

Factsheet

Attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a neurological condition – one of several “hidden disabilities”, which may not be immediately obvious to someone in contact with the child or young person. Children with ADHD are characteristically overactive, impulsive and have difficulty paying attention. Although most children demonstrate some of these behaviours some of the time, those with ADHD will display them consistently across all situations and will continue to display them to some extent into adulthood. Children of all levels of ability can have ADHD, and it is diagnosed far more often in boys.

Although you can use the same techniques to deal with hyperactivity in the majority of children, it is important to avoid assuming that every hyperactive, inattentive child has ADHD. Some children with ADHD regularly take medication to help them control their impulsive behaviours. The most common of these are Ritalin and Concerta.

ADHD manifests itself in many ways and varies from child to child. Common symptoms may include, but are not limited to:

- difficulty following instructions and completing tasks
- difficulty “sticking to” an activity
- easily distracted and forgetful
- often doesn’t listen when spoken to
- restless, fidgety, can’t sit still
- interferes with other children’s activities
- can’t stop talking, interrupts others
- runs about when inappropriate
- difficulty waiting or taking turns
- acting impulsively without thinking of the consequences
- daydreams
- easily frustrated
- mood swings
- sleep problems
- low self-esteem
- defensive/blames others.



Some coaching tips

- At the outset, talk to the child, their parents/ carers and perhaps (with permission) another significant adult, such as a teacher with experience in communicating with and managing the child.
- Identify the most appropriate and effective ways to engage with the child, issues likely to arise in the sports setting, and ways to respond to and manage any challenging behaviour.
- Ensure there are sufficient supervising adults to respond to situations that may arise.
- Children with ADHD may perform better in smaller groups if assistant instructors are available.
- Make eye contact when speaking to the child. Use the child’s name when giving instructions.
- Keep instructions simple and consistent – use as few sentences as possible.

- Respond to the child's good behaviour and contributions as often as possible; give very specific praise such as "good stance, your knees are bent perfectly" rather than "good work".
- Keep calm – if you get angry, the child will mirror this emotion and this may lead to a temper tantrum or more dangerous behaviours.
- Ensure the child understands the club rules – keep them clear and simple, and rehearse them regularly.
- Use the same methods of discipline used with the other children, although methods such as a "time out" may be necessary if behaviour becomes dangerous or the child has a temper tantrum.
- Give the child some special responsibilities, such as using them for demonstrations, so that others see them in a positive light and the child develops a positive self-image.
- Use a variety of activities in every session and change activities regularly. The use of physically draining activities such as a thorough warm-up can take the edge off the child's hyperactive behaviours.
- Remain vigilant as children with ADHD can display unpredictable behaviour, eg running off.

Children with ADHD can be some of the most challenging students and because of this they are also some of the most rewarding. Sport can provide a structured activity through which a child with ADHD can release their energy and frustration in a safe environment, allow them to experience success and improve their self-esteem.

Acknowledgements

Taekwondo Association of Northern Ireland (TANI)

Additional resources

NHS ADHD information and advice
www.nhs.uk

Mental Health Foundation
www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Attention Deficit Disorder Information and Support Service
www.addiss.co.uk