

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity that interfere with functioning or development (Friedman 1992). ADHD is commonly divided into three subtypes: **Predominantly Inattentive Presentation:**

Characterized by difficulty sustaining attention, forgetfulness, disorganization, and distractibility. **Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Presentation:** Marked by excessive fidgeting, talking, restlessness, and impulsive behaviours. **Combined**

Presentation: Exhibiting both inattentive and hyperactive-impulsive symptoms. The disorder affects approximately 5-7% of children worldwide, and around 60% of those diagnosed in childhood continue to have symptoms into adulthood. The causes of ADHD are believed to be multifactorial, involving genetic, neurological, and environmental factors (Becker 2020).

ADHD will often be diagnosed during childhood although it can be missed, and adults will experience symptoms and find day to day living challenging. An ADHD diagnosis can impact individuals in different ways being multifaceted and profound. The diagnosis can affect social relationships and emotional well-being. Occupational functioning and academia are also affected with detrimental effects to self-identity. It is vital to raise awareness of the impacts as it is crucial to fostering an understanding for individuals to help reduce stigma and promote effective support strategies (Re 2020).

ADHD will be diagnosed through evaluations by health care professionals. It involves numerous professionals working together to gather detailed information regarding behaviours, symptoms and the impact they have on the individual's daily routine related to hyperactivity, impulsivity and inattention. It is vital that educational practitioners refer children that present symptoms of ADHD as soon as they can to the ALNCo so that the child will have a better chance of an early diagnosis (Re 2020). The DSM.5 is a criteria scale to assess the presence of symptoms as well as the severity. A medical history review will also be carried out to rule out any medical conditions that could potentially explain some symptoms for instance vision or hearing problems, sleep disorders or mental health issues. Observations are vital to the evaluations as behaviour in different environments and with different individuals will help to deal and understand the disorder once identified. Consistently it can be a lot harder to diagnose in children that do have medical conditions such as hearing or vision problems as the symptoms they are presenting can be put down to frustration with communication issues and understanding what is being asked or expected of them (Becker 2020).

When an ADHD diagnosis is made it can provide individuals and families with mixed feelings. For many individuals, the ADHD diagnosis will allow them to feel a sense of

validation and relief. When they have spent several years struggling with unexplained challenges during daily living either at school or work depending on the age at the time of the diagnosis alongside the worry of social interactions. Having an explanation to the difficulties they face can give them a feeling of elation and allow them to feel empowered. By being able to identify that the challenges they have faced are derived from a neurodevelopmental condition instead of it being down to individual's personal failings will work towards relieving feelings of self-blame and guilt allowing a shift in self-perception (Banerjee 2013)

Although a diagnosis for ADHD is a welcomed as a reason and support will be provided, it can conversely evoke anxiety and fear. It can cause individuals to feel labelled that in turn allows them to feel judged and looked at differently. Due to the lack of knowledge and understanding of others regarding individuals can perceive there is a stigma and stereo type and that they will be seen as idle, disruptive and unintelligent (DuPaul 2014). Awareness needs to be raised to help understanding that ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition not a choice. When children are diagnosed with ADHD it is vital that parents and practitioners offer support to help with the child's well-being and emotional development. Children need to understand their disorder and how to develop strategies so that in time they will be able to self-manage the condition that will help them throughout their childhood an into adulthood (Friedman 1992).

For children it can be difficult for them to comprehend and understand the way adults, practitioners and other peers now perceive them. Whereas they could have already labelled themselves as the disruptive child now they have been given a reason for it so adaptations can be put in place to support them and their educational needs. Realising they are the same as their friends and can achieve the same outcomes with the additional support and the positivity to face and overcome the challenges, can give them a feeling of self-worth and aspirations (Weisz 2005).

Parents and carers also need support when their child is diagnosed with ADHD. Parents might face a battle to receive a diagnosis and when it eventually happens and the relief wears off it can be daunting and apprehensive for what comes next (Friedman 1992). Parents generally know their child better than anyone else and when symptoms of ADHD first present itself, they can be quick to blame themselves and their parenting skills. Being in a social environment and feeling judged or inadequate for the behaviour of their child can lower their self-belief and impact their well-being. Communicating their thoughts and feelings with practitioners can help with reassurance and get the child on the correct pathway for a diagnosis. After the diagnosis, professional support will be given so that parents and carers can work towards supporting and meeting the needs of their child (Gardener 2008).

Parents should implement routines that break the day up into sections and tasks. By children having the knowledge of what is happening and what is to be expected of them it will help them to regulate and manage their day focusing on the child's strengths and having constant open communication, following consistent rules will

establish positive parent-child relationships. Emotional support will be available from professionals, and they will be able to help establish valuable strategies for time management, that will in turn reduce chaos and stress. Having the positive mindset will resonate with the children so they do not feel inadequate. Simple changes made to the phrasing of the disorder will allow parents to see it differently and have a positive approach (Fabiano 2024). Impulsivity can be perceived as an intriguing mind and curiosity. Hyperactivity can be portrayed as enthusiasm, ambition, drive and energy. For inattention, the positives can be drives imagination, eager for stimulation, creativity, invention and innovation. It is vital that children with ADHD are aware that whilst these can be perceived as strengths, they will also present challenges. Different environments will provide various challenges and the school environment, children will notice will be more challenging to them than their peers (Barkley 2015).

Although a challenging journey for most parents, should the child have ADHD the journey will be more exhausting and complex leaving parents feeling isolated. When a child is diagnosed with ADHD the main focus is revolved around the child in question and as this is rightly so it needs to be promoted that parents needs are equally as important as they face issues such as emotional, social and financial difficulties that will have an impact on the well-being of parents and carers. Looking at the different factors that will affect parents and carers will raise awareness and allow others to realise support should be at hand (Herman 2011). Emotional exhaustion plays a big role in a parent's journey and accepting the diagnosis knowing that this is not a phase but a lifelong neurodevelopmental disorder. There is no quick fix, it is developing coping strategies and adapting day to day to try and accommodate the child's needs with trying to have as little impact on the family's life. The parenting style must take on the adaptations of constant redirection with vigilance and extreme patience. Parents can get stressed by the emotional outburst and dealing with the unpredictable behaviours that they would have to manage. Especially when they go out and feel judged by others making them feel they are always on an alert just in case an outburst occurs or there is a change to the plan, so they anticipate the next crisis. It can be isolating for parents too as for friends and family that have not experienced ADHD they do not fully comprehend and even though they can offer support and advice, it could be incorrect or lack empathy. By having others telling you how they would handle situations can leave parents feeling deflated and make them question their parenting skills (Gardner 2008). Being a long-term condition, it can allow for parents to have an emotional burnout delivering anxiety and depression that could go undetected and be neglected with parents feeling guilty that they cannot cope and will not reach out for support for fear of being seen as a failure and a bad parent. Constantly questioning if they are doing the best for their child and trying endlessly to meet their needs. When the diagnosis is made parents may need time to come to terms with it and can often go through a grieving process mourning the stereotypical parenting experiences that they are not going to have. A diagnosis can help with denial as parents might not want to believe that there are any underlying issues with their child. Accepting the diagnosis and having it

stated, knowing that it is a lifetime lasting condition can be hard to comprehend. Rejection and denial can be experienced, and parents will need support to come to terms with the diagnosis (Banerjee 2013). They can feel torn with wanting to be there to support their child but also feel they need time to adjust. A sense of guilt and selfishness can wave over parents, and they will need time to adjust. ADHD can be misunderstood by many and although there is more campaigning to raise awareness, the stigma around it is that a lot of people believe it is down to bad parenting and an increased lack of discipline causing the child to act that way, so parents can just blame it on ADHD. Parents may feel that they do not want to socialise or interact with others due to the judgement from others that will make them feel isolated (Becker 2020). Research shows that parents state they get blamed frequently for their child's behaviour in public and feel there is a constant criticism from friends, relatives and also teachers, reporting in feeling embarrassed in professional meetings. Parents will withdraw themselves from social interactions and become secluded from society due to the judgement felt and leading them to live a life of solitary. The emotional burden of lack of empathy can leave parents with depression that can go undressed and worsen over time which will then impact the child as they will not have the parents full support that they need (Maniadaki 2018).

An ADHD diagnosis will not only impact the child, but the family connected will be reshaped. It can cause arguments between partners as there could be split decisions on parenting and how to deal with the child. It is vital both parents are on the same page for continuity and to give the child the best possible chance of dealing with their condition (Gardner 2008). Parent's feelings can fluctuate, and it is important that they communicate with each other how they are feeling so they do not end up resenting each other or the child. By having a plan and strategies put in place, if they work together, they can reduce any negativity in the house (Fabiano 2024).

Having to make decisions that will affect the child will put added strain on a relationship. Every decision the parents make can feel heavy with the unknown outcome and whether they are making the right call on behalf of their child, leaving them with an overwhelming responsibility. When parents receive the diagnosis there can many decisions to be made and parents need time to adjust and get their head around everything without leaving it overwhelm them (DuPaul 2014). They have to adapt to a multi-modal approach to manage and cope with their child's needs. Treatment differs for every child and co-ordinating behaviour management therapy and lifestyle changes can be full on. Having to carry out research in medication and whether it is the right fit for their child can be very stressful. Weighing up all the options and different strategies to medication, parents will receive support from professionals and have the opportunity to discuss any concerns (Becker 2020).

When a decision is made for medication, parents need to keep on top of prescriptions and note any side effects and report them to the doctors to make sure the medication and dosage is correct and beneficial for the child. Outweighing long term side effects and feeling that the child will have a better quality of life is another decision that has to be made (Selikowitz 2021).

Parents need to consider any siblings and their feelings and emotions too. Depending on if the age, siblings can end up feeling a sense of neglect and that their needs are secondary to their brother or sister (Re 2020). They can feel resentful to both parents and the child, and this can lead to a downward spiral of acting out in order to get attention. Younger siblings may not understand the ADHD diagnosis and therefore seeing it as their brother or sister getting the attention and maybe not reprimanded so they may in turn defy instructions just for a reaction and attention. This could possibly trigger another ADHD assessment with the sibling as parents might not be able to know if it is just attention seeking or there is an underlying condition. Parents should seek help straight away if the child is showing any symptoms so the child can be assessed for them to rule out ADHD and know how to face the challenges. Although families should be able to access support to help them deal with the families' adaptations, many families do not receive it due to time issues, money resources and because they do not want to be seen as a failure and an inadequate parent (NICE 2008).

The biggest battle to be faced for parents with children with ADHD is unfortunately the education system. Laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act have been put into place but not all schools will adhere to them due to factors such as they do not have the staff and resources to facilitate this. Parents have reported that some struggles they have to deal with include inadequate expectations with teachers not following the plans set out for the children that will cause the children to act out and as they get older can lead to suspension and removal from school (Ostberg 2012). It can also make them feel labelled as troublemakers which will alter the teachers' perceptions of the child and affect peer interaction. Children with ADHD are both creative and intelligent and will be able to meet academic expectations as long as they are provided with the correct support to achieve this. Parents have reported feeling that they are in an ongoing argument with the education system to fight for the rights of the child and having to attend regular meetings to mediate with the school. They have stated the advocacy is time consuming and emotionally draining (Antshel 2006).

Racial and Cultural Disparities can be left unspoken about, but more awareness needs to be raised as it can add more complication to a parenting journey. Mental health issues can be seen as Taboo in many cultures and so parents reaching out for help can make them feel shameful. Research shows that racial disparities such as children of colour are less likely to be diagnosed and more likely to be punished and mistreated, so parents of a marginalised community have to navigate racial bias as well as all the other negative challenges (Banaschewski 2018).

Parents need to be kind to themselves when their child receives their ADHD diagnosis as although they have achieved the outcome, they fought so hard to achieve it is when the challenges really start. They have to deal with an unspoken grief of the loss of traditional milestones and experiences that might not be achieved. That their lifestyle will always be structured with no room for spontaneity and a constant on the go routine. Constant battles and challenges for the child to have the

correct support and for them to be able to live their best life (Dvorsky 2016). Parents have to adapt to the fact that although their child will provide them with joy and abundance, creativity and resilience as ADHD is unpredictable it means that their family life will present to be more reactive, ridged and scheduled learning, parents feel more in survival mode rather than enjoying their lifestyle. Parents if children with ADHD do not want sympathy but empathy and to feel supported and understood. Challenges will be present throughout their individual lives but having the ability to manage and cope will give them the confidence to live their life to the full and live in a positive way. ADHD does not define a child it is part of who they are (Re 2020).

'You work twice as hard as everyone else just to maintain a sense of normality, so you know what it means to preserve in hard times. This resiliency is a huge strength-on that many parents with children with ADHD don't give themselves enough credit for' (Supernanny 2023).

ECEY7005 Reference List

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