Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects behaviour and concentration.

Children and young people with ADHD often seem unusually restless, impulsive or distracted. They may speak or act without thinking, struggle with organisation, find it hard to focus or appear to be always on the go. Some people with ADHD do not experience hyperactivity.

ADHD is not a mental health condition or a learning disability. But children and young people with ADHD may also have other conditions or experience mental health problems.

Living with ADHD can be very challenging, for children and young people as well as for their parents and carers. But the right diagnosis and support can make a big difference to a child’s learning, life skills and relationships, as well as making family life easier. There is also lots you can do as a parent or carer to help your child manage the things they find difficult.

## What are the most common signs of ADHD?

A child with ADHD may:

* be easily distracted, finding it difficult to start or finish tasks
* often feel unable to concentrate
* often feel restless or fidgety
* be very talkative, often interrupting or blurting things out
* act impulsively, for example doing something before considering consequences or being prone to taking risks
* be easily angry or frustrated, or struggle to deal with emotions
* find making or maintaining friendships difficult
* be disorganised, for instance often losing things or being late
* lack awareness of time

Every child or young person with ADHD is an individual and they may not display all of these behaviours. Many of these behaviours are normal in younger children. They can also be caused by traumatic experiences. So, if your child is showing some of these signs, it does not necessarily mean they have ADHD.

It's important to understand that age and gender can also affect how someone with ADHD behaves. This can make it harder to spot signs of ADHD, particularly in girls. Girls are more likely to be undiagnosed or wrongly diagnosed with other conditions.

Typically, the signs of ADHD develop in early childhood and they may become particularly noticeable at times of significant change, such as when a child starts or changes school.

## What to do if you think your child might have ADHD

If your child frequently experiences some of these things and it's affecting their day-to-day life, discuss your concerns with your child’s GP. Before doing this, talk to your child’s teacher and the school special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) about what they have noticed.

The GP may want to refer your child for assessment, as ADHD can only be diagnosed by a specialist such as a child and adolescent psychiatrist or paediatrician.

## ADHD diagnosis and support

ADHD assessment is usually done through the NHS mental health service for children and young people, known as CAMHS. Diagnosis is most commonly made in childhood. In the majority of cases, young people continue to experience ADHD behaviours and qualities into adulthood.

There is no single, definitive test for ADHD. Specialists will base a clinical diagnosis on their observations of your child, discussions and questionnaires (with you and your child), and information from your child’s school.

They will consider how long the behaviours have been present, how much they impact daily life and whether they might be due to another condition. The NHS states that around 60-80% of children with ADHD have at least one other condition (such as [autism](https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/autism-and-mental-health/), dyslexia, dyspraxia, [anxiety](https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/anxiety/) or [behaviour issues](https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/challenging-behaviour/)). In some cases, this means a child may be given more than one diagnosis.

## What you can do to support your child with ADHD

* Be understanding
* Give simple instructions
* Set clear boundaries
* Build healthy routines
* Help with organisation