

Managing ADHD in children: 5-11 years

Worried your child has ADHD: first steps

If you think your child might have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), the first step is to visit your child's GP or paediatrician for further assessment and diagnosis.

If your child is diagnosed with ADHD, you and your health professional can work together to develop a behaviour management plan.

Behaviour management plans for children with ADHD

Managing attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children is about first accepting that your child will behave in challenging ways. But a **behaviour management plan** can make the behaviour easier to handle.

A behaviour management plan **guides your child towards appropriate behaviour** with:

1. **strategies to encourage good behaviour**
2. **social skills to help your child get along with others**
3. **strategies to manage your child's energy levels and tiredness**
4. **strategies to support your child in the classroom**
5. **medication, if your child needs it.**

The best plans are usually **based on sound professional advice that takes into account what suits your child and family**. Plans should consider all aspects of your child's life, including your child's needs and responsibilities at home, at school and in other social settings.

Children with ADHD often experience other difficulties like **oppositional defiant disorder or anxiety**. You can incorporate strategies to help with these in the management plan.

It's a good idea to discuss your plan with your child's family, carers, therapists and teachers. This helps people have realistic expectations of your child's behaviour. It can also help them understand how best to handle your child's behaviour. And if they have to give your child medication, they'll know how much to give and when.

When you work with health professionals, school teachers, other adults in your child's life, and your family and friends, it can be easier for you and your child to keep to the plan.

AD 1 Behaviour strategies to help children with ADHD

Your child's behaviour management plan will probably include strategies that help your child learn the **skills she needs to increase cooperative behaviour** and reduce challenging behaviour.

Some simple but effective behaviour strategies might include:

- **changes to the environment** to make it easier for your child to behave well
- **clear verbal instructions** to help your child understand what you want him to do
- **praise for positive behaviour** to encourage your child to keep behaving well
- **predictable daily routines** to help your child at demanding times of the day, like when you're getting ready for school and work in the morning.

AD 2 Social skills to help children with ADHD

Children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) might need support to get along with other children. So your child's behaviour management plan could include some ideas to help your child develop social skills.

These ideas might include:

- rewarding your child for helpful behaviour like sharing and being gentle with others
- teaching your child what to do if there's a problem with another child – for example, walking away or talking to a teacher
- teaching your child how to regulate her own behaviour – for example, by using a short prompt like 'Stop, think, do'
- giving your child the chance to practise social skills – for example, by arranging supervised playdates.

AD 3 Strategies to manage energy and tiredness in children with ADHD

All children find it easier to behave well if they can manage their energy levels and aren't tired, so behaviour management plans for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) often cover this.

You can **help your child manage energy levels** and maintain focus by:

- building rest breaks into activities
- allowing some time for physical exercise breaks while your child is doing learning tasks like reading or homework
- being ready with a few fun but low-key activities like Lego or a puzzle, which your child can do if he starts to get overexcited.

And you can **stop your child from getting too tired** by:

- getting your child into **good sleep habits**, like getting to sleep and waking up at about the same time each day
- providing **healthy food options** for longer-lasting energy and concentration
- making sure your child's **screen time** is balanced with other activities during the day
- making sure all electronic devices are switched off at least an hour before bed.

AD 4 Classroom strategies to help children with ADHD

Children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can have problems at school. So behaviour management plans should include classroom strategies to support your child's learning.

You could talk with your child's teacher about strategies like:

- dividing tasks into smaller chunks
- offering one-on-one help when possible
- giving your child a 'buddy' who can help her understand what to do
- planning the classroom so your child is seated near the front of the room and away from distractions
- making a visual checklist of tasks that need to be finished or keeping a copy of the school schedule where your child can see it
- doing more difficult learning tasks in the mornings or after breaks
- allowing some extra time to finish tasks.

To get the support your child needs for learning, language and physical problems at school, you might need to **advocate for your child**. This could involve talking to your child's classroom teacher, the principal or the additional needs support officer about special programs, funding and other help for your child.

Schools can help by setting out support plans in an [individual learning plan](#) for your child. The school should also work with you to set and review your child's learning goals regularly.

AD 5 ADHD medications

If your child needs medication to help him manage his attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), this will be included in his behaviour management plan.

Stimulant medications

These medications improve the way the parts of the brain 'talk' to each other. This can help children with attention and self-regulation.

Your child's paediatrician or psychiatrist will be able to work out which drug and dose will be best for your child.

Here are a few questions you might want to ask your doctor:

- How long will each dose last?
- What are the side effects of the medication?
- How will the medication be monitored?
- How long will my child stay on medication?

Non-stimulant medication

These medications can help to reduce anxiety too.

Side effects of ADHD medications

These medications can cause some side effects – for example, loss of appetite, which can affect your child’s weight gain or growth. Other side effects might include difficulty getting to sleep, tummy upsets or headaches.

Because of these possible side effects, a child who has been prescribed medication should always be closely monitored by a health professional.

Most side effects are mild and don’t last long. If there are side effects that don’t go away, your health professional might change the dose or timing of medication, or suggest trying a different medication.

When your child has ADHD: looking after yourself

Looking after yourself by asking for help and support is a big part of managing your child’s attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Here are some options for you to think about:

- Ask for help from family members and friends. If your child relates well to a particular family member, like an aunt or grandparent, that person might be able to help in difficult situations like shopping, or spend some time with your child while you get some chores done.
- Speak to your child’s teacher about classroom behaviour strategies that you can try out at home.
- Go to a support group for parents of children with ADHD.
- Talk to your child’s health professional about any difficulties you’re having.
- Learn about stress and how you can handle it.