

Understanding ADHD 1

Welcome to Module 7 of your SEN toolkit!

In this module we will look specifically at Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), what it is, how to recognise it, how it affects people and what that might mean in your classroom.

Aims

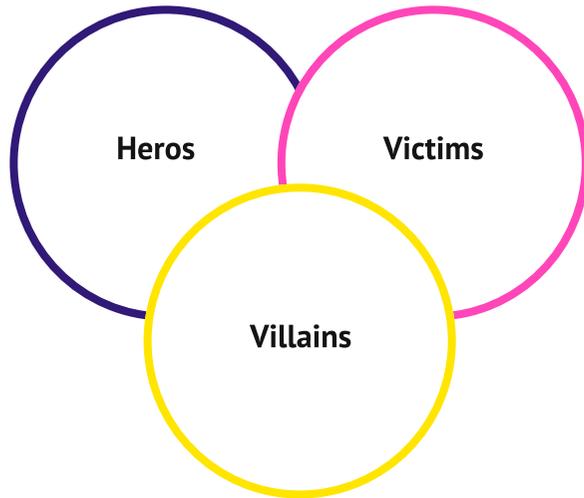
By the end of this module, I will be able to:

- recognise the basic signs of ADHD in a series of case studies
- adapt my practice to accommodate the basic needs of ADHD learners
- understand that ADHD is not a genuine neurological difference which has appropriate strategies to accommodate it



What do you think?

People with ADHD can be portrayed as either heroes, victims or villains in media coverage. But how far do you agree or disagree with these statements about the supposed causes of ADHD?



Read the following prompts and decide which one you agree or disagree with the most

Scenario 1 - Social causes:

“The ‘victims’ are the children and parents who get duped into believing the behavior is the result of a psychiatric disorder. The ‘villains’ may be the teachers who insist on treating the behavioral disruptions and the doctors who prescribe unnecessary medication. The ‘heroes’ are those who wish to save the victims by providing “education” on the “dangerous medications” and the profit motive of pharmaceutical companies.”

Scenario 2 - Psychological causes:

“The parents and teachers are the ‘victims’ of the child’s disruptive behavior. The child is seen as the ‘villain’ whose behavior distresses everyone around him. The ‘heroes’ are those who offer “therapies” to deal with the recalcitrant child.”

Scenario 3 - Biological causes:

“The ‘victim’ is a child or adult with ADHD who suffers at the hands of his genetics and neurochemistry. The villains are seen as all those who offer broader explanations for the causes of ADHD, namely other medical and environmental factors. The ‘heroes’ in this story are the doctors and the pharmaceutical companies who have developed and prescribe the much-needed medication to “cure your ills.”

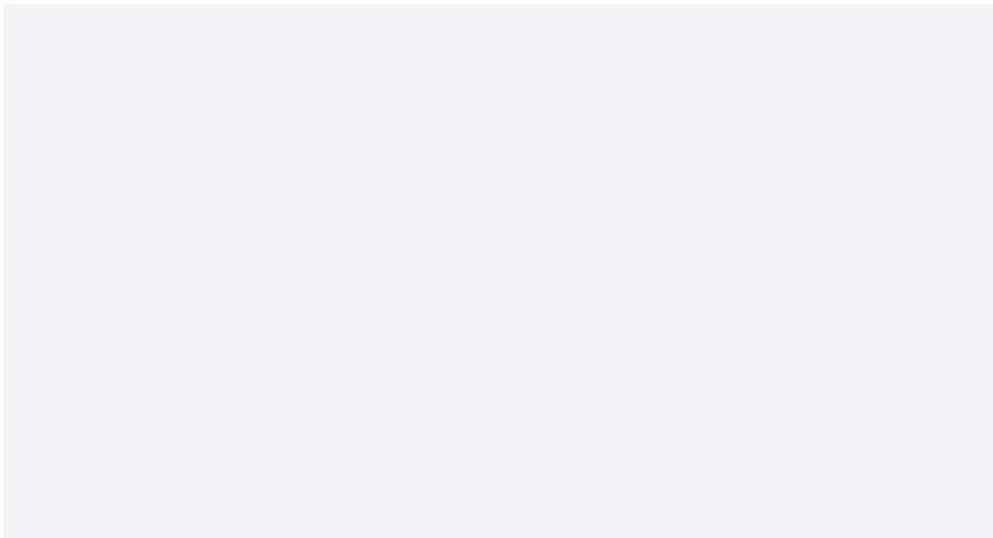
Source: Article extract

https://chadd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ATTN_10_14_MediaRepresents.pdf

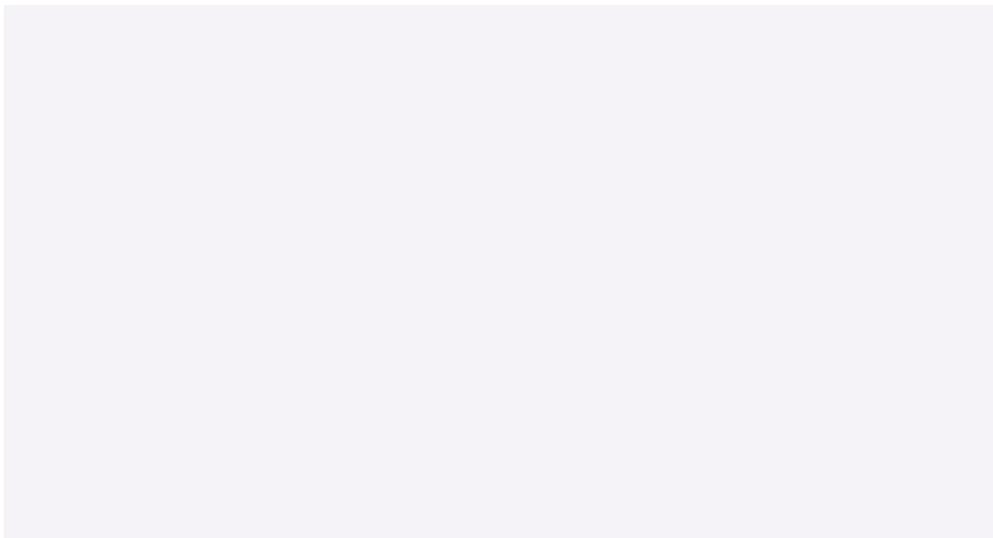
Reflexive questions

1. Which of these scenarios do you agree with the most?

2. Have you experienced negativity of ADHD in the classroom?



3. What significance can you take from these scenarios?



Interview: A person dealing with ADHD

How can recognizing the basic signs of ADHD actually make a significant difference? In this section, you are going to read an interview from somebody with ADHD.

Read the interview and then reflect on the questions below

Ioana D. is 32 year old and has been identified as someone who could provide helpful and current information for the evaluation of ADHD. A short telephone interview was conducted with a specific set of questions.

Interviewer: When did you find out you had ADHD?

Ioana: I learned about my ADHD when I was 12. My ADHD was invisible by that time but the news received changed everything I thought I knew about myself. I still remember how scared my parents were, but me too, because nobody told us that ADHD is not the end of the world.

Interviewer: I am convinced you are still connected with the influences of ADHD you experienced. What were the basic signs that made you aware of ADHD?

Ioana: You know it is hard to ask for what you need when you feel your needs do not matter for you or those around you. Because of my negativity bias, I tend to immediately jump to the worst-case-scenario. I experienced mood fluctuations, difficulties with school work completion, distractibility, impulsivity and disorganization. I missed a regular sleep as a priority. I often become anxious and I had a longstanding history with poor attention.

Interviewer: You keep talking about this story with a “happy voice”. How does ADHD impact our ability to inspire and motivate ourselves?

Ioana: Definitely, in so many ways. Generally, the ADHD tendency is toward negative stories. The biggest challenge is that people with ADHD tend to minimise their accomplishments and their needs. There are also significant mental health concerns and emotional difficulties. But the most IMPORTANT thing is getting clarity around the ADHD process.

Interviewer: What happens when you do not, or cannot, inspire and motivate yourself?

Ioana: That makes it a lot harder for us to succeed. We just repeat our cycle of failure and reinforce the negative thoughts we share ourselves. The key solution is to learn how to advise FOR and WITH ourselves.

Interviewer: You know... We looked at how ADHD is portrayed in the Media and we identified three critical elements: victims, villains and heroes. Have you ever heard of these concepts related to ADHD?

Ioana: (Sound of laughter...) Yes, definitely. Generally, the victims are the children and parents, the villains are the teachers and the heroes are the education providers. It is a whole discussion but all I can say here briefly is that teachers are at least HEROES.

Interviewer: Indeed, but do you know anyone else who has/had ADHD?

Ioana: Yes, I do. Actually, when I was in secondary school it was “fashionable” among pupils to have older friends in high school. I remember people talking about one of my friends who had ADHD. I did not understand very well what implications it had but I came

later not only to understand them but also to feel them. So I had a friend with ADHD without being aware. Do you know what's most interesting? The fact that the basic signs of ADHD were there but I had not felt them. My friend just seemed unable to concentrate, he was impulsive, disorganised but I thought there were completely different reasons.

Interviewer: That is really interesting. Thank you very much for your time and interest! As a conclusion, from your perspective what is ADHD about?

Ioana: We must never forget that ADHD is about differentiation, it is about a group as a whole, not just about me or you.

Reflexive questions

1. How much do you relate to the fact that the basic signs of ADHD may exist but cannot be easily identified? Why?

2. In what way will understanding the difference between ADHD and “annoying child” impact the teaching/learning strategies in the classroom?

3. If you were to give a moral to this interview, what would it be?

Detecting signs of ADHD

In this section you will learn about the basic signs of ADHD, and find out how these are caused by neurological differences. Then, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your own practice when it comes to working with your own SEN students.

Part 1: Basic signs of ADHD

ADHD is real and all children and adults with attention deficit disorder must benefit from appropriate ADHD understanding. No doubt about it, ADHD often makes it hard for people to navigate the “normal world.”

Signs of Attention Dysregulation

- Easily distracted
- Difficulty staying focused on one activity
- Misinterpreting instructions
- Difficulty completing work
- Losing things
- Difficulty starting things
- Daydreaming
- Forgetting normal routines

Signs of Hyperactivity

- Talking excessively
- Unable to settle into a quiet activity
- Constantly on the go

- Frequently handling or touching objects
- Standing instead of sitting at the table

Signs of Impulsivity

- Beginning work before instructions are given
- Disturbing others who are playing
- Acting or reacting before considering consequences
- Touching, hitting others
- Making impulsive decisions

Case study – Nancy

Nancy is a 13 year old Grade 8 student currently living at home in Toronto with her two parents and older sister. Since first entering school, Nancy has experienced difficulties with school work completion, inattentiveness and distractibility, disorganization, impulsivity and mood fluctuations.

Nancy states that she is struggling to meet expectations at home and at school, complete academic work, and communicate effectively with others who do not share her interests.

Nancy indicates that she often becomes anxious when she is asked to speak in public, or to spend time with people she does not know. Her parents report increased anxiety around school participation this year. Nancy reports feeling nervous when going to school because of presentations and homework.’

Do you think Nancy has ADHD? What are the basic signs of ADHD that Nancy's case fits into? Why?

Now, match the different signs of ADHD in the case study. Were they easy to identify?

Part 2: Neurological differences in the ADHD Brain

Researchers reported that people with ADHD had smaller brain volume and total size. Brain scans cannot be used to diagnose ADHD. There is no objective test to diagnose ADHD. There is a gap between neurons, which is called a synapse. There are alterations in blood flow to various areas of the brains in people with ADHD. The prefrontal area of the brain houses the executive functions and they are responsible for many tasks including planning, organizing, paying attention, remembering, and emotional reactions.

ADHD is one of the most common neurodevelopmental disorders of childhood. It is usually first diagnosed in childhood and often lasts into adulthood. ADHD is a brain-based disorder. It can interfere with the child's everyday activities at home and at school. It is normal for students to have trouble focusing and behaving at one time or another.

Now, research the internet to come up with more ideas for the following questions. There are so many resources on the internet to choose from.

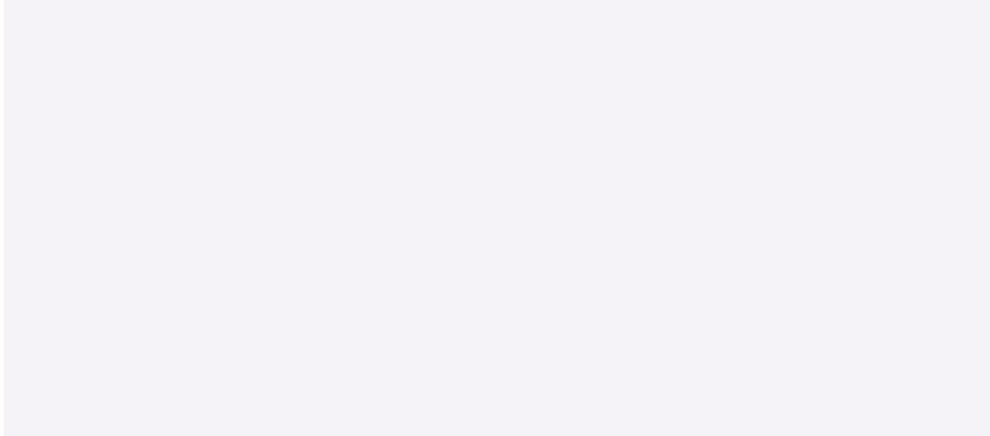
How quickly is ADHD diagnosed in childhood?

How do we differentiate "normal behaviour" from ADHD?

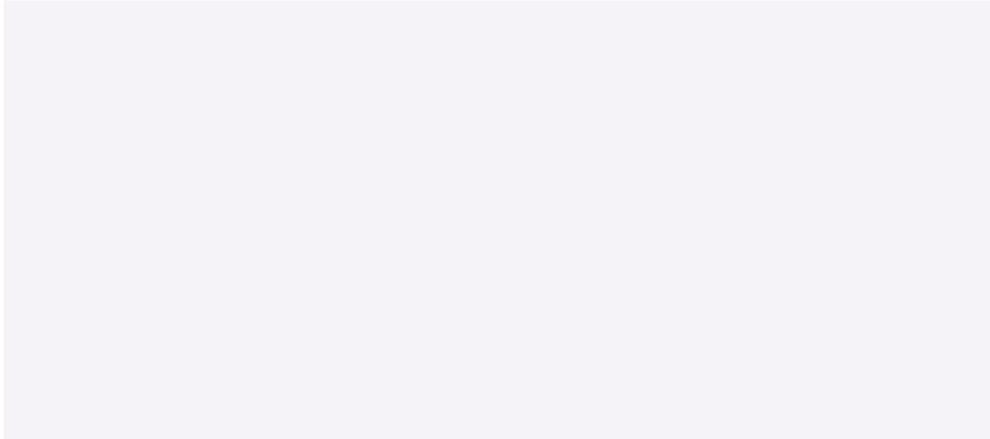
Part 3: Reflecting on your own practice

Now, think about your current teaching practice and answer the following questions:

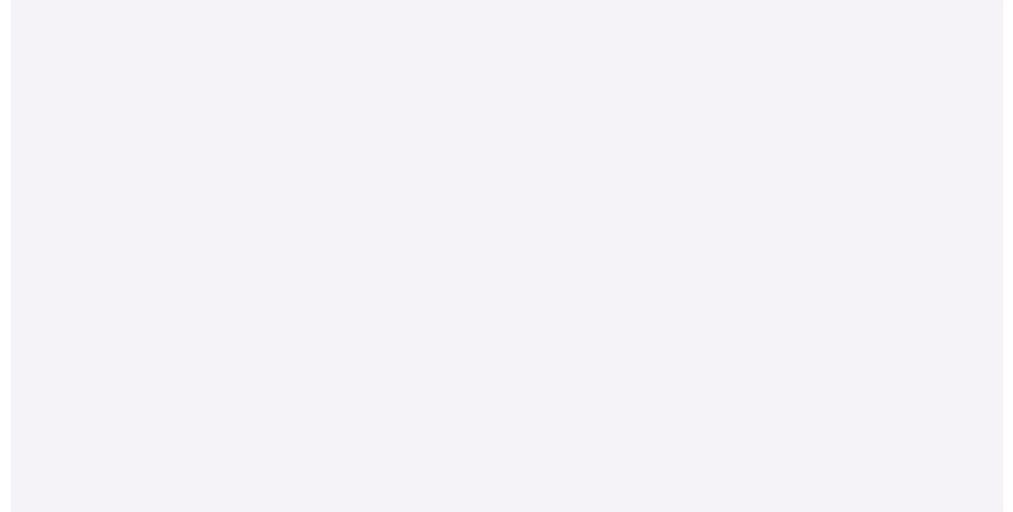
How do you work with ADHD children in your classes already?



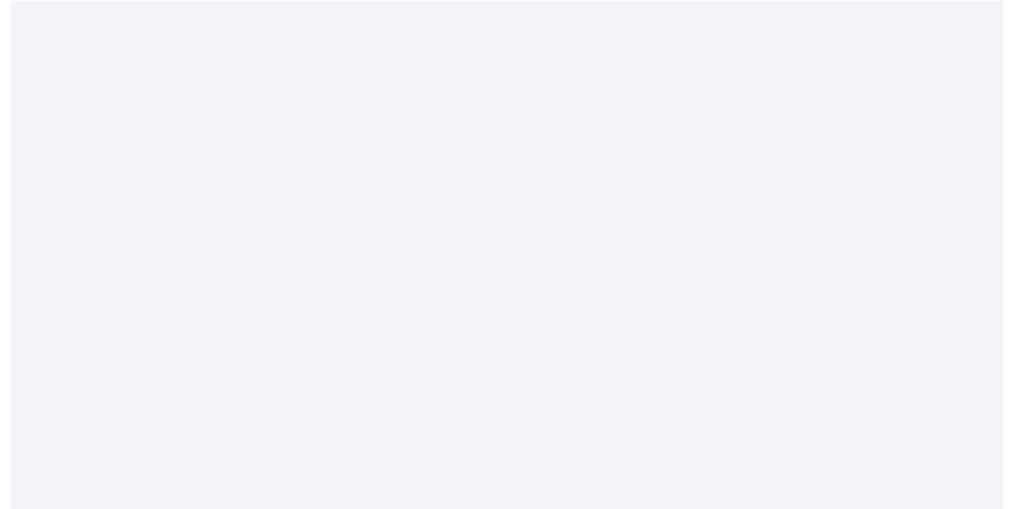
How well do children with ADHD react to your current way of teaching?



What challenges do you face?



What do you think are the signs that differentiate between children with ADHD and children who are “annoying”?





Analysing lesson plans

Now it is time to start thinking about your classroom and how you can start making some small changes that will have a big impact. What can teachers do to help children with ADHD?

Successful programs for children with ADHD integrate the following three components:

- **Accommodations:** what you can do to make learning easier for students with ADHD.
- **Instruction:** the methods you use in teaching.
- **Intervention:** How you head off behaviours that disrupt concentration or distract other students.

All three of these components can be integrated into a teacher's lesson plan.

Take a look at the following two sections from two different lesson plans:

- 1) Compare and contrast the sections;
- 2) Identify which is better for ADHD learners.

Lesson Plan 1

In this lesson plan primary school pupils are reviewing and building upon their knowledge of addition in a maths class.

Section – Preparation

- Review the movie and features to plan for any adaptations.
- Preview the suggested pause point discussion questions accessible on the topic Lesson Idea Page.

- Determine which of the topic's features you plan on having students explore (e.g. Challenge, Creative Coding, etc.)
- Optional: Assign Make-a-Map using the Assignment Builder

Lesson Plan 2

In this lesson plan students are reviewing addition

Section – Preparation

- Movement variation: the students are getting up out of their seats to get necessary supplies.
- Students are moving around so they are not seated for the whole time during the assignment.
- Ask the students to pair up
- Specific worksheet is given, on which it is clearly stated that all answers should be less than 15, and that students should not do any subtraction
- The teacher also explains that there should be no subtraction on the worksheet

Answers

Lesson Plan 2. Here the teacher demonstrates a lesson plan that can be used with students with ADHD that still accurately present the necessary standards.





Reflexive questions

Now, analyse a current lesson plan that you are working on and decide how you could improve that to accommodate students with ADHD.

E.g. Key points for classroom accommodation for students with ADHD:

- Create worksheets with fewer items;
- Leave space for movement in the classroom.



10 basic signs of ADHD that may be present in a learning environment

Read the checklists we have prepared below. When you have finished, add extra signs of ADHD, as well as strategies to the checklist considering your teaching experience.

Are any of your pupils displaying signs of ADHD? These are the most common signs displayed by a child with ADHD in a learning environment:

- 1 Inattention
- 2 Problems with getting homework done
- 3 Misinterpreting instruction and questions on assignments or tests
- 4 Problems paying attention to details
- 5 Excessive talking and interrupting others
- 6 Unable to sit still, constantly on the move
- 7 Transitions or changes produce agitation or frustration
- 8 Problems dealing with frustration
- 9 Problems starting assignments
- 10 Unable to change focus or start and stop activities

5 strategies to accommodate students with ADHD

But how can we better accommodate students with ADHD? Read the five strategies below, and feel free to add any more that may have been successful for you in the past

- 1 Allow students with ADHD to have their preferred list of activities
- 2 Make the goal reasonable for the student with ADHD - give him a break to move or engage in a preferred activity when the task is completed (or during the task completion – at the middle)
- 3 Give children with ADHD choices throughout their day (sense of control, feel respected)
- 4 Start the class with a 1-2 minutes ice breaker (morning routine) in the morning
- 5 Tell children with ADHD what to do rather than what not to do

Check your understanding

Take a short quiz to check you've understood the main points of the module.

Read the following five questions and choose the option that you think is correct.

1. When you are passionate about a learning goal, your ADHD energy:

- a) makes you impulsive
- b) drives performance and productivity
- c) distracts you from the learning goal

2. The biological differences between how ADHD impacts girls and boys:

- a) are related to gender identity
- b) are related to family health implications
- c) have nothing to do with gender identity

3. A manifestation of ADHD Symptoms in the classroom is:

- a) showing an adventurous behaviour
- b) enhancing silence
- c) unable to sit still, constantly on the move

4. ADHD is:

- a) a brain-based disorder
- b) a disease that requires medication
- c) a disease that is only genetically

5. How can you make your classroom ADHD-friendly?

- a) provide a separate quiet workspace for ADHD students
- b) ask for a slow classroom interaction
- c) give children with ADHD the freedom to make personalized choices throughout the day

Answers

1b, 2c, 3c, 4a, 5c

Reflect on the module

In this final section, think about what you've learned this module and how you can use this in your day-to-day working life.

1. What is your biggest take away from this module about recognizing the basic signs of ADHD in line with transitions or changes required for building an inclusive learning environment?

2. What do you commit to changing in your practice to accommodate the basic needs of ADHD learners?

3. What do you understand about how the difference between ADHD and annoying students influence the classroom cohesion?