

ECCY7010: ADHD and ASD: Neurodiversity, Mental Health and Additional Learning Needs

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1. Script

Slide 1:

This educational video is designed to raise awareness among primary-school staff of how ADHD can affect a young person and their family, and how informed, supportive practice can help.

Slide 2:

Let's start by going beyond the adult perspective and thinking about what a young person with ADHD might go through.

We will look at how ADHD affects learning and friendships, what these experiences mean for the child and their family, and how the right support can make a difference.

As we go, let's keep one question in mind: what do we need to understand about this child's experience?

You might already be thinking of a particular child. Keep that child in mind as we consider what school and daily life could feel like for them, and how we can help.

Slide 3:

ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. It is a developmental condition that affects how the brain grows and functions (National Institute of Mental Health, 2024).

The main signs of ADHD are inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. This can look like trouble focusing, organising tasks, sitting still, waiting, or thinking before acting. Some children mostly have trouble paying attention, while others are more hyperactive or impulsive, or have a mix of both (National Institute of Mental Health, 2024).

These difficulties persist, affect everyday functioning, and occur in more than one setting, such as school and home. Every child's experience is different (National Institute of Mental Health, 2024).

Next, we will look at how these traits can affect a child's learning and friendships.

Slide 4:

Think about what a child needs to do in a lesson: listen to instructions, get their materials ready, start an activity, and keep going. For children with ADHD, paying attention and staying organised can make these everyday tasks much harder (National Institute of Mental Health, 2024).

Imagine missing part of an instruction and feeling unsure how to start. Or beginning an activity but getting distracted before you can finish. When work is left unfinished, we see the result, but not always what made it hard.

A UK study looked at over a thousand primary-school children and found 47 who likely had ADHD, based on parent and teacher questionnaires. These children were more likely to fall behind in reading, writing, and maths. These children were more likely to be working below age expectations in literacy and numeracy. These differences remained evident throughout two and a half years of follow-up (May *et al.*, 2021).

The effects went beyond just schoolwork. Children with probable ADHD also said they felt less happy at school compared to others. These findings highlight difficulties in both educational progress and children's experience of school (May *et al.*, 2021).

Tracking children over time gives stronger evidence that these learning differences can last. The results show why it matters to notice problems early and provide the right support (May *et al.*, 2021).

For staff, the key question is: when a child has trouble finishing their work, do we really understand what is making it hard and how school feels for them?

Slide 5:

“Get your book, find the right page and answer the first question.”

This instruction seems simple, but following it requires remembering information while doing something else. That process uses working memory (Kofler *et al.*, 2020).

Researchers studied 172 children between eight and thirteen, comparing those with and without ADHD on different memory tasks. They found that children with ADHD had more trouble holding and working with information in their minds (Kofler *et al.*, 2020).

The study distinguished between briefly remembering spoken information and actively working with it. Children with ADHD showed substantial difficulties with working memory, while short-term storage of spoken information was not significantly poorer than in the comparison group (Kofler *et al.*, 2020).

Think of a child who can repeat the teacher’s instruction but loses track while finding their book and turning to the right page. They remember what was said, but it is hard to stay on task while doing it.

Staff need to understand this difference. If a child can repeat an instruction, it does not always mean they can remember it while doing the task.

If a child asks, “What do I do now?”, try to find out where they got confused. Their question can show us what support they need, instead of assuming they were not paying attention.

Slide 6:

A school day is about more than just lessons. Talking, playing games, and making friends all help children feel like they belong.

When a child struggles with attention, impulsivity, or emotions, social situations can become more challenging. They might interrupt, lose track of what others are saying, or struggle with disagreements (Spender *et al.*, 2023).

Think about wanting to join a game but struggling to wait your turn. Adults might see the interruption but not realise how much the child wants to be included.

A review of twenty-four studies found that, on average, children and young people with ADHD have fewer friends, lower-quality friendships, and more challenges with friends than those without ADHD (Spender *et al.*, 2023).

Research helps us see what these patterns mean for real children. In one Canadian study, 213 children aged six to eleven with ADHD and social difficulties were asked about feeling lonely. The study found that having fewer mutual friendships was linked to feeling lonelier (Smit *et al.*, 2020).

A mutual friendship is when both children see each other as friends. This matters because being around other kids doesn't always mean a child feels connected or included.

Children with ADHD can form close friendships. By understanding each child's experience, staff can better see where support is needed.

For staff, it is not just about whether a child has someone to play with. It is also important to ask if the child feels included, if the friendship is mutual, and what the child says about their experience.

Slide 7:

We have looked at how ADHD can impact a child's learning and friendships. Next, we will discuss two interventions designed to address these challenges.

We will examine what each intervention includes, how it can help the child, and what research says about its effectiveness.

Slide 8:

Behavioural teacher training helps teachers recognise a child's challenges and create a clear plan to support their involvement in class.

The study examined two approaches. The first focuses on what happens before a problem starts, like giving clearer instructions or using visual aids. The second looks at how adults respond, using feedback, praise, and rewards to encourage certain behaviours. Teachers spot a challenge, decide what successful participation means, and pick strategies that fit the child (Staff *et al.*, 2021).

A randomised study with 90 children aged six to twelve who had significant ADHD symptoms tested these methods in two teacher-training sessions. Both approaches led to fewer classroom problems compared to a group that had not yet received training. Improvements were also evident at the three-month assessment (Staff *et al.*, 2021).

Imagine a child who is asked to get their book, find the right page, and answer a question. A helpful classroom plan could list these steps on a small visual checklist, so the child can refer to it instead of trying to remember everything.

The teacher might set a realistic goal, like starting the first question after checking the list. Giving specific feedback, such as “You checked your next step and got started,” helps the child see what they have accomplished.

The aim is to make it easier for the child to take part successfully. Goals should fit the child’s abilities, and encouragement should highlight their progress.

Experts also suggest changing the classroom environment to fit each child. This might mean reducing distractions, providing written instructions alongside spoken ones, and allowing shorter focus times with movement breaks (NICE, 2018).

Making this work needs everyone to be involved. In Wales, person-centred planning puts the child and their parent at the heart of decisions about extra learning support. Staff can use these talks to learn what matters to the child and agree on meaningful goals (Welsh Government, 2021).

When healthcare professionals are involved, sharing information with the school, with consent, can link classroom support to the child’s overall treatment plan. School feedback helps professionals see how the child is doing day to day (NICE, 2018).

Finally, check the goal: Is the child starting tasks independently, needing fewer reminders, and finding the work easier? Use this information to keep or change the support as needed.

Slide 9:

Earlier, we looked at how being around other children differs from truly feeling included. Parental Friendship Coaching helps children build the skills they need to make friends.

The programme shows parents how to listen to their child's social worries, offer helpful feedback, and create opportunities to practise with another child. It links coaching to real-life situations, so parents can help their children use these skills (Mikami *et al.*, 2020).

In a Canadian study, 172 families with children aged six to eleven who had ADHD and social challenges took part. Parents joined ten weekly group sessions run by clinicians, where they learned through explanations, role-play, and practice between meetings (Mikami *et al.*, 2020).

The comparison group also received ADHD education and support. Friendship coaching led to more positive and fewer negative friendship behaviours than the other programme, both right after and eight months later. The additional improvement was in friendship behaviours; overall friendship quality did not differ between the programmes (Mikami *et al.*, 2020).

For primary school staff, this links support between home and school. Clinicians deliver the programme to parents, while school staff can share their observations and give children chances to practise the skills they are working on.

Imagine a child who likes playing with a certain classmate but struggles to choose an activity. By working with the family, staff can set a simple goal, like having the child ask what their friend wants to play before sharing their own idea.

An adult can quickly practise this with the child before a paired activity and then praise their effort afterwards. The child should help choose the activity and who joins in. This shows how school can help reinforce a skill the child is learning.

Good communication is important. Staff can talk about what they see, parents can share what happens at home, and the child can say what helps them. This aligns with the person-centred approach to planning support for additional learning needs in Wales (Welsh Government, 2021).

Look at both how much the child joins in and how they feel. Are their interactions getting easier? Are both children choosing to spend time together? Does the child feel more comfortable and included?

The goal is to give children supported chances to connect, while paying attention to what friendship means to each child.

Slide 10:

Earlier, I asked you to think of a specific child. Take a moment to picture that child again.

We have looked at how ADHD can affect learning and friendships, such as following instructions, finishing classroom tasks, making friends, and feeling included. Adults might notice unfinished work or interruptions without seeing what the child is experiencing (May *et al.*, 2021; Kofler *et al.*, 2020; Spender *et al.*, 2023; Smit *et al.*, 2020).

We have discussed two ways to help: teacher training to support classroom participation, and Parental Friendship Coaching to build friendship skills through guided practice (Staff *et al.*, 2021; Mikami *et al.*, 2020).

For staff, the next step is to identify what the child struggles with, listen to their perspective, and work with their family and other professionals. Choose support that fits their needs, and check whether it helps.

The next time you see unfinished work, an interruption, or a child having trouble joining in, think of the child you have been picturing.

You might still notice the same behaviour. But now you have more ways to understand what might be causing it, and more ways to support them.

Slide 11:

We should not wait until a child reaches a breaking point before we change how we support them.

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