

A glowing human brain is the central focus, rendered in a golden-yellow hue with intricate details of its gyri and sulci. It is surrounded by a network of thin, glowing lines representing neural connections, with several bright yellow nodes at the junctions. The background is a vibrant blue with flowing, wavy patterns and light trails that create a sense of movement and energy. The overall aesthetic is futuristic and scientific.

***Supporting Students with ADHD and  
Attention Regulation Differences:***

***Practical Tools to Empower Staff***

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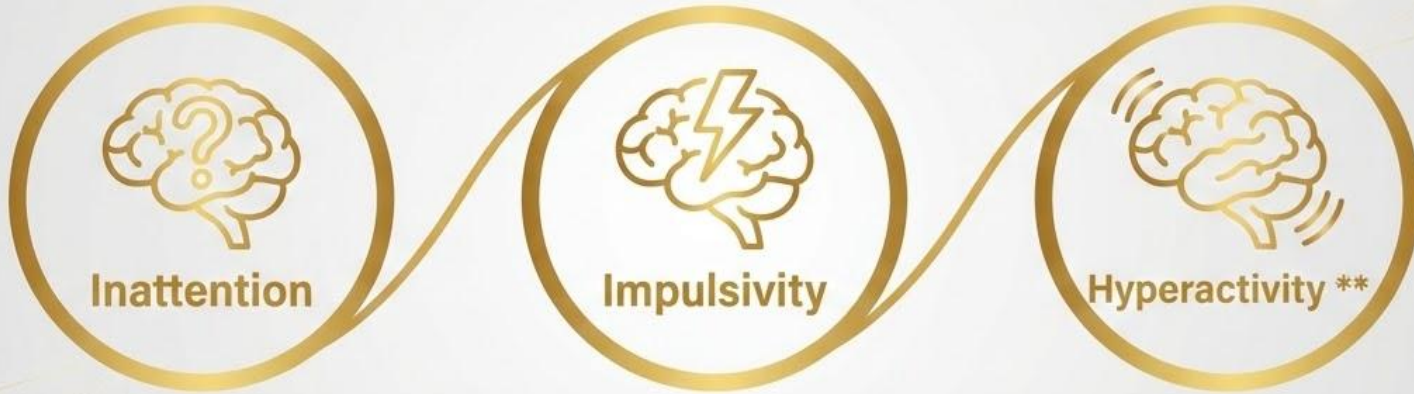
**COMPASSION**

**UNDERSTANDING**

**CONTEXT**

# What is ADHD?

It is a complex neurodevelopmental condition affecting both children and adults.



- **Plus co-morbidities** e.g. social communication, sensory integration, Autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette's
- **Also impact on emotional** regulation & rejection sensitivity but not yet in the diagnostic criteria

\*\* Not all ADHD young people are hyperactive; inattentive type can be harder to detect

# ATTENTION REGULATION: SPOTLIGHT vs. FLOODLIGHT MINDS

## SPOTLIGHT FOCUS



## FLOODLIGHT MIND



# ADHD PRESENTATIONS

There are three presentations of ADHD:



**Inattentive**



**Hyperactive-impulsive**



**Combined type**  
(inattentive &  
hyperactive-impulsive)

# What do we mean by Inattention?

- May have difficulty sustaining attention
- Can find it difficult to give close attention to detail or makes careless mistakes
- May not appear to listen
- May lose or misplace belongings
- Can be forgetful in daily activities
- Mundane tasks may be more difficult to focus on.
- Tasks that are more enjoyable will help aid concentration.
- Attention is more likely to be directed towards things that provide stimulation or instant feedback.
- ADHD relates to differences with attention rather than attention deficit.



# Hyperfocus and Monotropism

**“I know that my attention span is interest based, and that’s why the quality of my work used to vary based on my interest in the topic – something that baffled the teachers in my primary school who I think were convinced I was being inconsistent to spite them”.**

**“I struggled to work to others’ agendas, but I could harness my 2am hyperfocus. In my zone of genius, I managed to write my final dissertation in a 48 hour period with no sleep”.**



# What do we mean by Impulsivity?



May talk excessively.



May 'blurt' out answers before questions have been completed or rush tasks.



Differences with waiting or taking turns.



May interrupt others.

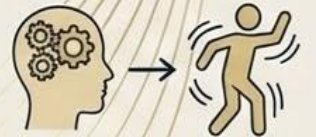


May have differences in relation to danger awareness.

# What do we mean by Hyperactivity?



- May appear restless, i.e. fidgeting or moving whilst seated.
- Children may run around or climb lots.
- Difficulty engaging in activities quietly.
- Always 'on the go'.
- Hyperactivity can be internal or external.



# Other features of ADHD



Emotional reactivity



Poor sleep

Rejection sensitivity



Time blindness



Over thinking

Others?



# How common is ADHD?



ADHD is the most common neurodevelopmental condition of childhood.



Around **5%** of children & young people in the UK.



Found in all ethnic groups.



Male to Female ratio in children is approximately **4:1**



Girls more commonly have inattentive symptoms.



**60-70%** of children with ADHD have one or more other conditions

# Boys vs Girls

## BOYS

ADHD often identified at younger age

Can present as more hyperactive >>


Behaviours can be more externalised

Behaviours can be more accepted by peers >>>



## GIRLS

ADHD Often identified at older age 

Can present as more inattentive. 

Behaviours can be more internalised

Can have more difficulties with friendships



# THE ADHD STRENGTHS ICEBERG

WHAT PEOPLE  
THINK ADHDERS  
ARE GOOD AT:

talking  
fast

creativity

WHAT ADHDERS  
ARE ACTUALLY  
GOOD AT:

literally anything  
they find  
interesting

problem  
solving

working  
under  
pressure

learning

empathy

brainstorming

getting a lot  
done in a short  
amount of time

changing  
the world

crisis  
situations

risk-taking

forgiveness

unique  
intuition

entrepreneurship

competitive  
challenges

optimism

tackling new  
challenges

sense of  
humor

creating  
something  
beautiful

imagination

hyperfocus

mastering  
new hobbies

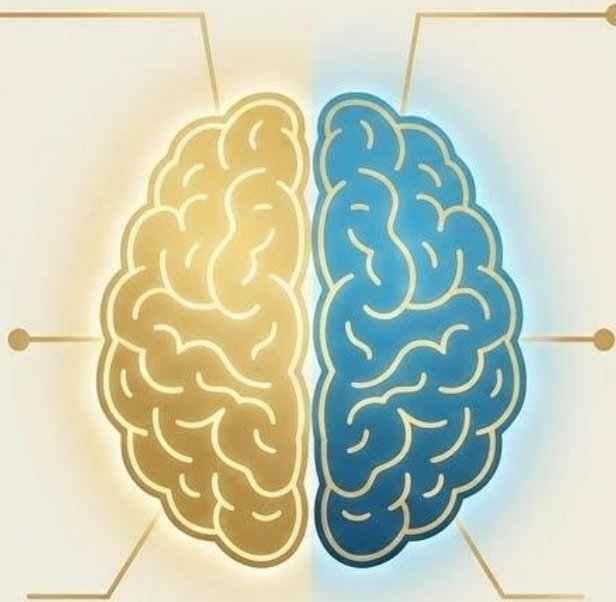
authenticity

# ADHD – how do you see it?



## STRENGTHS & POSITIVES

- Energetic
- Enthusiastic
- Sees linkages
- Perseveres
- Works under Pressure
- Creative
- On the Go
- Hyperfocus
- Hypersensitive
- Compassionate
- Interested in the novel
- Hardworking
- Project Orientated



## CHALLENGES & DIFFICULTIES

- Impulsive
- Lack Focus
- Hyperactive
- Busy Brain
- Answer out of turn
- Disorganised
- Disinterested in the tedious
- Overwork
- Fatigues
- Fidgety

# Why is it important to recognise and support ADHD?

Young people with unrecognised ADHD are:



More likely to have their behaviours interpreted as 'naughty'



More likely to underachieve



More likely to have poor self-esteem as a learner



8 times more likely to be excluded from school

# Impact of ADHD at school



Negative overall experience



Very different approach to learning and problem solving



Forgetfulness means many discredits, detentions, being told off for forgetting ruler, PE kit etc



Inattention means difficulty to start a task, a lot of unfinished work, missing out on spoken instructions



Poor organisation skills leads to work not being handed in, messy exercise books, lost worksheets (affecting revision)



Poor social skills leads to friendship issues and communication issues with teachers

# Impact of ADHD: Emotional & Behavioral Responses



## Externalised Emotions



“stupid test/teacher”

- Anger and frustration
- Behavioural problems



This can lead to:  
School exclusions, violence, crime



## Internalised Emotions



“stupid me”

- Shame, self-loathing, low self-confidence
- Stress and exhaustion



This can lead to:  
Anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-harm, OCD



# How can we help?

## Learning



- Develop structure
- Increase active teaching so pupils can move, explore and interact
- Game-based learning
- Choice over how they work and learn
- Flexible seating
- Pair them with less distractible students
- Reinforce instructions
- Use visuals
- Give them opportunity for regular breaks

## Behaviour



- Punitive responses do not work long-term
- Keep all instructions short and simple and positively framed
- Support calm transitions and reduce where possible
- Tell them when they are good
- Consider a reward scheme (dopamine)
- Time out or take a break

## Socialisation



- Building trust with the child
- Pairing up with a buddy
- Teaching social skills awareness and self-advocacy skills
- Option of a range of activities/clubs at lunch time
- Encouraging participation in extra-curricular activities with a social element

**Provide a structured environment but offer flexibility**

# Tools by developmental age

## Early Years & Preschool (Ages 2–4)

At this stage, the focus is on **sensory regulation** and **predictability** to help a child navigate a high-stimulus environment.



### Visual Timetables

Using "Now/Next" boards with pictures to reduce anxiety during transitions.



### Movement Anchors

Providing defined spaces for high-energy play and "heavy work" (e.g., carrying a basket of blocks) to provide calming proprioceptive input.



### Structured Choice

Offering two clear options rather than an open-ended "What do you want to do?" to prevent overwhelm.



### Environmental Cues

Using physical markers like carpet spots for sitting to provide a clear boundary of where their body should be.

# Tool by developmental age

## Primary School (Ages 4–11)

The focus shifts to task initiation and social integration as academic demands increase.



### Task Chunking

Breaking a 20-minute worksheet into four 5-minute segments, often rewarded with a “brain break” or a quick movement activity between each.



### Strategic Seating

Positioning the student away from high-traffic areas (doors/windows) but close to the teacher for “low-key” redirection (e.g., a gentle tap on the desk).



### Fidget Tools & Sloping Boards

Allowing discreet sensory tools or wobble cushions that satisfy the need for movement without disrupting the class.



### Scaffolded Instructions

Giving one-step-at-a-time verbal instructions and reinforcing them with a written list on a mini-whiteboard at their desk.

# Tools by developmental age

## Secondary School (Ages 11–18)

As students move between classrooms and teachers, the priority is executive function support and exam access.



### Classroom and Exam Access Arrangements

For some students, having extra time to process and execute task demands/applying for extra time in exams can be supportive, access to a separate quiet room when needed, or having an adult to prompt them when needed (an adult who uses an agreed cue if the student loses focus).



### The 'Exit Card'

A pre-agreed pass that allows the student to leave the room for a period of time for a sensory movement break, without having to explain themselves to a teacher.



### Assistive Technology

Using laptops for longer writing tasks or reading pens to help process complex text more quickly.



### Pastoral Mentoring

Weekly check-ins with a SENCO or mentor to help organise their planner, break down long-term projects (like coursework), and manage the social complexities of teenage life.

# COMPASSION



By age 10, estimates suggest children with ADHD receive 20,000 more negative messages than neurotypical peers.



Individuals with ADHD desire less character judgment and more neurological understanding.



When a student can't 'just do it', it's often a neurological barrier, not a character flaw.



Compassion shifts focus from willpower to finding creative ways to spark interest.



Stress and shame shut down the prefrontal cortex (focus, organization, emotional control); compassion lowers nervous system threat.



Compassion creates psychological safety for the brain to function at its best.

# Compassion principles



## Effort does not equal output

Children with ADHD and attention regulation differences are often working twice as hard as their peers just to stay in their seats, leaving very little energy left for the actual work.



## Consistency is a neurological luxury

Just because they could do a task on Tuesday doesn't mean their brain could do the same on Wednesday. This is known as fluctuating capacity.



## The shame spiral is real

Correction without compassion can feel like a personal rejection, leading many young people to 'check out' or become the 'class clown' as a defence mechanism against constant failure.



## Validation over correction

Instead of "Why haven't you started?", try saying, "I can see you're stuck, let's find the first step together."



## Permission to stimulate

Doodling or fidgeting can be useful tools to help ADHD children listen. Allow these tools where they support positive change.



## Privacy in redirection

Being singled out in front of the class for losing focus or forgetting a kit is a core traumatic memory for many. Try using low-key cues e.g. a hand on the desk or a private post-it note—instead of public reprimands.



## Flexibility in 'the process'

Many ADHD minds find shortcuts or unconventional ways to solve problems which are often marked down for not 'following the steps'. Consider how important this really is to the task.

# Tools for a compassionate and effective response



What you see: Blurring out an answer or interrupting others

## Frustrated Interpretation



Disrespectful or impulsive

## Compassionate Reframe



**High Engagement + Low Inhibition:** Their brain is so excited by the idea that it can't quite hold it until the appropriate time.



## Compassionate Response

"I love that enthusiasm! Hold that thought on your internal 'scrap paper' so you don't lose it, and I'll call on you in a moment."



What you see: Staring out the window or doodling during a lesson

## Frustrated Interpretation



Daydreaming or Checking out

## Compassionate Reframe



**Under-Stimulated:** Their brain is seeking a secondary background task to keep their brain awake and listening.



## Compassionate Response

"I see your hands are busy; does that help you listen better? Just check back in with me if I ask for an 'eyes on me' moment."



What you see: Meltdown over a small change in the schedule.

## Frustrated Interpretation



Dramatic or Attention-seeking

## Compassionate Reframe



**Executive function difficulties (Inertia):** They can't see the 'first step.' The task looks like a giant, unscalable mountain.



## Compassionate Response

"Beginning is the hardest part. Let's do the first sentence together, then I'll check back in in five minutes."



What you see: Losing focus/fidgeting after 10 minutes of work.

## Frustrated Interpretation



Off-task or Disturbing others

## Compassionate Reframe



**Cognitive Fatigue:** Their attention battery drains faster because they have to work twice as hard to filter out noise and distractions.



## Compassionate Response

"Your brain looks like it needs a reset. Go do a heavy work errand for me (like taking these books to the shelf) then come back."



# Questions and Reflections

