

Understanding an ADHD Diagnosis

A guide for parents and carers · Child Psychiatry Consultancy Ltd

This guide has been written to help families understand what an ADHD diagnosis means for their child. It is for general information only and is not a substitute for clinical advice. If you have questions about your child's diagnosis, please contact us.

What does the diagnosis mean?

An ADHD diagnosis means that your child has been assessed by a specialist and found to meet the clinical criteria for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. This is a recognised neurodevelopmental condition — it is not a label, a character flaw, or a result of parenting. It is a difference in how the brain develops and works.

For many families, a diagnosis brings relief — finally having an explanation for what they have been observing for years. It also opens the door to the right support, both at home and at school.

What ADHD is — and what it isn't

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition with a strong genetic basis. It affects the brain's ability to regulate attention, impulse control, and activity levels. It is not caused by poor parenting, diet, screen time, or lack of discipline.

- ADHD is not a sign of low intelligence — many children with ADHD are highly capable
- ADHD is not laziness — children with ADHD often work much harder than their peers just to keep up
- ADHD does not mean your child will always struggle — with the right support, outcomes can be excellent
- ADHD often co-exists with other conditions — anxiety, autism, dyslexia, and sleep difficulties are common

The three presentations of ADHD

Predominantly inattentive

Difficulties with focus, organisation, remembering, and following through. More common in girls. Often missed because there is no obvious hyperactivity.

Predominantly hyperactive-impulsive

Difficulties sitting still, waiting, and controlling impulses. More commonly identified in younger children and boys.

Combined presentation

Features of both inattentive and hyperactive-impulsive ADHD. The most commonly diagnosed presentation overall.

What happens next?

Now that your child has a diagnosis, there are several things you can do:

- Share the report with your child's school — specifically the SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator)
- Ask the school what support they can put in place — this may include extra time, movement breaks, or seating adjustments
- Consider whether medication might help — discuss this with Dr Athina Zakyntthinaki if you haven't already
- Look into support organisations such as ADHD UK (adhduk.co.uk) and Young Minds (youngminds.org.uk)
- If your child's needs are significant, consider applying for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

Telling your child about their diagnosis

Most children feel relieved when they understand their diagnosis. It gives a name and explanation to difficulties they may have been blaming themselves for. Keep the explanation age-appropriate, positive, and focused on strengths.

- Younger children (5-8): 'Your brain works differently from some other children's brains. That's why some things feel harder. It also means you have some brilliant qualities.'
- Older children (9-12): Explain ADHD simply — difficulties with attention and sometimes sitting still, nothing to do with being clever or trying hard
- Teenagers: Be honest and involve them in decisions about their support and treatment

About medication

Medication is not right for every child with ADHD, but for many it makes a significant and positive difference. ADHD medications help the brain regulate dopamine and noradrenaline — the chemicals involved in attention and impulse control.

If you are considering medication, Dr Athina Zakyntthinaki will discuss the options with you in detail, including benefits, side effects, and monitoring requirements. No medication will be started without your informed consent.

Practical strategies at home

- Keep routines consistent and predictable — children with ADHD thrive on structure
- Give one instruction at a time and check it has been understood
- Break tasks into small, manageable steps
- Use visual reminders, timers, and checklists
- Ensure enough physical activity — exercise significantly helps ADHD
- Prioritise sleep — sleep difficulties are common in ADHD and make symptoms worse
- Focus on effort and progress, not just outcomes
- Celebrate strengths — children with ADHD are often creative, energetic, and highly empathetic