

Attention Difficulties: Information for parents

Are you concerned your child has difficulties with their attention?

Attention difficulties can present themselves in a number of ways. Some children start to show problems with attention and concentration from a very young age, whilst with others it only becomes noticeable once they are in and having to concentrate in a formal classroom situation. You may have noticed, or had feedback from teachers about your child daydreaming, being distracted, or distracting others. Difficulty concentrating does not necessarily mean your child has an “attention disorder” like Attention Deficient Hyperactivity Disorder. There is a misconception that a child can be either ‘normal’ or ‘disordered’, but in reality most children fall in between and can benefit from some brief therapy to strengthen their attention skills.



Key signs & behaviours to look for

- A short attention span and often unable to remain on tasks that are tedious or time consuming
- Being easily distracted and frequently daydreaming
- Frequently has problems organizing tasks or activities
- Frequently forgetful and loses needed items, such as books, or pencils
- Frequently fails to finish schoolwork, chores or other tasks
- Often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat
- Has poor attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, or other activities



It is important to remember that not every child shows every behaviour listed above but it is still important to consider assessment if functional impacts are noted in your child. Early identification of issues and treatment can avoid longer term delays in learning and minimise impact in social functioning. Also, behaviours differ in boys and girls: boys may be more disruptive in class and girls may tend to be quietly inattentive. Talking to teachers or school counsellors is a good way of getting a better picture of how your child is doing.

What can I do to help?

The good news is there are many effective ways of helping children who show signs of attention difficulties, whether or not they are at the level of a disorder. Correct diagnosis of any attention issues and any co-occurring problems is one of the most critical stages in helping your child's skills. It may be beneficial to have your child undergo cognitive, and specifically attention testing to determine why they are struggling to focus. Sometimes other processing or even potentially emotional issues may be creating problems with focus. Thus, assessment needs to consider your child holistically in order to formulate the correct diagnosis and guide treatment plans. Whilst medication may be a possibility for severe attention disorders, in the long term cognitive training to build core attention skills can be a highly effective solution, particularly for children that don't fall in the category of a disorder.