

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder which displays a consistent lack of attention, over activeness and hyperactivity, which significantly affects a child's day to day life and learning. (NHS, 2023). Statistics suggest that an estimated two million people (children and adults) have been diagnosed with ADHD in the UK to date nationwide with figures said to be increasing.(ADHD UK, no date) Boys being ten times more likely to gain a diagnosis than girls.(NICE. 2022). This poster will briefly pinpoint some useful material regarding ADHD referrals, diagnosis, and intervention, and is designed to be an informative tool to encourage further research.

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Meeting the needs of children with ADHD in the Early Years is underpinned by statutory requirements set out by the Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021, (Welsh Government, 2021), Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018), (National Assembly for Wales, 2018). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, (Unicef, no date).and the Convention of the rights of persons with disabilities. (United Nations, no date).

Early Intervention

Miller, et al. (2021) states that new research is identifying ADHD behaviours in children under two years of age. Intervention this early could yield major improvements in the management of ADHD patterns. Agreeing, Gleason. et al. (2016) encourages earliest possible intervention, stating that it is invaluable for the child, parents/carers and practitioners to work together and support each other from the start. Gleason. et al. (2016) advocates services such as the New Forest Parenting Programme, to inform and guide parents through the diagnosis and the challenges that children with ADHD face. (New Forest Parenting Programme, 2023). Undiagnosed, a child with ADHD that is not receiving intervention is at risk of a disruptive education with low attendance and poor recorded behaviour, leading to difficulties engaging socially and integrating themselves into the responsibilities of adulthood. Youssef, A. (2021)

ADHD

Identification, diagnosis and treatment

There are some specific groups considered to be higher-risk when identifying ADHD. Some of which are: children born prematurely who are vulnerable to developmental disorders, children who have a genetic family history, existing medical conditions or children who are in care, who may have been subjected to mistreatment. (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2019)

Parents/Carers and Early Years practitioners are among the first to witness behaviours linked to ADHD. (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2019) Each practitioner has a responsibility to act upon their observations and suspicions. (Macintyre, 2015)

Once identified, the SENCO/ALNCO or General Practitioner will observe, assess, and gather information to support a referral onto a specialist qualified to diagnose. (Wales Ambulance Service NHS Trust, 2023)

One diagnostic tool used in the UK is the ICD-11 form (International Classification of Diseases 11th Revision), (WHO, 2018) which along with evidence, recorded observation in two or more critical areas within the child's daily life, and at least a six-month history of flagged episodes of hyperactivity and impulsiveness will contribute towards the final diagnosis.

Poznanski. Hart. & Cramer, (2018) describe the negative attitude that children with ADHD can sometimes face due to difficulties focussing, engaging in learning, and establishing relationships. To combat the stigma that goes hand in hand with ADHD in education, practitioners must have access to consistent training regularly building on their knowledge. (Mohr-Jensen, 2019).

Controversially, medication is often given in severe cases of ADHD to calm the mind and help children who are struggling with hyperactivity. (Ouvry, and Furtado, 2019) There are however concerns that this medication is provoking low energy and masking outbursts of impulsive hyperactivity. One strategy that has been considered in many settings to reduce symptoms of ADHD is intermittent exercise, taking a child or group of children away from the classroom and using up energy resources at pivotal points during the day. (Jacobson, 2023) Although there is limited accredited research regarding brief bursts of exercise throughout the day, Pathway2Success, (2019) describe it doing more good than harm? However, there are barriers. Lack of staff, time, inclusivity challenges, insufficient training, children not wishing to partake due to low motivation, children not wanting to return to learning. Even so, a child's right to play is one of the rights that underpins the foundations of the early years, and exercise, especially outdoors is beneficial to both the child and practitioner. (Silva, et al. 2015). (Vysniauske, et al. 2020). (Lazarides, Watt, and Richardson, 2020)

What does ADHD look like in the Early Years

According to Leo, and Timimi, (2017). Very few ADHD cases present in the exact same way. For practitioners, behaviours can be closely monitored due to the working relationships and time spent with the children. Additionally, if parents have concerns, they can attempt to validate them through the practitioner. (ADHD Foundation, 2022) Some behaviours that could potentially be indicative of ADHD within a setting could be Hyperactivity – seen as constant movement and fidgeting, talking, and thinking. The inability to sit still and engage. Disturbed sleep. Impulsive behaviour with little awareness of danger. Struggling to conform to routine, and difficulty following instructions. (ADHD Foundation, 2022)

The challenges –Identifying criteria for referral can be difficult. (Page. 2021) Many children starting Nursery/ Early years settings will be facing transitional complications that could result in reactional behaviour similar to the behaviour traits of ADHD. This establishes the need for ongoing observation and assessment, to build a clear picture following the 'settling in period'. Furthermore, the internalised symptoms that girls mask are difficult to identify without sufficient training. (Skogli, E. et al. 2013).

To Conclude

ADHD is often faced with criticism and sceptics, professionals who do not believe ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder, critics who condemn medication and doubters who need biological markers. However, like it or not we live in neurodiverse times. Awareness of ADHD along with other neurodiverse disorders is essential to change negative attitudes and celebrate a different way of thinking. (ADHD Foundation Neurodiversity Charity 2023)

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