



# Could your child have undiagnosed ADHD?

By Dr Tony Lloyd



**Dr Tony Lloyd, CEO of the ADHD Foundation, addresses the question: How is ADHD diagnosed and what should parents look out for?**

Children who have ADHD are often misdiagnosed as 'naughty children' and even if they're officially diagnosed with ADHD, many kids are still simply labelled as naughty.

However, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a recognised medical condition that affects around 3-5% of children and 2% of adults. One of the most common neurodevelopmental conditions in childhood, it is described by the NHS as: "A condition that affects people's behaviour. People with ADHD can seem restless, may have trouble concentrating and may act on impulse."

There are several enduring myths about ADHD. Many parents will no doubt be concerned that a diagnosis of ADHD may be harmful in itself because in the past it's been associated with 'naughty', or about giving children drugs to behave. This is such a tragedy because although one in 20 children have ADHD, less than half of that number are ever assessed or diagnosed and as many as 50% of children who are referred for an assessment don't in fact have ADHD but instead have behaviours linked to trauma, anxiety or other neurological conditions. Also, many people think ADHD is about bad behaviour. ADHD is not a behavioural disorder - it's a neurodevelopmental condition characterised by a delay in development in certain parts of the brain.

## How is ADHD diagnosed?

The Royal College of Psychiatrists ([rcpsych.ac.uk](http://rcpsych.ac.uk)) says there's no single, definite test for ADHD and diagnosis requires a specialist assessment by a child psychiatrist or a paediatrician, who will



observe the child and look for recognised patterns of behaviour, and get reports of their behaviour at home and school. Diagnosis doesn't usually happen until after the age of six.

## **What do parents need to look out for?**

### **Anxiety:**

Speak with your child's school and ask if they appear to be struggling with learning and anxiety. Anxiety is the main cause of distressed behaviours that aren't context appropriate for the classroom.

### **Forgetfulness:**

A child with ADHD may often lose or forget things.

### **Difficulties with concentration:**

Children may find it difficult to sustain concentration or attention. Whilst all children can find it difficult staying on task, what defines these characteristics as ADHD is they present in a more extreme form.

### **Difficulties with planning and organisation:**

Children with ADHD often have what's known as poor executive functioning skills. This means the ability to organise their thoughts and regulate their emotions to plan and organise how they do their school work. This can result in difficulties with starting tasks. So they procrastinate and become frustrated and overwhelmed as they can't order their thinking. However, this can also be an engine of creativity!



### **Hyperactivity:**

Some children with ADHD can be hyperactive. They are always on the go with seemingly boundless energy and no matter how tired they are, they can still have difficulty sleeping.

### **Being Impulsive:**

Some children with ADHD can be impulsive. They may say and do things they know aren't appropriate and can find it difficult to consider the consequences of their words or actions.

### **Have relatives with learning difficulties:**

We know that while genetic in origin, ADHD comes under the umbrella of a number of learning difficulties which often co-exist, for example, more than 40% of children with ADHD also have dyslexia. However, how ADHD affects an individual is determined by the environment. This means that how you parent your child, how your child's needs are addressed in school can be very significant. If ADHD is identified early and managed well, there is no reason why your child cannot achieve their potential. Your child is not sick or 'disordered', nor are they mentally ill. But with the right support, early intervention and informed and loving parents, your child can thrive."