

ADHD in Teens: What to expect and how to help

With Dr Alex Doig & Dr Tamasine Black

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a brain-based difference (neurodevelopment disorder) affecting regulation of executive skills such as working memory, concentration, impulse control, emotional regulation, and behaviour.

Recognising the signs of ADHD



ADHD manifests differently in each individual and its symptoms can vary in intensity. Here are some common signs to watch for:

Hyperactivity:

Difficulty sitting still, excessive movement, and constant fidgeting.

Inattention:

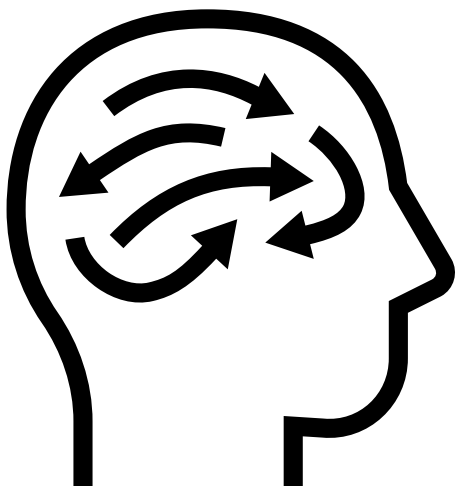
Easily distracted, daydreaming, trouble focusing on tasks, and frequent careless mistakes.

Impulsivity:

Interrupting others, difficulty waiting for their turn, and making hasty decisions.

Emotional Dysregulation:

Rapid mood swings and heightened emotional reactions.



Symptoms often become more noticeable during Senior School years...

1.

Increased Demands: The academic and organisational demands of secondary school increase, making ADHD more noticeable.

2.

Struggling with Focus: Difficulty concentrating on more complex and extended tasks.

3.

Multiple Teachers and Classes: Transitioning between different classes and teachers requires keeping track of various assignments and materials.

4.

Homework Management: More homework from different subjects can overwhelm a student who struggles with executive function skills, like organising, prioritising, and completing tasks on time.

5.

Longer Assignments: Essays, projects, and homework become more extensive and require planning and time management.

6.

Emotional Regulation: Increased emotional ups and downs, which can affect peer relationships and self-esteem.

7.

Peer Relationships: Navigating friendships and social hierarchies becomes more complex. Teens with ADHD might struggle with impulsive behaviour, which can impact relationships.

Key strategies for parents:

Supporting a teen with ADHD requires patience, understanding and practical strategies



Establish Routines: Create consistent daily schedules to provide structure.



Break Tasks into Manageable Steps: Help teens tackle large tasks by breaking them down into smaller, more manageable parts.



Repetition of Tasks and Activities: This is an important factor of reinforcing learning and establishing habits, particularly beneficial for teens with ADD/ADHD. If at first you don't succeed, try try again.



Manage Emotions: Recognise and address emotional dysregulation, which can be particularly challenging during the teenage years.



Positive Reinforcement: Encourage and reward positive behaviors to motivate your teen.



Clear Communication: Use clear and concise instructions. Ensure your teen understands expectations and consequences.



Stay Organised: Use tools like planners, apps, and calendars to help your teen keep track of assignments and activities.



Encourage Physical Activity: Regular exercise can help manage hyperactivity and improve concentration.



Dietary Considerations: Certain foods, particularly sugary and processed items, can exacerbate ADHD symptoms. Identifying and managing these triggers can be helpful.



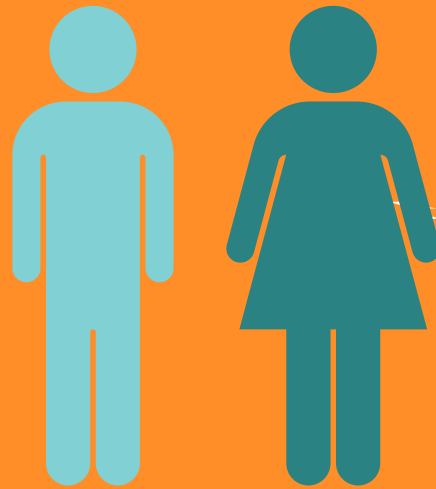
Maintain Open Communication: Keep an open line of communication with your teen about their feelings and challenges.



Encouraging Independence and Responsibility: Teenagers with ADHD benefit from being given responsibility and the opportunity to make decisions about their treatment. This empowerment can lead to better adherence to treatment plans and improved self-esteem.

ADHD & Gender Differences

Generally speaking, ADHD may manifest differently in boys and girls, often leading to earlier recognition in boys who typically exhibit more hyperactive and impulsive behaviors. These behaviours are more disruptive and noticeable in a classroom setting, prompting earlier diagnosis.



In contrast, girls with ADHD often display inattentive symptoms, such as daydreaming and difficulty focusing, which are less disruptive and frequently overlooked, leading to later identification, often during secondary school. However, these are general trends: some boys may have predominantly inattentive ADHD, and some girls may be hyperactive.

The hormonal changes and increased academic and social demands of puberty can further exacerbate ADHD symptoms, particularly in girls, resulting in heightened emotional dysregulation, anxiety, and depression. This inattentiveness in girls can lead to poor academic performance and organisation skills, as they are easily distracted and may not actively engage in learning.

ADHD and Comorbidities

ADHD frequently coexists with other conditions like autism spectrum disorders, specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia, and other conditions like anxiety, depression, and self-esteem issues. This overlap necessitates a comprehensive assessment to identify all contributing factors and provide appropriate support.

The Importance of a Holistic Approach

Identifying ADHD is crucial to help teens understand that their struggles are due to a brain-based difference, not personal failure. A holistic approach to supporting teenagers with ADHD involves considering all aspects of their lives, including emotional well-being, social skills, and academic needs. This comprehensive support system helps them navigate their challenges more effectively.

Seeking Help



Professional help can make a significant difference for teens with ADHD. Here are some steps and resources for seeking support:

1. **Pediatricians and Psychiatrists:** Can provide a diagnosis and discuss whether medication might be beneficial for your teen after diagnosis. A diagnosis of ADHD can be beneficial for many, providing clarity and a framework for understanding their experiences. The key is to ensure that the diagnosis leads to targeted support, helping individuals manage their symptoms effectively.
2. **Therapists and Counsellors:** Offer behavioural therapy to develop coping strategies and skills.
3. **School Support:** Collaborate with teachers and school counsellors to create an Individualised Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan. Work with your child's school to implement accommodations, such as extra time on tests or a quiet place for studying.
4. **Support Groups:** Join support groups for parents of children with ADHD to share experiences and advice.

Therapeutic Interventions

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): Helps in developing strategies to manage symptoms and change negative thought patterns.

Behavioral Therapy: Focuses on modifying behaviour through reinforcement strategies.

Understand ADHD - arm yourself with parent knowledge to support your ADHD teen effectively.

Understanding the challenges of ADHD can help parents support their teens more effectively, ensuring they receive the appropriate help and interventions to thrive.

Conclusion

Supporting teenagers with ADHD involves understanding their unique needs, tailored strategies, providing targeted support, and creating an environment that encourages growth and independence. With the right strategies, individuals with ADHD can thrive.

This factsheet offers a concise yet comprehensive overview of ADHD in teens, equipping parents with the knowledge and tools to support their children effectively through understanding, open communication and guidance.

Alex Doig & Tamasine Black



“ LET’S ALL TALK mental health

There are sessions on the [Let’s all Talk Mental Health hub](#) for you to view on ADHD and your teen including the talks linked below. All talks are provided FREE to watch by your school.



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LET’S ALL TALK.
mental health

Moving Forward with Teen ADHD & Learning Difficulties

Monday 16th October at 8pm

[@letsalltalkmh](#) [@letsalltalk_mentalhealth](#) [@letsalltalk_mentalhealth](#)

Moving Forward with Teen ADHD & Learning Difficulties - > FOR CPD SCROLL BELOW

Dr Tamasine Black will talk about the some of the signs and symptoms of Teen ADHD in both genders and how having an understanding and a potential diagnosis...

🎧 Contrast videos

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LET’S ALL TALK
mental health

Monday 13th June 8pm
Teenage Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); understanding the condition so you can understand your teen

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Teenage Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); understanding the condition so you can understand you...

What does ADHD look like in teenagers; what it is, some of the symptoms, what co-existing conditions can present alongside it, what treatments are available...

🎧 Contrast videos

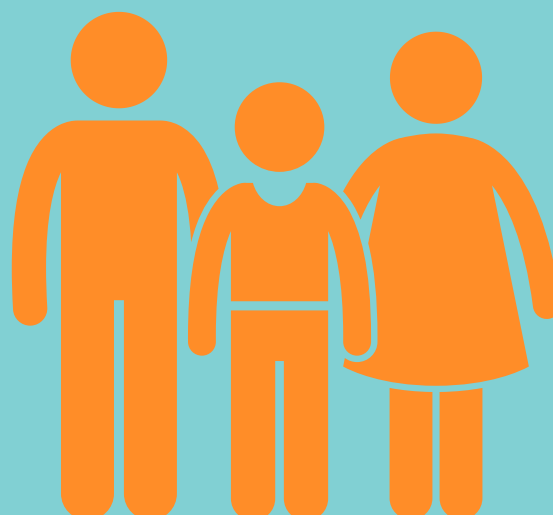
Other Resources for Parents

[“Smart but Scattered” by Richard Guare](#)

[ADHD UK](#)

[Understood](#)

[ADDitude](#)



This factsheet is for advice purposes. Please remember that we’re not offering medical or clinical health services specific to your situation. If you need help, please contact your GP or other healthcare professionals – don’t wait to get help if you or your young one needs it.