

Returning to school: Children with ADHD

Advice for teachers and teaching staff



Many children are looking forward to returning to school however, for some children who may have settled into being at home and home schooling or perhaps are going to a new school, it may feel overwhelming and they may be reluctant to attend. Children with ADHD can find change and dealing with the unknown especially challenging. To support these children getting back to school successfully we have put together some ideas to help teachers support them.

For children with ADHD (or others that are neurodiverse) issues may be:

- Concerns or anxiety around being back in the school environment
- Not knowing what to expect or being able to visualise the day ahead
- Not understanding how they are meant to carry out social distancing
- Feeling they are academically behind their classmates after homeschooling
- Finding it challenging to focus or sit still for prolonged periods
- Adjusting to the new school routines and layouts
- A busier and louder environment than they are now used to resulting in sensory overload
- Not knowing how to start a task or work on their own

For children with ADHD, these anxieties may increase their ADHD behaviours of hyperactivity, impulsivity, and inattention. This may exhibit as:

- Being overly loud and very talkative
- Impulsive behaviour and possibly forgetting social distancing
- An increased need to move/fidget
- Inability to focus and concentrate
- Not knowing how to make a start and taking a long time on a piece of work
- Struggling with classmates and distractions and being overly interactive
- Being disorganised and distractible and forgetting things

We have also had feedback that an increasing number of young people suffered from mental health issues, sometimes severely, during the lockdown period.

Facilitating the transition back to school

Many schools have been proactive in connecting with their pupils by arranging zoom class meetups, having virtual tours of the school or issuing information packs. If your school has not had much engagement with pupils, providing information ahead of time about how the school day will be arranged and how social distancing will work will help to prepare children and calm nerves. We are encouraging the families we support to be proactive in helping prepare their children for the return to school. We are also encouraging them to work closely with schools.

For school here are some suggestions on ways teaching staff can help students with ADHD and related comorbidities settle back at school.

Ways to help:

- Ahead of the children returning to school reach out to parents and ask them to brief you on any emotional concerns their child is having about the return to school.
- On the first day back, spend enough time to clearly explain how the new school layouts work, what the routine will be and what they can expect to happen each day. This may need to be repeated in the first week or two as some pupils may not have absorbed all the information.
- Consider sensory exercise at the start of lessons to ensure all pupils are ready to learn. Build movement breaks / sensory exercise into the lesson for pupils with ADHD in particular.

- Quickly creating a daily routine giving very clear descriptions will help children to visualise their day and reduce the anxiety of the unknown or 'getting it wrong'.
- Help children to be organised by explaining exactly what they'll need for a task eg "you will need your pencil case, ruler and calculator ready on your desk"
- Reduce large tasks or a long set of instruction into one or two steps so it feels more achievable and can be attained.
- Encourage students to ask questions or let you know if they want to talk away from their peers.
- Seek opportunities to praise and give positive feedback.
- Provide feedback to parents on how the child is settling in or discuss any concerns to enable parents to engage and support their child with the school.
- Compassion, collaboration and consistency are the order of the day!

Other ways school can help pupils with SEN:

- Do they have access to a quiet place where they can calm down or work quietly if they are overwhelmed, a SEN support room or small classroom?
- Can they have something to hold and fiddle with in the classroom?
- Can they have a resistance band tied around their chair legs which they can push their legs against?
- Do they know who they can speak to if they are struggling? Will they take the steps to speak to someone if they need support or does someone need to check in with them?
- How can morning and lunch time breaks be structured to help children with ADHD, which is often when things can go wrong if they are left in an unstructured environment?
- How can they be supported if they are not following the social distancing rules of the school?
- What other reasonable adjustments can be made to further support the pupil with ADHD

Further resources for supporting children with ADHD in the classroom:

Weds 9th September 8.15pm webinar for teachers: '[Supporting neurodiverse learners returning to school](#)' with Colin Foley of the ADHD Foundation

Video: [‘Classroom support for secondary school young people with ADHD’](#) with Colin Foley of the ADHD Foundation. Slides from the talk can be found [here](#).

Slides: [Classroom support for primary school children with ADHD](#) by Soli Lazarus