

My sibling has ADHD

*For older children*

**A D H D**

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Maybe you already have a bit of an idea of what ADHD is, or maybe not. As someone who has a sibling with ADHD, you will be the expert in what ADHD looks like in your sibling, and it might not look exactly the same as someone else with ADHD. Here we’ll try and make it a bit clearer about what ADHD is and how it can affect a person.

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition, which just means it is about how the brain grows over time. No two brains are the same, and we all have different strengths and weaknesses. However, we say that someone has ADHD when they have a specific set of difficulties. Although ADHD will look different in everyone, there are **3 things** that are common for people with ADHD to struggle with. These are:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Attention and Concentration | 2. Impulse Control | 3. Hyperactivity |
| This affects how well we are able to focus on any task and complete it without being distracted. | This is about how able we are to think things through before we do them. Low impulse control means to act without thinking first. | Hyperactivity Stock Illustrations – 1,375 Hyperactivity Stock ...This is about our ability to sit still and be able to comfortably remain still/seated in situations that we’re expected to do so. |

How this might look in your sibling depends on how much they struggle with each of these things. Maybe some of those things are ***really hard*** for them, even when they are trying really hard*.* Maybe your sibling is active all the time, can’t sit still and is always fiddling with something. Or maybe they don’t move around lots but are always getting distracted and leaving things half finished. The main thing is, ADHD will look different in every person, and that’s why you’re such a key piece of the puzzle – you know your sibling the best, and can see what they’re great at, and what they struggle with.

**Why don’t myself or my parents have it?**

ADHD is a condition that’s partly passed on in the genes of your family, so if someone in your family has ADHD, it can make it more likely that someone else will have it too. It’s not all genetic though, so just because your sibling or parent has it doesn’t mean that you will too. Anyone can have ADHD, and it’s not because anyone did anything different or ‘wrong’, it’s just a different kind of brain, like different colour hair.

**Can anything be done to cure it?**

As we’ve mentioned, ADHD is a condition that is to do with how peoples’ brains are different. So in this way, there isn’t a ‘cure’ for ADHD because it’s just something different about how that person’s brain is built and how it works. We’ll see later that there are things about ADHD that can be really positive for that person and the people around them. However, there are some things that having ADHD can make more difficult, and this is where your parent or caregiver might look at treatments to help.

When people talk about treatments for ADHD, they are looking at ways of helping that person manage the things they find more difficult than other people. If we look back at the things ADHD can affect, we can guess what might be more difficult for them. See below –

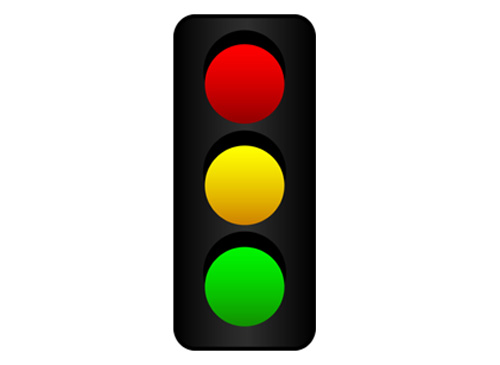
|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Area affected by ADHD | When do we use this? |
| Attention and Concentration | * Doing schoolwork or homework * Listening to other people   Can you think of any times when you have needed to pay attention and concentrate? |
| Impulse control | * Thinking about the consequences of our actions * Making good decisions   Can you think of any times where it was important you thought about something before you did it? |
| Sitting still | * In the classroom * In a restaurant   Can you think of any other situations where you might need to sit still? |

There are areas that will obviously have a big impact in school, particularly things like paying attention. But things outside of school are affected too – making sensible decisions and listening are used all the time – most of us do this without having to think too much about it.

It’s important to understand that everyone has different abilities, whether they have ADHD or not – some people are great at Maths but find writing stories difficult or boring. Some people have to work really hard at maths, but they can draw like an artist. That’s normal, and we all have things we’re great at, and things we have to work a bit harder at. The difference in ADHD though, is that the 3 areas we looked at can be so hard that it’s often impossible for them to do something like sit still, no matter how hard they try. Or maybe sitting still takes **so much** **effort** that they can only do it for a short time, and even that is exhausting!

**A note about impulse control:**

Impulse control is really important in our decision-making. When we want to do something, our brains go through something a bit like this:



Stop, I’ve got an idea! (The **impulse**)

Let me think about it… (The **control**)

Decision – YES or NO (The **outcome**)

This all happens **very fast**, so we usually don’t notice it.

When someone has **ADHD**, they don’t always go through the **YELLOW** light. Sometimes you’ll see them jump straight from **RED** to **GREEN**. This can sometimes mean they’ve done something that makes other people think “Shouldn’t you know better?”. But often with ADHD, it isn’t a case of not knowing or not understanding, but a case of no **YELLOW** light to help them stop and think before acting. You can imagine how this might affect the outcome of a lot of different situations:

*Imagine you are having a conversation with your sibling who has ADHD. You are telling a funny story about a time you fell off your bike. What you are saying is making your sibling laugh and makes them think of a story they want to tell. Instead of waiting for you to finish, they interrupt you and start talking over you so you have to stop. You are now feeling a bit annoyed and fed up, when you were having fun.*

What is the **RED** (impulse) in this situation? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What is the **YELLOW** (control)? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What is the **GREEN** (outcome)? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**What kind of treatments are there?**

**Behavioural Support -** this just means the way we respond to someone and really, it’s what parents and teachers do all the time, almost without thinking! Behavioural strategies are things like:

* The way we talk to someone
* How we teach someone
* How their day is set up

Your parents might go on a course to learn some techniques that are helpful with children with ADHD. An example of a behavioural strategy might go like this:

**Problem**: This child finds it really hard to sit still in class, and it stops them from concentrating on their work. How can we help them to concentrate?

Let’s make it so that their harder work is after breaktime, when they’ve had a good run around.

out of class to break up the difficulty of sitting still.

Let’s give them breaks to move around so they don’t have to sit still for a long time.

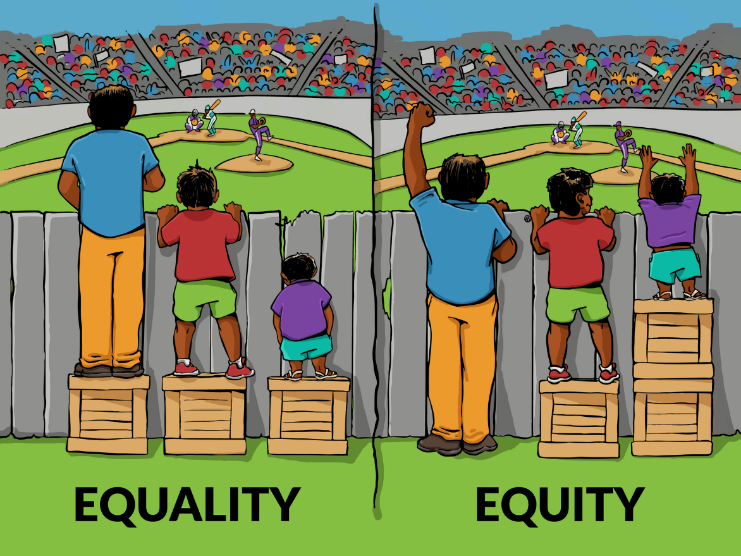
Let’s give them something to fiddle with to help them listen in class.

out of class to break up the difficulty of sitting still.

**Medication** – Your sibling might take a medication to help control their ADHD. They’ll have regular appointments with the doctor or nurse to check on how this is working. Some medications might need adjusting every so often so they’re working at their best. It can be a bit tricky finding a medication that works best for a person, and so it’s helpful to be patient while trying to work this out. It’s important that the person with ADHD is honest about how the medication is affecting them so they can be on the one right for them.

Your parents might think about what kind of medication is best, and when it should be taken – some people take medication just for school hours, for example. Some people take medication that works for the full day. It depends on your situation, and the doctor or nurse should be able to answer any questions you have.

It can be strange to think about your sibling being on medication to be ‘normal’. It can be explained like this: a medication for ADHD doesn’t create a new ‘normal’ person. It just allows a person to show their true selves, without being held back by some of their ADHD symptoms. Treatments for ADHD don’t want to do any more than help that person express who they really are.



Treatments for ADHD aren’t a magic solution that make everything easy. Instead, what they try to do is see where someone is really struggling and help them reach a similar level to other people. In other words, they try and level the playing field. If you look at this picture, we can think of the boxes as treatments – some people get on fine without any, some people need a little bit, some people need more, but the end result is the same – everyone getting the same opportunity.

**What might it be like having a sibling with ADHD?**

You will know this better than anyone – have a read through and see if any seem familiar to you, and add some of your own.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Face with Steam from Nose Emoji, Google style**What might be difficult having a sibling with ADHD?** | Grinning Face with Smiling Eyes Emoji, Google style**What are some of the benefits of having a sibling with ADHD?** |
| * They can be loud * They can interrupt what you’re doing or saying (or both!) * They can barge in without asking * They can lose their temper quickly * They can find it hard to focus on a game * They can do things without thinking first * They can lose or forget things easily * They can take over conversations * They can find it hard to behave themselves when needed * They can forget things that they’ve done before   What else? | * They can be really funny * They can be really creative and have a great imagination * They can show you a different way of doing things * They can be great at solving problems * They can notice things that others don’t * They can have seemingly endless energy * They can be helpful and kind * They can be courageous * They can think of things in the spur of the moment * They can be really motivated when something takes their interest * They can be great at sports * They can be lovely with children and animals   What else? |

**What can I do to help?**

Having a sibling with ADHD can sometimes feel like a bit of a rollercoaster, so it’s good to know how to handle it, and who to go to if it feels like it’s too much. Here are some things that are important for you to remember:

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| --- | --- |
| Powerpoint Check Mark Symbol | **Be honest** – Your sibling might need attention from your parents sometimes, but you do too! It’s important to share if you’re feeling sad, left out, angry or hurt – your parents will want to know and try to help. Sometimes ADHD can make life feel very busy so it might help to make time to chat to your parents about anything you’re feeling. It’s better to share than to bottle up your feelings. |
| Powerpoint Check Mark Symbol | **Take time for yourself** – Everyone needs chill out time. Sometimes this can be difficult if your sibling wants to spend a lot of time with you. This shows that they really feel good around you which is great! But if you’re finding that you aren’t getting time to yourself then ask your parents for help is keeping some of your time private. |
| Powerpoint Check Mark Symbol | **Be patient** – Some of the more difficult aspects of ADHD can be frustrating for the person with ADHD and those around them, including you and your parents. Try and see things from other peoples’ point of view, and if you feel yourself getting too frustrated by a situation, try and go somewhere else to cool off, rather than saying or doing something you might regret (practice that impulse control and be a good role model!). |
| Powerpoint Check Mark Symbol | **Work together** – As difficulties arise, it can be easy to get frustrated and feel like everyone wants different things. When a new problem comes up, try and think about it together, it’s almost certain that you won’t be the only one finding it frustrating! It can make everyone feel a bit more relaxed when you’re working towards the same goal. |
| Powerpoint Check Mark Symbol | **Enjoy your time together** – It’s hard to do this all the time, we know! But enjoy the unique perspective having someone with ADHD can bring to your family. Some things will be difficult, but notice the fun and funny aspects of family life, it’ll help you feel more balanced when things are harder. |

**Resources**

Websites

* Resources for looking after yourself - <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/looking-after-yourself/>
* Resources for looking after yourself - <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/for-children-and-young-people/>
* If you're under 19 you can confidentially call, email or chat online about any problem, big or small - [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)
  + Freephone 24h helpline: 0800 1111
* More information about ADHD - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/>

Apps

* **Headspace** – Great for some relaxation techniques for everyone
* **Daylio** – A diary for your mood. It can help you see what you found the most stressful and might be good to share with your parents to show how you’re feeling.
* **Catch It** – Another diary but with prompts to help you see situations differently

Books

* *The ADHD Sibling Challenge: How to Thrive When Your Brother or Sister Has ADHD. An Interactive Family Guide* - Barton S Herskovitz, 2020.
* *Can I tell you about ADHD?: A guide for friends, family and professionals* – Susan Yarney, 2013.