



Neurodiversity

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Aims



- To increase understanding of neurodiversity and neurodiverse conditions (ADHD and autism)
- To look in more detail at ADHD and autism
- To consider what may be helpful to support those with ADHD and autism
- To answer your questions!



Neurodiversity



- Neurodiversity is a natural and valuable form of human diversity
- Neurodiversity should not be pathologized, 'cured,' or 'treated'
- Neurodiverse people are 'disabled' by their environments
- Neurodiversity should be accepted, celebrated, and supported

All behaviour communicates a message



Understanding the child



Behaviour

What we see

What they are 'telling' us

Cognitive Style
Learning, thinking, processing differences

Communication

Sensory Difficulties
Sensitivity to auditory, visual, taste, tactile, space

Executive Functioning Difficulties
Organisation planning, focus, inflexibility

Communication Differences
Non-verbal, social interpretations, recognising emotions

Social Relationship Difficulties
Impaired Theory of Mind

What is ADHD?



- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition which impacts a person's ability to focus their attention, regulate activity levels, and control their impulses
- Differences associated with ADHD tend to start before the age of 6 years but some might not be diagnosed until later in life
- Estimated to affect 3-5% of children
- Can run in families but the cause is mostly unknown
- A form of neurodiversity

Differences associated with ADHD



- **Hyperactivity:**
 - Restless, struggling to sit still, fidgety, fiddling with things
 - Running when not appropriate
 - Noisy, can't stop talking
- **Inattention:**
 - Short attention span, difficulty concentrating, easily distracted
 - Difficulty organising tasks
 - Difficulty listening and following instructions
 - Forgetful
 - Struggling to complete tasks
- **Impulsivity:**
 - Saying or doing things without thinking
 - Living "in the moment" without thinking about consequences
 - Talking a lot, interrupting others, 'blurting' out the answer
 - Difficulties waiting or taking turns

Executive functions



- Inhibit**
The ability to control impulses and appropriately stop a behaviour at the proper time
- Shift**
The ability to move freely from one situation, activity or aspect of a problem to another, to transition
- Initiate**
The ability to begin a task or activity and to independently generate ideas
- Plan/organise**
The ability to anticipate future events, set goals, develop appropriate steps ahead of time
- Control attention**
The ability to maintain, direct and shift attention
- Working memory**
The ability to hold information in mind for the purpose of completing a task and be able to stick with an activity
- Organisation of materials**
The ability to keep workspace and materials in an orderly manner
- Monitor**
The ability to check work and assess performance during or after finishing a task to ensure attainment of a goal, the ability to keep track of the effect of one's own behaviour on others
- Emotional control**
The ability to modulate emotional responses appropriately

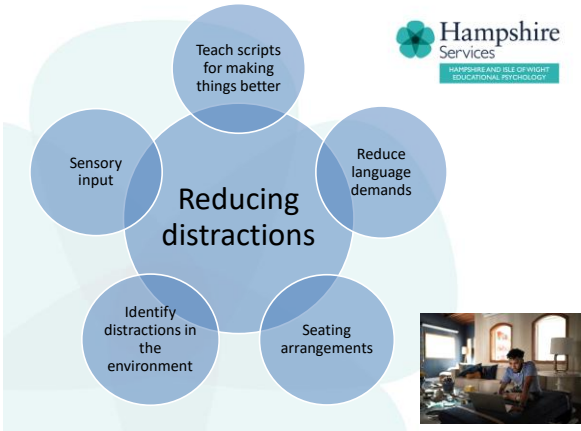
What ADHD might feel like

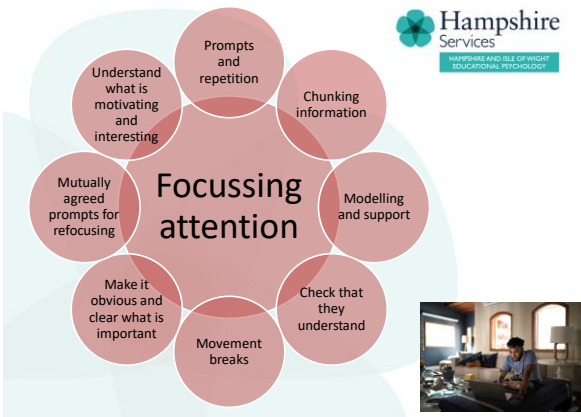


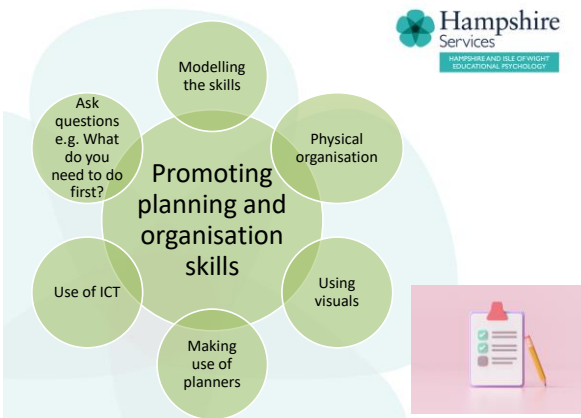
"ADHD is like a TV set that isn't receiving a perfect signal. For the student, it's as if the channel keeps changing. Imagine you are watching the news on BBC1. Suddenly, somebody picks up the remote control and flicks over to ITV. A second later the programme changes to Channel 4 and then back to BBC1. Then it switches to BBC2.

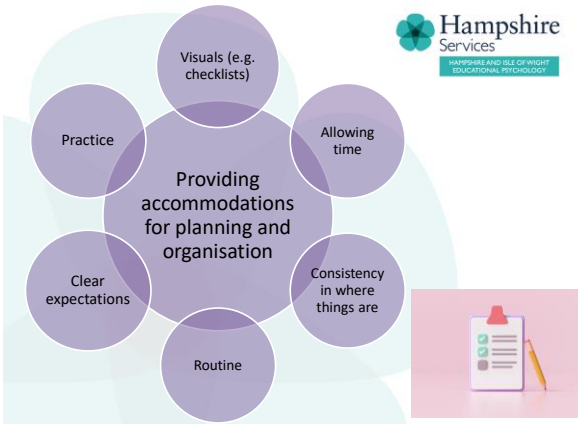
If you were asked about the news on BBC1 you might find it hard to remember. For a student with ADHD, the world is a constant stream of changing images and messages. It's difficult to focus on one thing at a time because something new is always coming along. It's all rather bewildering and it's hard to keep pace."

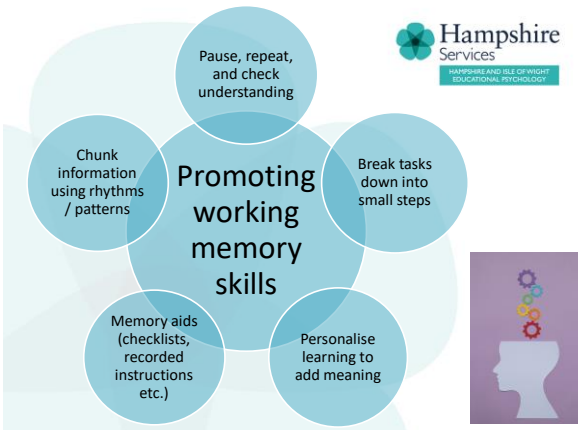
ADHD Foundation, 2018, p14











Sharing strengths



It is common for young people with ADHD to have low self-esteem because they notice that it takes them more effort to complete tasks others find easy.

So that the young person develops a positive sense of self, reflect on the strengths you have observed with them. Strengths identified in young people with ADHD can include:

- Awareness, observation, hyperfocus;
- Creativity and ability to think “outside the box”;
- Enthusiasm and desire to try new things;
- Kindness and generosity;
- Spontaneity;
- Sense of fun and energy.

What is Autism?



- A lifelong neurological condition leading to differences in key areas
- Affects how people perceive the world and interact with people
- Being autistic affects people in different ways
- Some autistic people have co-occurring conditions, including over- or under-sensitivity to sensory experiences, learning disabilities, or mental health difficulties
- A medical / observational diagnosis
- Involves:
 - social communication and interaction difficulties
 - restricted, repetitive behaviours
- Respond to the need rather than the diagnosis

What we are likely to see



- In general
 - difficulties with social understanding and interaction.
 - need help to express themselves socially or understand the social communication of others.
 - difficulty managing a change to a familiar routine and thinking flexibly.
 - many children on the autism spectrum have sensory processing difficulties.
- In particular
 - “Once you’ve met one person with autism....you’ve met one person with autism” (attributed to Lorna Wing)

Anxiety



Anxiety is a key factor in understanding behaviour and managing well-being, and learning in school

Terminology



'Autism,' 'on the spectrum,' 'has autism,' 'Aspergers,' 'high or low functioning' ???

UK survey of autistic people and their families:
Preferred identity-first language: 'autistic,' 'on the autism spectrum' (Kenny et al., 2016)

'...person-first language appears to stigmatise, rather than de-stigmatise, persons with disabilities, particularly children and particularly children with developmental disabilities.' (Gernsbacher, 2017)

"I am a young person with autism, my autism is a part of me, but it does not define me. I know what it is like to have labels put on me" Adams (undated)

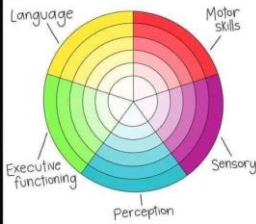
The Autism Spectrum



WHAT PEOPLE THINK the AUTISM SPECTRUM LOOKS LIKE:



WHAT it CAN ACTUALLY LOOK LIKE:



Social interaction



"School was a torture ground... I just didn't automatically know the social rules and when I did I had to think about them all the time and who can keep up that sort of coping skill ALL THE TIME (Karen)"

"I hadn't worked out that I needed to tell people things in order for them to know them."

Sainsbury (2000) *Martian in the playground*

Social interaction



- Interacting, playing and developing relationships with others
- Unwritten social rules, understand others' feelings and emotions, initiate and maintain interactions, and to form friendships.
- May seem over-formal, egocentric, or inappropriate.
- Motivation to interact.
- Knowing how to respond appropriately to new or unfamiliar social situations.
- Understanding the views and intentions of others

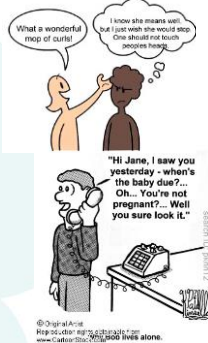
Should we always teach social interaction skills?



Social interaction strategies



- Modelling behaviour
- Role play in new situations
- Social stories
- Comic strips
- Small groups / pairs for playdates
- Support during unstructured social times
- *Avoid social overload*
- *Teach explicit interaction skills*



Language and clear communication



- Interpreting written or spoken language literally, misunderstand metaphors, similes and jokes
- Using echolalia or repetitive questioning and remain in these phases longer than other children
- Communication may be factual and only used functionally in terms of having needs met, rather than socially in a conversation



Language and clear communication



- May not realise the importance of communicating their needs and therefore will need to be taught how to do so explicitly
- Turn-taking, dialogue and conversation may be difficult
- May be based purely on a child's own special interests and not adapted to the social context they are in
- Difficulty with using tone, pitch, volume and intonation correctly
- Difficulty with non-verbal communication include 'reading' or interpreting facial expressions and body language and using eye contact correctly

The Curious Incident...



This will not be a funny book. I cannot tell jokes because I do not understand them. Here is a joke, as an example. It is one of my father's.

His face was drawn but the curtains were real.

I know why this is meant to be funny. I asked. It is because drawn has 3 meanings, and they are 1) drawn with a pencil 2) exhausted, and 3) pulled across a window, and meaning 1 refers to both a face and the curtains, meaning 2 only refers to the face, and meaning 3 refers only to the curtains.

If I try to say the joke to myself, making the word mean 3 different things at the same time, it is like hearing 3 different pieces of music at the same time which is uncomfortable and confusing and not nice like white noise. It is like 3 people trying to talk to you at the same time about different things. And that is why there are no jokes in this book.

Language and clear communication strategies



- Language should be short and simple e.g. “dinner time now”. Clear, precise and concrete. One step at a time. What the child has to do, for how long and the desired outcome
- Don’t imply there is a choice, unless you actually mean it!
- Avoid rephrasing in different ways or repeating too soon before a response.
- If in doubt, use less language.



Language and clear communication strategies



- Use positive direction: “come to the table now” not “if you don’t come now I’ll give your dinner to the dog”.
- Avoid non-literal phrases such as “pull yourself together”.
- Give time for child to process and respond to questions.
- Give cues before instruction such as using the child’s name.
- Match body language and non-verbal communication to words.
- Don’t assume anything. You might need to state what appears (to you) to be obvious.
- Be clear where your talking to lots of people that this applies to the child.
- Use visual support.

Change and thinking flexibly



- Recognise the importance of routine, rules, change.
- Difficulty managing a change to a familiar routine and to apply their skills across different settings.
- Difficulty with choice, problem-solving and decision making.
- Unstructured times may lead to difficulties as children may be uncertain as to what to do.
- Particular focus on one topic or interest.
- Coping with new and unfamiliar situations.
- “Fixed and rigid thinking” about ways of doing things.

Strategies for change and thinking flexibly



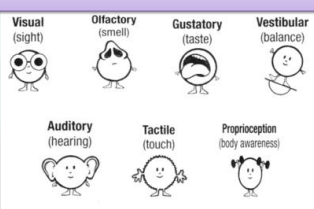
- Communicate rules/routines explicitly.
- Firmly establish & practise routines regularly.
- Enforce rules/consequences consistently in order to provide predictability.
- Give advanced warning of changes to regular events.
- Structure transitions.
- Plan and practise for events.
- *Try to make as much "known" as possible*



Sensory



HYPERSensitivity (High Sensitivity): Too much sensory stimulation occurs and the individual can become aversive.



HYPoSensitivity (Low Sensitivity): This is where too little sensory stimulation occurs and the person becomes sensory seeking.

Sensory environment strategies



- Sensory stimulation – sounds, screens, light, visual stimulation, smells, how things feel



Sensory environment strategies



- Sensory blocking
 - Is the child able to learn skills and use resources which will enable them to block out distressing stimuli?
- Self calming
 - This aims to stop the build up of arousal. Can the child do things to stop themselves becoming overwhelmed (independently or with adult help)?
- Communication
 - Teach the child communication skills to enable him / her to resolve problematic situations.

Visual Support



- Underpins many of the elements covered
- Helps child understand – supplements verbal communication
- Increases predictability, reduces confusion, helps organisation & (potentially) reduces behaviour problems
- Lowers anxiety : increases calmness
- Enables child to focus on relevant information : increases learning
- Supports independent learning and living



Understanding the child



Organise the environment

- Help them to feel safe
- Increase predictability and consistency
- Manage sensory needs

Teach new skills

- Understanding and communicating with others
- Flexible thinking

Think about language

- Yours and theirs

Masking



- Attempting to pass as non-autistic by “suppressing their authentic character” (Jones, 2021)

Suppressing or hiding stims	Copying other people (visually and verbally)	Suppressing sensory experiences
Not asking for help	‘Holding it in’ or ‘keeping it together’	Not talking about interests

Two final thoughts



- All the things you would do for all other children.....they apply as well
- “Once you’ve met one person with autism....you’ve met one person with autism”



Some resources



- <http://www.autism.org.uk/>
- <https://www.autismhampshire.org.uk/>
- <http://www.autismsupportnetwork.com/>
- <https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>

The Derbyshire File for Autism Friendly Schools
 Hampshire Services for Young Children Social Communication Toolkit
 Hampshire Special Schools

Resources



- Teaching and Managing Students with ADHD: Systems, Strategies, Solutions (ADHD Foundation, 2018) <https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Teaching-and-Managing-Students-with-ADHD.pdf>
- Young Minds – ADHD and Mental Health https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/mental-health-conditions/adhd-and-mental-health?gclid=EAlaIqobChMI6Kmu-Pa8_AIVHOrtCh2wfQCCEAAYASAAEgIypPD_BwE#WhatisADHD

Resources



- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder \(ADHD\) – CAMHS \(hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk\)](https://www.hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/)
- Enhancing and Practicing Executive Function Skills with Children from Infancy to Adolescence (Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University) <https://children.wi.gov/Documents/Harvard%20Parenting%20Resource.pdf>

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