

ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Strengths-based programming & behaviour guidance

These notes are not intended as a comprehensive guideline and unfortunately there are limited opportunities to undertake training in this area. We hope to open a small window of understanding and give a few important pointers on the way forwards when working with children with this challenging neurological condition.

Notes partially based on OSCN Workshops facilitated by Tracey Roundtree, Every Day with ADHD.

What is ADHD?

Read about ADHD Characteristics - Diagnosis – Medication here

<http://www.adhd.org.nz/what-is-adhd/>

Possibly the most important first step for anyone who will work with a child with ADHD is to consider what it's like to have ADHD. Refer to these 2 short video extracts: [Link 1](#) and [Link 2](#)

Imagine having to play a game where you don't know the rules and the person in charge just keeps saying "get on with it". Frustration and anxiety can be on going, and this in turn can lead to aggressive outbursts, depression and chronic low self-esteem.

Developmentally, the early school years can be the toughest time, with all the social and behavioural demands that come to the fore. And this may be precisely when the child enters your service.

READ MORE: "What is OSCAR like for children with ADHD" (OSCN 2015)

Behaviour guidance: "a place where they can succeed."

These few key points provide a foundation for an effective approach. For more comprehensive tips and problem-solving, we recommend further reading, in particular "Every Day with ADHD" by Kerry Cooney (Chapter 12.)

Plan ahead, instead of constantly reacting

While children with ADHD are very different from children on the Autistic spectrum, both groups are very sensitive to their environment. Effective behaviour guidance will be largely aimed at setting up an environment where the child with ADHD can experience success, while minimising some of the likely sources of frustration and aggressive outbursts. Work to reduce the negative time and attention that the child experiences.

ADHD (page 2)

Be realistic, be ready, be fair and be firm

On a day-to-day basis, accept that the child is going to demand more time and attention. Routine tasks will be an on-going challenge and it absolutely pays to walk away as much as possible from confrontations, or find ways to re-direct or approach the task differently.

“Fairness” means “a fair chance to learn and take part” as much as “all being treated the same.” There is no need to justify (to other children or parents) that you treat children with different needs, differently.

Firm boundaries remain important though – especially around hitting, other aggressive or abusive behaviour and damage to property. (For suggestions about discipline see further below.)

Reach out to parents

Parents may have had a long history of struggle and stress, so they will often feel overwhelmed and inadequate as parents, with frequent feelings of being judged and embarrassed in social situations. Their defensiveness and difficulty with interaction with you as their child’s OSCAR carer may be nothing to do with you and everything to do with this experience.

Parents can also be tremendous sources of expertise in “what works” such as calming techniques or the child’s special characteristics, quirks, interests and obsessions.

Start from strengths

Children with ADHD are likely to have frequent experiences of failure, giving up and being “useless”. So one of the most important impacts we can have is to organise some opportunities for success based on the child’s interests and/or strengths.

These positive activities will also give some options when “cooling off” or re-direction is needed and will give the child the chance to be seen more positively by other children.

Small, sensible helper roles are very effective. When set tasks with clearly defined boundaries, they try hard to meet expectations.

[After a while you might see that strengths-based programming has benefits for all children in your programme.]

ADHD (page 3)

Giving instructions and explaining expectations

Make your communications as clear as possible. Give short instructions. Wait then repeat. Then ask the child to repeat back. The child is likely to be quite black and white with language and meanings, so check in on understanding. Never punish the child for being disorganised, it's a part of the way he/she is. Calendars and signs can be helpful aids to remind when, where, how.

Rules and expectations need clear explanation and repetition. Make this a routine part of an activity and remind staff to spend a little one-to-one time with the child with ADHD before an activity starts, giving a simple rules reminder.

When things go off track – escalating behaviour & discipline

Once the child is in the middle of being upset or an aggressive outburst, there are limited options but it's not the end of the world either. Respond with simple calm language "stop, now" and try re-directing with clear task – "go to the couch and sit down" or "go get yourself a drink and wait by my desk". Establish some tasks that have a calming effect on the child such as cleaning, taking a message to another staff member etc. There is no point trying to reason or discuss at this point.

Later it should be possible to talk with the child about the incident – listen and try to get a sense of how the child saw things. This might help you to prevent a recurrence. Explain clearly what sort of behaviour would have been more appropriate – remember the child might be quite unaware of even simple social cues and expectations.

Consequences might be of limited value because the child might not be able to connect the consequence to their misbehaviour. The child may be completely unaware of the impact the behaviour has had and why it was inappropriate. "Technically the child did not decide to break any rules. Before he could think about it the action had occurred." (Cooney)

As a follow up, take note of warning signs that behaviour is escalating (noise, movement, facials) and act sooner. Look out for possible triggers, especially changes: including new staff, trips, different facilities, unexpected social interactions. Think ahead about possible sources of frustration in an activity.

Work towards agreed "safety valves" that the child themselves can initiate e.g. if they are inclined to run away, establish a specified safe place they can remove themselves to, rather than just running off at random.

UNDERSTANDING ABOUT ADHD IS CONSTANTLY IMPROVING. WE STRONGLY RECOMMEND FURTHER READING:

- *Every Day with ADHD* by Kerry Cooney (1996); Woodslane Press
- OSCN behaviour guidance resources: www.oscn.org.nz/behaviour-guidance.html