

ADHD poster

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Word count – 1087

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Introduction

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects attention, self-regulation, impulse control, and activity levels. It is one of the most identified additional learning needs in childhood and can significantly influence a child's academic progress, emotional wellbeing, and social development. ADHD is typically characterised by persistent patterns of **inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity**, which are inconsistent with developmental expectations (NICE, 2018). Within educational settings, these characteristics may create barriers to learning and participation, meaning children with ADHD often require additional support to achieve their full potential.

This poster critically evaluates how ADHD is identified and diagnosed, analyses the barriers associated with ADHD, and explores one evidence-based support strategy: **structured routine and predictability**.

Identification and Diagnosis of ADHD

Identifying ADHD can be challenging because many characteristics associated with the condition such as high energy levels, distractibility, or impulsive behaviour may also appear during typical child development. As a result, diagnosis requires careful assessment over time rather than relying on isolated observations.

In many cases, ADHD is first identified by parents or teachers who observe ongoing difficulties with concentration, task completion, sitting still, listening to instructions, or controlling impulsive behaviour. Teachers often play a significant role in early identification because classroom environments place demands on attention, organisation, and self-regulation (DuPaul and Stoner, 2014).

According to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2018), ADHD should only be diagnosed by trained healthcare professionals such as paediatricians, child psychologists, or psychiatrists. The diagnostic process usually includes:

- Developmental history
- Behaviour rating scales completed by parents and teachers
- Clinical interviews
- Classroom observations
- Assessment across multiple settings

A major strength of this multi-disciplinary assessment process is that it provides a holistic understanding of the child's behaviour across different environments. Symptoms must be present in more than one setting, such as both home and school, and must significantly affect functioning before diagnosis is confirmed (NICE, 2018).

However, there are several challenges associated with diagnosing ADHD. One issue is symptom overlap with other conditions, including Autism Spectrum Disorder, anxiety, trauma-related behaviours, or attachment difficulties. This can result in delayed diagnosis or misdiagnosis. Additionally, research suggests that girls are often diagnosed later than boys because they may present with quieter inattentive symptoms rather than disruptive hyperactive behaviours (Barkley and Murphy, 1998).

Despite these challenges, diagnosis can offer significant benefits. Early identification can provide access to educational interventions, specialist support services, and improved understanding among families and educators.

Barriers Associated with ADHD

Children with ADHD often experience barriers that affect learning, relationships, and emotional wellbeing.

Academic Barriers

One of the most significant barriers is difficulty sustaining attention. Children with ADHD may struggle to focus during lessons, follow multi-step instructions, or complete independent tasks. This may result in unfinished work, missed learning opportunities, and lower academic attainment compared with peers (DuPaul and Stoner, 2014).

Executive functioning difficulties may also affect:

- Organisation
- Memory
- Time management
- Task prioritisation

For example, children may lose equipment, forget homework, or struggle to plan written tasks effectively.

Social Barriers

ADHD can also impact peer relationships. Impulsivity may lead children to interrupt conversations, act without considering consequences, or struggle with turn-taking. These behaviours may be misunderstood by peers, increasing the risk of conflict or social rejection (Hoza, 2007).

As a result, some children may experience isolation or difficulty maintaining friendships.

Emotional Barriers

Repeated criticism or behavioural sanctions can affect emotional wellbeing. Many children with ADHD experience frustration, low self-esteem, or feelings of failure if they are consistently compared negatively with peers (Barkley and Murphy, 1998).

Without support, these emotional barriers may contribute to anxiety, reduced motivation, or school avoidance.

Support Strategy: Structured Routine and Predictability

One effective strategy used to support children with ADHD is **structured routine and predictability**. This involves creating consistent classroom routines, clear expectations, visual timetables, and predictable transitions between activities.

Children with ADHD often experience difficulties with executive functioning, including organisation, planning, memory, and self-regulation. Structured routines help reduce these difficulties by creating consistency within the learning environment (DuPaul and Stoner, 2014).

For example, a teacher may use:

- Visual schedules
- Repeated lesson structures
- Step-by-step task instructions
- Consistent classroom rules
- Transition warnings before activity changes

These strategies help children understand what is expected and reduce uncertainty.

Benefits of Structured Routine

One major benefit of routine is improved attention and engagement. When children know what to expect, less mental energy is spent processing environmental uncertainty, allowing greater focus on learning tasks.

Structured routine can also support emotional regulation. Children with ADHD may become overwhelmed by sudden changes or unclear expectations. Predictability creates a sense of security and reduces anxiety (Hatherly *et al.*, 2022).

Research by Zentall (2005) found that structured classroom environments improved on-task behaviour and reduced disruptive behaviours in children with ADHD.

Another benefit is the development of independence. Through repeated routines, children gradually begin to internalise classroom expectations and rely less on adult prompts. This can improve self-confidence and organisational skills over time.

Compared with reactive behaviour management approaches which often address behaviour after problems occur, structured routine offers a more preventative approach by reducing barriers before they arise (Norfolk County council, 2026).

Challenges and Limitations

Despite its benefits, structured routine also presents challenges.

One limitation is that excessive structure may reduce opportunities for creativity, flexibility, and spontaneous learning. Some researchers argue that children with ADHD also benefit from movement-based or interactive learning experiences, which overly rigid routines may restrict (Barkley and Murphy, 1998).

Another challenge is consistency. Structured routines are most effective when reinforced across both school and home environments. If expectations differ between settings, children may struggle to transfer learned behaviours.

There is also the issue of individual differences. While some children thrive in highly structured environments, others may become disengaged if routines become repetitive or insufficiently stimulating.

When compared with more individualised interventions, such as one-to-one behavioural coaching, routine may not fully address complex emotional or social difficulties. However, unlike intensive specialist interventions, structured routine is more practical and accessible for everyday classroom use (Norfolk county council, 2026).

Conclusion

ADHD is a significant additional learning need that can affect children's academic achievement, emotional wellbeing, and social development. Although diagnosis can be complex due to overlapping symptoms and individual differences, early identification is essential in ensuring appropriate support. Children with ADHD often face barriers related to concentration, organisation, peer relationships, and self-esteem. Structured routine and predictability offer an effective evidence-based strategy that can improve attention, reduce anxiety, and support independence. However, its effectiveness depends on consistency, flexibility, and adaptation to the individual child's needs.

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