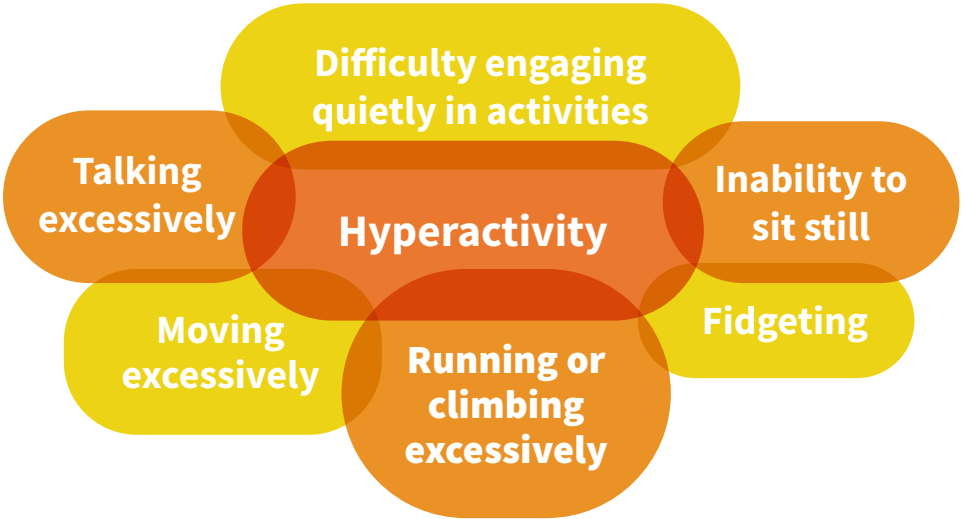
One of the best ways to support children with ADHD is to ensure that their needs and difficulties are acknowledged and understood. Maintaining open communication concerning those needs helps the school to better make accommodations to promote your child's learning and development. Don't wait for a formal diagnosis before putting strategies into place to support your child.

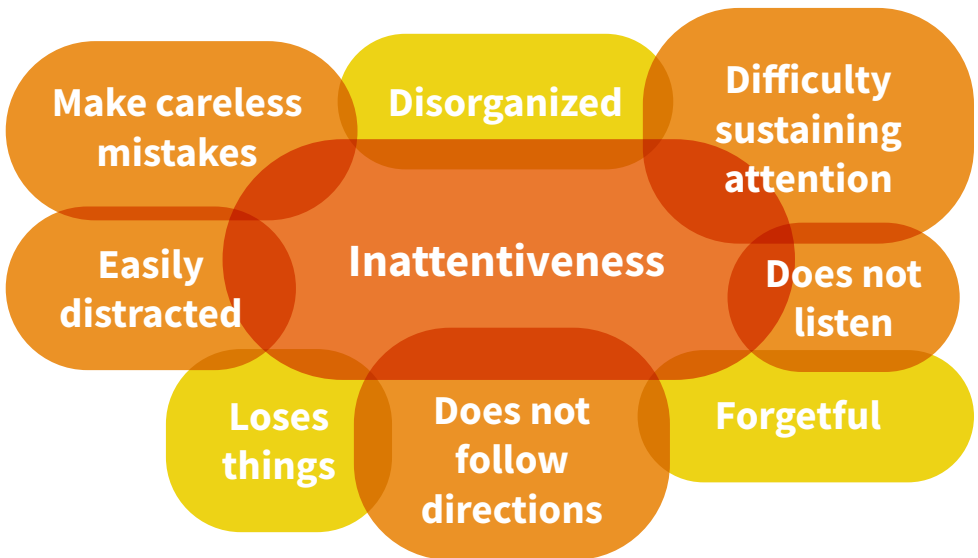
You may wish to consult with a child specialist, such as a child psychologist or a developmental pediatrician. Alternatively, you can contact your local early intervention agency (for children under 3) or public school (for children 3 years and older). To make sure your child reaches his or her full potential, it is very important to seek out support resources as early as possible.

The Diagnostic Criteria for ADHD can be found in the DSM-5 criteria for ADHD:

- A persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development
- For children, six or more of the symptoms have persisted for at least six months
- For older adolescents and adults (age 17 and older), five or more symptoms are required
- Several inattentive or hyperactive-impulsive symptoms present prior to age 12 years
- Several inattentive or hyperactive-impulsive symptoms present in two or more settings (e.g. at home, school, or work; with friends or relatives; in other activities)
- Clear evidence that the symptoms interfere with, or reduce the quality of, social, academic, or occupational functioning

# Characteristics of ADHD





# Executive functioning

Some ADHD specialists refer to ADHD as a disorder of self-regulation. Self-regulation requires that a person have intact executive functions. Executive functions refer to brain functions that activate, organize, integrate, and manage other functions. They enable individuals to account for the short- and long-term consequences of their actions and to plan for those results.

They also allow individuals to make real-time evaluations of their actions and to make necessary adjustments if those actions are not achieving the desired result. This is hard to do when your working memory, your time management, and your organizational skills are affected by ADHD.

Here is a list of executive functioning skills:

## 1. Self-awareness

Simply put, this is self-directed attention.

## 2. Inhibition

Also known as self-restraint—the ability to not speak or act, but to stop and think before speaking or acting.

## 3. Non-verbal working memory

The ability to hold things in your mind. Essentially, visual imagery—how well you can picture things mentally.

## 4. Verbal working memory

Self-speech or internal speech. Most people think of this as their inner monologue.

## 5. Emotional self-regulation

The ability to take the previous four executive functions and use them to manipulate your own emotional state. This means learning to use words, images, and our own self-awareness to process and alter how we feel about things.

## 6. Self-motivation

How well you can motivate yourself to complete a task when there is no immediate external consequence.

## 7. Planning and problem solving

Experts sometimes like to think of this as self-play—how we play with information in our minds to come up with new ways of doing something. By taking things apart and recombining them in different ways, we're planning solutions to our problems.



# How might poor executive functioning present?



## ADHD and emotional maturation

Children with ADHD often seem to develop more slowly than their peers—their brains are developing at a slower pace than the brains of other kids their age. Some scientists estimate that this delay can be as much as one-third of their chronological age. As a result, children with ADHD are often perceived as being poorly behaved or immature.

Children with ADHD often struggle to make and maintain friendships. They experience difficulty taking turns and can be impatient and easily frustrated. Managing conflict or understanding social cues, as well as the rules and regulations of social groups, may also be difficult for your child.

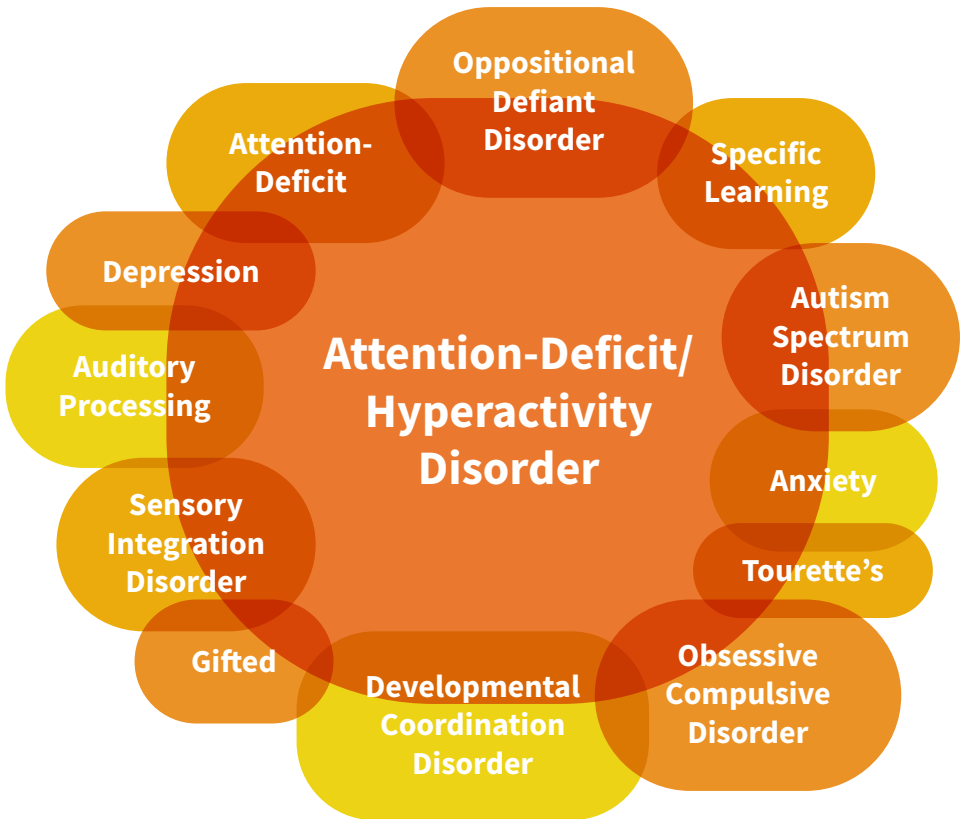


We recommend that children with ADHD be encouraged to participate in group activities, such as scouts, team sports, and outdoor recreational clubs. Such structured groups and activities will help your child to develop friendship skills.

# Frequently co-occurring difficulties associated with ADHD

ADHD can also be associated with other neurodevelopmental conditions as detailed below. This does not, however, mean that if your child has a diagnosis of ADHD, they will also have all the other conditions. But, conditions can coexist.

29% of children with a primary diagnosis of ADHD also have ASD (autism spectrum disorder), and over 40% will also have dyslexia. Dysgraphia, dyscalculia, tics, and Tourette's syndrome can also co-occur, or your child may display traits of several other neurodevelopmental conditions.



# How to treat ADHD

There are a range of treatments and interventions for ADHD that include:

- Psychoeducation training for parents/caregivers and children/young people (information, advice, and guidance)
- Parent/caregiver training programs that are specific to ADHD
- Behavioral therapy
- Systemic family therapy
- Stress-reduction strategies, such as progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, and deep breathing
- Medication

Leading global health organizations often recommend a multi-modal approach that may, at times, require the use of a combination of treatment options, all of which you can discuss with your ADHD specialist.

## Nutrition and Diet

A healthy, balanced diet is essential for everyone and can also play a key role in the successful management of ADHD.

Hyperactivity can result in the body using up the energy obtained from food too quickly, resulting in the body craving carbohydrates to restore its energy. Overreliance on carbohydrates can affect mood, motivation, and concentration and can result in frequent bouts of tiredness. It can also be a cause of weight gain through overeating.

Regular meals and, depending on your level of activity, regular snacks are needed to maintain energy levels. Children will struggle to learn in school if they are tired and need energy from food.

Ensure that your child always has a good breakfast that includes some protein. Protein enables the body to utilize energy over longer periods, whereas a child with ADHD can quickly burn up the energy from a bowl of cereal that consists mainly of carbohydrates.

Essential fatty acids such as omega-3—found in fish oils—and omega-6—from plant sources—fatty acids have been proven to be effective in helping brain growth and are often used in conjunction with ADHD medications to reduce symptoms and reduce the medication amounts needed.

# How to treat ADHD

EQUAZEN® PRO contains essential fatty acids EPA:DHA:GLA in the ratio of 9:3:1 which is backed by 19 clinical studies\* to reduce symptoms of ADHD in kids and teens.†

## Exercise

Regular daily physical exercise is proven to help regulate ADHD, reducing anxiety and elevating mood. Regular exercise also improves neurotransmission in the brain.

## Sleep

Poor sleep and the resulting tiredness is a frequent difficulty for those with ADHD. Regular bed and waking times for children, ideally with some exercise and stress-reduction strategies before bedtime, all help. Parents should explore this with their child and discover what works best for their family life.

The natural body clock in our brain can be affected by ADHD, so the mind and the body will benefit from a routine with set times for going to bed and waking in the morning. Some children are supplemented with melatonin—a natural hormone to help with poor sleep.

## Planning and Organizing

Executive functioning skills training often forms part of parent support programs and psychoeducational programs. People with ADHD often experience difficulties planning and organizing themselves and can be very forgetful.

Employ time management, organizational, and planning skills to help your child learn how to put structure and routine into daily life.

Journals, posters around the home, timetables, and smartphones can all help your child remember important tasks and appointments. And, yes, remind them when they have to clean up their bedroom or share in family tasks and responsibilities.

†EQUAZEN® PRO is a medical food to address fatty acid deficiencies in people with ADHD and related neurodevelopmental conditions that cannot be resolved by normal diet modification alone. In clinical trials\* among kids and teens with ADHD, the EQUAZEN® formula on average showed significant improvements in focus, attention, academic performance and balanced mood. \*19 clinical studies include 6 ADHD clinical trials. Visit [Klaire.com](http://Klaire.com) for details.

# How to treat ADHD

## ADHD Medication

There are a number of different medicines for ADHD. The approved drug categories for medications in the US are:

### Stimulants

- Amphetamine
- Dexmethylphenidate
- Dextroamphetamine
- Methylphenidate
- Lisdexamfetamine

### Non-stimulants

- Atomoxetine (SNRI)
- Guanfacine
- Clonidine

Non-stimulant medications can take up to several weeks before there is a noticeable benefit. Stimulant medications become active within an hour of ingestion. There are some types of stimulant medications which last for only a short time—four hours or so; others are longer lasting and can continue to be active for 8 to 12 hours.

There is no standard dose. Doctors usually start with a small dose, gradually increasing it until everyone is agreed that the medication is working effectively. This process is called titration. It may take some time to get this exactly right, because every individual is different. It is important that parents and teachers, as well as the young person, agree that the medication is working effectively.

Treatment with medication can improve symptoms of ADHD quite dramatically. Medication is not a cure for ADHD. Medication is only one strategy you can use to live successfully with ADHD. Remember that daily exercise, good sleep, healthy nutrition, social skills training, and cognitive behavioral therapy are all important tools in living successfully with ADHD.

Side effects of medications vary from individual to individual. Many report an upset stomach for the first few weeks of taking ADHD medications. For most people, these side effects disappear after a short time. It is important that you as a family make an informed and educated choice of treatment for your child. If you have any concerns about medication or side effects, please discuss these concerns with your doctor.

Many parents express concerns about medications for children. You should discuss your concerns with your child's doctor so you can make an informed choice about whether medication should be used as one way of supporting your child.

Different types of medication are available, and some children respond better to certain types of medication than others. Your child's clinician will advise you on how to approach this, and they may trial different types of medication and dosage until your child is responding to medication in the best way. Always follow your doctor's advice and guidance on all matters relating to medication.

## Information for Parents and Caregivers

Parenting a child with additional needs requires additional knowledge and skills. Parents of children newly diagnosed with ADHD should be offered a training program to understand and support their child's ADHD.

ADHD is not caused by poor parenting, but parents do need to understand how to parent a child with ADHD. Learn how to make your home ADHD-friendly, and ensure your child's school has been trained to meet the educational needs of your child to ensure their emotional well-being. It is a legal requirement that school staff are trained to meet the needs of every learner. Parents can obtain a wealth of information from the following websites:

[www.adhdfoundation.org.uk](http://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk)

[CHADD.org](http://CHADD.org)

[www.additude.com](http://www.additude.com)

[Global Alliance for Our Children's Future](http://GlobalAllianceforOurChildrensFuture.org)

[Autismspeaks.com](http://Autismspeaks.com)

# Ten tips for your ADHD journey

## 1. Be informed

Learn as much as you can about ADHD and those other neurodevelopmental differences that frequently coexist with ADHD (such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia).

The more you know, the better able you will be to understand your child and support them, both at home and at school.



## 2. Keep a record of every meeting and appointment at the school and the doctor's office

Always take your notebook with you (or record appointments on your smartphone) and date and time them. Things discussed and agreed to can often be forgotten or overlooked, so be the best advocate your child can have by making sure you have copies of all notes, reports, and documents relating to your child's health and education.

## 3. Take a strength-based approach

Focus on the positives with your child; encourage them to recognize the things they are good at rather than just those issues they struggle with.



# Ten tips for your ADHD journey

## 4. Boost your child's confidence and self-esteem

Remind them constantly how much they are loved unconditionally, praise the effort they make, help them learn to manage their ADHD—don't be the parent who just says "Do as I say."; show them how—and be patient with them as they make mistakes. ADHD is not an excuse—it's an explanation. Children have to learn to be accountable for their actions—and remember that if you follow all the instructions in this booklet, you will make your child's life much less stressful as they learn how to deal with ADHD.

## 5. ADHD does not define your child

Please ensure that your child and everyone in the family knows that ADHD is one part of who they are; it does not define them, nor should we interpret everything about them through the lens of ADHD. Every human being is unique and experiences the world in their own way.

## 6. Find support accessible to you

Join a support group and participate in parent skills programs, online training, podcasts, and webinars. Your family needs to support one another and seek support from other groups, charities, and agencies.

If you are worried about your child's emotional well-being, speak with an expert in ADHD. Remember that not all doctors, nurses, teachers, or school counselors have been trained to understand how to support a child with ADHD.

They need your knowledge and expertise as a parent who has learned what ADHD is and how it can impact an individual.

## 7. Become a good listener, communicator, and collaborator

You will need the support and cooperation of many people to ensure your child's needs are understood and that they are able to access good healthcare, a good, inclusive education, and all those things that children enjoy, so they can achieve their potential and mature into a successful young adult.

# Ten tips for your ADHD journey

## 8. Teach your child “The Friendship Factor”

Loneliness can affect our health and happiness. One of the most important parts of childhood is making friends. Human beings are a social species—we thrive in relationships.

We learn how to belong and feel safe in our family homes, in our schools, and in our communities as well as the groups our child joins, such as Scouts, Brownies, Girl Scouts, sports clubs, etc. We need our friends to share good times with and be there for us when things are difficult.

Good friendships help to build resilient children who are able to make their own way in the world. Make one-on-one time with your child, and help them learn what a good friend is—patient, kind, sharing, forgiving, helpful—and how to communicate with others in a calm, sensitive, and respectful way.

Be a role model for them—be the type of friend that you needed when you were a child.

## 9. ADHD is a family affair

ADHD is largely genetic but influenced by environmental factors, such as home life, school, and any really positive or difficult events in our early childhood. ADHD is not just about genetics; the world around us affects how ADHD presents in your child.

Do you, as a parent, have ADHD or dyslexia, dyscalculia, sensory integration difficulties, tics, or autism? Do any of your relatives?

Again, be informed—as a family. Ensure that siblings understand that their brother or sister experiences the world in a different way; equally, any family friends or relatives. ADHD is characterized by a developmental delay of about 1 to 3 years, sometimes more.

This means your child may seem to be, and behave in ways, that are less mature than that of other children their age. This may affect their ability to make friends and feel that “they belong.”

# Ten tips for your ADHD journey

## 10. Celebrate your child's achievements and progress

Always look for opportunities to pay your child a compliment every day. Children learn from modeling the behavior of those around them. Be a role model they can learn from—be the parent you needed when you were a child. Be the teacher you needed when you were a child. Be there at those special moments, and always be ready with words of encouragement, kindness, and support.





**The ADHD Foundation Neurodiversity Charity** is an integrated health and education service supporting families with unique lifespan services.

The Foundation is the National UK ADHD Charity and the leading user-led ADHD charity in Europe, supporting over 6,000 parents annually in the UK and training over 15,000 education and health professionals annually.

The Foundation takes a strength-based approach to neurodiversity and maintains that if 1 in 5 human beings are neurodiverse—have either dyslexia, ADHD, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, or autism—that they are not “disordered” or errors of genetics, but that these differences are part of the natural and diverse nature of human neurology. The Foundation showcases how many successful neurodiverse individuals lead happy, healthy, and successful lives and can be found in every career and profession. These differences can be very varied and affect different individuals in different ways. There are some who experience severe and distressing, lifelong impairment to their lives and health, and this is why and when the term “disorder” is appropriate and access to lifespan expert care is needed.

We live in a neurotypical world, which means that, for the 20% of human beings who are neurodiverse, the world can be more challenging at times. As such, awareness, understanding, and appropriate accommodations and support are needed by many neurodiverse individuals, especially in childhood, so they can achieve their potential and thrive and succeed in education—where they are often excluded because of our outdated educational paradigm and concept of intelligence. Fortunately, this traditional misconception of intelligence, ability, and employability is changing as many 21st-century organizations actively recruit neurodiverse employees, recognizing their unique way of thinking. Schools are also recognizing that such learning differences do not indicate a lack of ability or intelligence. Schools and universities are now exploring how we can more accurately measure learning and academic progress instead of relying on standardized exams for the 1 in 5 learners who do not have “standardized” neurotypical brains.

The Foundation—working in partnership with NHS, Department for Education, and health, education, and social care providers, as well as the business sector, work to create better life chances for the 1 in 5 of the population who are neurodiverse. You can access more information [here](https://www.adhdfoundation.org) or reach us via email: [info@adhdfoundation.org.uk](mailto:info@adhdfoundation.org.uk) and follow us on Facebook “**ADHD Foundation**” and on Twitter [@ADHDFoundation](https://twitter.com/ADHDFoundation).



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