

# ADHD

# Small steps

# Big impact

Manual for kindergarten teachers



Erasmus+



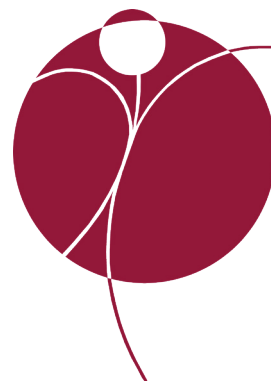
**HELPING HAND**

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HELPING HAND. ADHD. SMALL STEPS. BIG IMPACT. – MANUAL FOR KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

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## Introduction

This manual has been developed for those working in early childhood settings with children who may present with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or ADHD-like behaviours. ADHD is a neuro-developmental condition characterised by excessive impulsivity, hyperactivity (i.e. excessive movement), and/or difficulty sustaining attention. ADHD can affect an individual from birth, through childhood, and into adulthood. Since the difficulties associated with ADHD are often apparent from very early childhood, the earlier they are identified and accommodated, the better it is for the individual's longer-term outcomes. Through early identification and intervention, it is possible to support the development of appropriate coping skills, as well as the knowledge and understanding of others in the individual's environment. This may, in turn, lessen the impact of ADHD on the individual's life. Children without a formal diagnosis of ADHD can nonetheless show similar behaviour; in this manual, this is described as ADHD-like or challenging behaviour.

Those teaching or working with children are aware that all children are different; each individual child has their own strengths and areas for development. In the kindergarten environment, it is the responsibility of the kindergarten teachers to provide learning environments where all children can flourish. A supportive learning environment:

- » takes into account and celebrates each child's background and the diversity of their experiences;
- » supports the child's development, provides challenges, and emphasises success;
- » engages children in their own learning and development process through active learning principles;
- » takes into account the child's age and individual developmental needs;
- » promotes positive self-image;
- » ensures a warm, accepting and caring atmosphere;
- » provides emotional security during early education;
- » provides children with an opportunity to voice their opinions and participate in decisions about their own education

In addition to creating a holistic environment, where social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development is supported and promoted, kindergarten teachers need to also pay attention to identifying atypical development, and who may present with special educational needs.

For each individual child, regardless of whether they demonstrate typical or atypical developmental patterns, kindergarten teachers need to:

- » observe behaviour thoroughly and objectively;
- » seek to understand the reasons behind specific behaviours;
- » carefully select the strategies to implement to support individual development;
- » constantly re-evaluate the effectiveness of the selected strategies in differing contexts

This manual is designed to support kindergarten teachers when working with children with ADHD-like or challenging behaviours. The program includes two manuals – a parent / carer manual and a teacher manual – when used in combination both home and school work together to support the child. This program was developed with developmental specialists, created in collaboration with kindergarten teachers and parents, and so combines parent / carer and teacher knowledge and expertise with up-to-date research into how to include and support children with ADHD-like or challenging behaviours.

The first two units present theoretical background about childhood development and ADHD, and the remaining units contain suggested guidelines, techniques and methods that may be used in practice. It is hoped that users of this manual will recognize the situations and phenomena described, and that the methods will enrich their every-day educational practices.

**Remember, every child is different. Select the methods that work best for the individual child and introduce them gradually. True change requires trial, time and persistence.**

# Unit 1 How Children Develop

## 1a Emotional, Behavioural and Cognitive Development in Early Childhood

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this section, you will:

- » Understand how most children develop the ability to manage their emotions and behaviours
- » Understand the role of the environment in the development of this ability

Every child is unique and is born with immense learning potential – we are born primed to explore our environment and ourselves. As adults working with children, it is up to us to tap into each child's natural tendencies and to create the best learning environment for the children we work with.

### Typical Development

The term “typical development” refers to a complex concept which varies between children. This is especially true in the early years, in terms of timing and rate of development. For example, most children start speaking somewhere between 18 to 24 months, but some start speaking earlier, while others (without developmental concerns) may not speak until after the age of 2.

Developmental trajectories vary between children, which is why such broad age ranges are considered to be “normal” for the development of specific skills in young children. Skills may develop relatively later for some children; this may be due to a variety of reasons, many of which are not problematic at all.

However, when a child achieves developmental milestones slightly later than their friends, it may indicate a need to pay greater attention to their development, or to give the child extra developmental support.

When thinking about “normal” development, educators may have a picture of a “good child” in their heads. “Normal development” may be envisaged as a baby, and later a toddler, demonstrating average development according to that which is written about in books. This perception of “normal” may include the idea that the child does not do things too early and is not being delayed in any of the developmental domains.

In today's society, we often focus on that which is considered to be the “well-behaved” child; these children are imaged to be those who eat well, cry only a little, play nicely with other children, speak nicely to adults, sit still when they are told to, and listen to what they are told at all times. But these children do not really exist, or at the very least are in the minority.

Within normative childhood development, there are huge individual differences at play, and healthy development includes some behaviours that adults working with children may find difficult. For example, at around the age of 2 years, children may start demonstrating oppositional behaviours. While these behaviours may be challenging to work with, this is an important step within the normal development of autonomy. As educators, it is important to understand these behaviours as part of the child's journey to flourishing into autonomous young people and then adults.

It is also important to recognise that a child's development does not occur without the influence of their surroundings. Indeed, the child's various environments (such as the physical and social worlds) greatly impact on their development. When children behave in ways that are perceived as challenging for adults and other children in the classroom, this may cause difficulties in terms of being included in the group/classroom or kindergarten/school community and the child may be labelled as “problematic.”

However, every child has a range of attributes and characteristics, which include positives as well as perceived challenges. Educators should strive to see the possibilities and strengths of each child, while considering what their behaviour may be trying to communicate.

Remember that young children experience the same range of emotions that adults do, but may not have yet developed the language or means of communicating their feelings. For example, a child may be sad, hurt or hungry and may act out using angry or aggressive behaviours as their only means of expression. We must always seek to understand why a child presents challenging behaviour, so that potential underlying causes may be addressed (e.g. developmental delay, environmental factors, or a combination of the two).



FIGURE 1. DEVELOPMENTAL TRAJECTORIES VARY BETWEEN CHILDREN

From early childhood, there is a long way to go, until the infant develops into an adult who:

- » takes responsibility for him/herself;
- » understands, plays, and works well with others;
- » has developed a range of effective coping strategies;
- » independently solves problems;
- » regulates his/her own behaviour and responds effectively to situations;
- » has a positive and realistic sense of who they are;
- » understands and regulates their own emotions;
- » understands and empathizes with others.

### Where does development happen?

Childhood development occurs across a multitude of realms and incorporates a broad range of developmental components. In order for the developing child to acquire the various skills listed above, these components need to develop efficiently and work together effectively. A full understanding of childhood development includes:

- » biological development (genetic background and brain function)
- » physical development (physical, perception and movement)
- » cognitive development (thinking skills and processes)
- » sensory development (the way they interpret and respond to sensory experiences)
- » spiritual development (how they think and feel about themselves and others)
- » social development (friends, family, community relationships)
- » behaviours (those ones that we see)
- » cultural background (different cultures have different expectations, and children learn what they see)
- » the physical environment (how to deal with noises / lights, in what kind of environment they learn, develop)

The maturation of the nervous system, physical development, cognitive development, spiritual experiences, and social changes are inseparable. Development is holistic – this means that all of these factors are interconnected and influence one another.

In order to understand the behaviour of a young child, these biological, psychological, social and cultural factors should be considered together. For example, social development is not only influenced by physiology (neuro-biology and motoric development), it is also heavily influenced by opportunities to interact with other people. In this way, children learn specific languages and also

specific norms, rituals, and behaviours from the people and groups that they are a part of. Decades of research into child development has shown that other people in the child's environment matter. This includes parent(s)/carer(s) and other caring/nurturing adults. During early childhood, the kindergarten teacher plays an essential role in creating that caring or nurturing environment.

In an effectively nurturing environment, the child:

- » is understood, accepted, and valued;
- » has opportunities to express and learn to regulate their emotions, impulses, and behaviours;
- » has access to caring adults who help them deal effectively with problems, difficulties, and resulting stress;
- » is provided with clear structure and boundaries, which provide a sense of safety and understandable rules;
- » is provided with opportunities for social development through interaction with adults and other children (e.g. relating to others, being part of a group, cooperation, empathy) (Schaffer & Kipp, 2014).

### Self-regulation

Self-regulation refers to a complex process that allows the child (and later the adult) to respond flexibly and appropriately to on-going and changing environmental demands. Development of self-regulation is an essential feature in typical childhood development and is also implicated in Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Self-regulation allows the individual to control and modify thoughts, feelings, and behaviours when needed, so that goals can be achieved or behaviours adapted to suit different situations. For example, when another child takes a child's toy, try to observe how they respond. It's likely that all children will feel a sense of frustration but not all children will respond the same. Some children (with more developed self-regulation skills) may choose to tell an adult or distract themselves with another toy. However, other children might try to grab the toy back or possibly lash out physically. These types of challenges are encountered throughout the lifespan – for example, in adulthood, another driver might cut you off or a colleague might say something that causes frustration. Our reactions to these situations depend on our self-regulation abilities.

In order to map a given situation and decide on the most appropriate behavioural response, an individual needs to be able to access their attention and executive functioning skills; self-regulation plays a central role in being able to access these important brain areas (Berger, 2011). Later chapters in this manual will further explore how difficulties in self-regulation and executive function are thought to underpin many ADHD-like or challenging behaviours.

One aspect of self-regulation is emotional control: the ability to feel and express emotions at an appropriate level and to manage them according to the demands of different situations and environments (Lakatos, 2011). For example, everyone cries. However, how we cry changes over the course of our lives, due to the development of emotional control. Think about a two-year-old child who falls down on the playground - they get a shock and might scrape their knee. It is not unusual for them to burst into tears – the crying and inconsolable wailing may go on for some time. We do not always look at this as “atypical”, however, if a 16-year-old responded in the same way, we might not view this as a typical behavioural response. The reason we do not usually see such an extreme response from a 16-year-old is because, while they might feel the same shock and pain, they have developed a range of other skills (e.g. self-awareness, social awareness, and self-soothing) that enable them to manage their emotions and their emotional responses differently.

Teaching self-regulation for toddlers is important because it allows the development of the following skills and abilities:

- » self-control;
- » perseverance;
- » decision making;
- » conflict management;
- » sustained effort;
- » goal setting;
- » productivity (i.e. effectively completing tasks);
- » problem solving;
- » advocacy and assertiveness;
- » following rules;
- » tolerance;
- » internalisation and reinforcement of compassion (important for empathy) (Molnár, 2009).

One of the most important periods in the development of self-regulation is early childhood. Part of this ability is innate (i.e. present from birth and associated with neurological development), however, the child's environment has a great impact on development of self-regulation, and research has confirmed that many of these skills can be taught and developed.

The infant and toddler learn to adjust and adapt their behaviour (organising their inner and outer worlds) with the support of nurturing and caring adults. As the child develops, and gets older, the role of the adult changes and the child's dependency on the adult does and should decrease, but even by the end of kindergarten there is still a significant need for teachers to take an active role in supporting the development of the child's self-regulation and emotional control.

To a large extent, supporting the development of the child's self-regulation and emotional control depends

on effective observation and problem-solving skills of the adult. This requires careful observation of the child in order to understand the specific area for development, and provide relevant feedback and support in a nurturing way. When effective, the child uses this feedback to become more skilled at independently regulating their own emotions and behavioural responses. This is usually an on-going process, rather than a one-off event, as these skills take time as well as trial and error to develop. These learning and experiential processes take place in the context of everyday life, and places responsibility on teachers, parent(s)/carer(s), and other caring adults to pay attention, be sensitive, and respond effectively.

The responsive parent, carer, or kindergarten teacher:

- » recognizes and accurately interprets the child's behavioural signals;
- » responds in a timely and appropriate manner;
- » adapts their response to the child's developmental stage and circumstances

In this manner, children gradually learn to recognise and interpret their own feelings, and become more independent in their management and regulation.

The “good co-regulating” parent / carer / teacher:

- » supports the development of the child's autonomy;
- » keeps his/her own behaviour consistent;
- » is structured;
- » is predictable;
- » is an active participant in the child's life (Grolnick, 2009).

We are born with the capacity for self-regulation, but its development varies depending on other individual personal attributes and opportunities for its development within our environment.

To fully understand self-regulation (in order to effectively support children with ADHD-like or challenging behaviour) let's see how it develops.

#### **In the first year of life:**

Initially, newborn infants are able to distinguish between pleasant and unpleasant types of stimuli. The pursuit for self-regulation is present within their behaviour: unpleasant stimuli result in moving away (e.g. turning the head, closing eyes, crying) and pleasant stimuli trigger efforts to get closer to the stimuli. Some efficient forms of self-regulation include:

- » sucking a pacifier to self-soothe;
- » redirecting their attention (e.g. paying attention to an interesting toy for a second);
- » asking for external help (e.g. crying).

During the first six months of life, infants learn to regulate their sleep-wake cycles and undergo significant de-

velopment of sensory motor control (i.e. they learn how to use their bodies independently to reach for objects, grab them voluntarily, move them from one hand to another, and so on) (Whitebread et al, 2012).

During these first months, the child's behavioural signals clearly serve social purposes, and they begin to develop their "social reference": they learn who to turn to and will seek certain members of their environment when they need support. For example, when hearing a novel or unpleasant sound or encountering an unexpected toy, a baby may look to a trusted adult to signal how they should react. If they perceive fear on the adults' face, they may interpret the experience negatively, whereas if they see encouragement, they may approach the experience with interest.

By the end of the first year of life, a range of emotions (e.g. anger, joy, interest, sadness, fear) are identifiable in a child's behaviour. Along with the development of these abilities, self-regulation takes place with the active, caring participation of significant adults in the child's life.

### In the second year of life:

At this age, children begin to recognize that other people's thoughts and feelings are not the same as theirs.

They begin to demonstrate more goal-directed behaviour and are better able to remember their goals and to actively pursue them. As a result, they may have a greater ability to sustain their attention and be less distractible. With adequate support, they are able to some extent to delay gratification and work towards their goals or getting what they want.

This does not mean that they do not struggle to self-regulate. It is still hard for them to regulate their immediate emotional responses, but they are, for example, able to wait a little longer for food when hungry or to express annoyance or frustration in a less intense way.

Speech develops very rapidly during this period: children begin to understand simple verbal instructions and they develop greater control over their environment by using single or double-word combinations. For example, the child might signal that they want to play with something by saying "toy," with the result that this is given to them. They use words to describe emotional content from the age of two; but recognition and identification of emotions still have a long way to go (Cole & Cole, 2006).

### In the third to sixth years of life:

During these years, toddlers explore the world primarily from their own point of view, however – contrary to past opinion – research has shown that children of these ages can understand the viewpoints of others, and can empathize with others well before the age of 3. There is also a great leap forward in the development of the ability to "mind read"; that is, in a given situation, they begin to understand that other people are separate from them, to imagine themselves in the situation of the other, and to empathise with another person's point of view or feelings (Györi, 2004).

Children increasingly begin to show the ability to control their behaviour and (importantly) begin to adapt it to the demands of a particular situation. They apply rules for themselves and others; these behavioural rules (e.g. take your shoes off in the house) are understood, respected, and adhered to by the child and they make other people adhere to them too. During this time, children begin to understand situations and start to figure out strategies to solve situation-specific problems. These strategies are often based on strict adherence to specific rules.

As time goes by, and as the brain develops, children can wait longer and longer for their demands, desires, and needs to be met.

With their developing attentional capacity, they can focus more on a given task. As their emotional and cognitive skills develop, they can tolerate being separated from their loved ones better and for a longer time.

In addition to the environmental context (such as the physical environment, past experiences, family, community, etc.), hereditary attributes and temperament also play a role in childhood development (Ferenczi, 2011).

Within individual variability, children are born with certain attributes or tendencies to behaviour and will respond to the environment in particular ways as a result.



**FIGURE 2. THE TRAFFIC LIGHT MODEL FOR ANGER MANAGEMENT**



As is to be expected across all aspects of development, self-regulation will show the usual amount of individual variation between children. Some children are better able to meet the demands of their environment (for example, adhere to an adult's request to not touch a chocolate bar on the table) while others struggle to do so.

Self-regulation is largely developed by young adulthood, but it can continue to develop and be developed later in life. Inadequately developed self-regulation or difficulties in this area can contribute to ADHD-like or challenging behaviour (Lakatos, 2011). Therefore, it is important that during these years, children develop the ability to:

- » identify the emotions that they are feeling;
- » know the names/words for those feelings;
- » express their emotions in an appropriate way;
- » modify or regulate their emotions, for example, to be able to use a range of appropriate coping strategies to self-soothe or distract themselves;
- » adapt their emotions and thoughts in order to achieve a goal or complete a task.

### Test your Knowledge:

- » **To understand development holistically, what factors do we need to consider?**
- » **What are some key characteristics of a nurturing environment?**
- » **What are the key characteristics of self-regulation?**
- » **Why is it important to support self-regulation in young children?**
- » **What developmental goals can be set to develop self-regulation for children aged 3-6?**

## 1b Understanding Typical and Challenging Behaviours in Early Childhood

### Learning Outcomes:

**By the end of this section, you will:**

- » **Understand when, how, and why a child's behaviour might be concerning**
- » **Understand how our own cultural views may impact on how we view a child's behaviour**

As previously explained, each child develops at their own pace, and there is great variability in terms of behavioural development.

This is why developmental milestones charts (you can find them online or in the library) show broad ranges of when a particular type of behaviour might be expected. It is outside the scope of this manual to explore typical behaviour development in depth, but it is important to bear in mind that “challenging behaviour” is considered in relation to what is most commonly expected within these broad ranges.

### What is Meant by “Challenging Behaviour”?

This program adopts the term “challenging behaviour” as opposed to “behaviour problems” which carries a negative connotation of blame toward the child.

The term “challenging behaviour” shifts the focus from the child, to their broader context: a child's behaviour may be challenging for a range of people—parents, siblings, other children in the child's peer group and teachers. But the child themselves also shares the challenge, as they have not yet developed necessary coping skills to meet the demands of their environment.

All children will demonstrate challenging behaviour at some point, especially in early childhood—it is a part of typical development. These behaviours may be due, in part, to the rapid development of early childhood, when children have to develop many skills to regulate their own emotions, thoughts, and actions and achieve autonomy. As a result, parents of young children frequently encounter a number of behaviours that they perceive as challenging. Examples of behaviours that may be perceived as challenging include:

- » seemingly inappropriate expressions of anger;
- » emotional outbursts;
- » physical and verbal aggression towards self or others;

- » disruptive behaviour;
- » oppositional behaviour or disobedience;
- » excessive activity;
- » destructive behaviours;
- » anxiety or withdrawn behaviour;
- » difficulties in separation;
- » controlling or dominating behaviour

### **What Causes Challenging Behaviour?**

When faced with challenging behaviours, what teachers see is the overt external actions or behaviours of the child. However, it is essential to consider what underlies or causes the challenging behaviour. In order to do this, the teacher needs to understand the child's current state.

The behaviour of all humans is, in part, a response to how the individual thinks or feels at a specific time (e.g. think about how you talk to someone when you are feeling stressed). In the same way, a child's behaviour is often influenced by how they are feeling, for example, they may act out if they feel:

- » sick;
- » tired;
- » hungry;
- » emotionally overwhelmed;
- » overloaded by sensory experiences;
- » unsafe.

### **Understanding the Impacts of the Child's Environments**

Teachers need to be aware that demands or challenges of the environment might impact behaviour. Behaviour happens in a specific context but is influenced by a range of factors. So, when considering any behaviour, it is worth considering if there is something in the context or environment that may be contributing to the behaviour.

This is true in relation to positive behaviours (i.e. environmental factors that support desired behaviours of the child) as well as challenging behaviours (i.e. environmental factors that contribute to undesired behaviours).

It is also important to remember the impact of sensory environments – not all children respond in the same way to similar sensations (e.g. touch, smell, movement) and some children can experience seemingly harmless sensations as being very unpleasant (e.g. bothered by labels on clothing, extreme fear of being on unstable surfaces).

Challenging behaviour can also occur as a response to potentially intense emotional experiences or major life changes, such as:

- » moving home;
- » birth of a sibling;
- » start of kindergarten, changing classes / years, returning after holidays / school breaks;
- » communication difficulties with inability to communicate needs in a verbally accepted manner;
- » new teacher.

It is worth noting that apparently minor change or transition may be perceived intensely by the child and may lead to challenging behaviours. Some children (especially those with executive functioning difficulties, which will be explored later in this manual) may struggle to adapt to these (e.g. changing task or the end of break time).

In summary, when challenging behaviour occurs, it is important to ask “what is going on internally for this child? What are the types of demands that they are experiencing at the current time?” This allows the teacher to begin the process of adapting the situation to support the child.

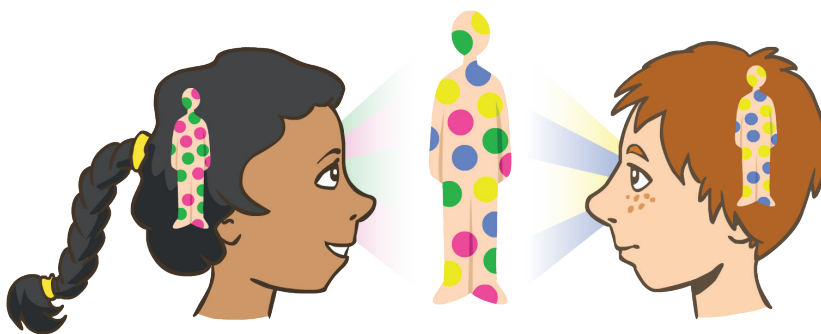
### **Understanding the Impact of Personal and Cultural Contexts**

Non-school based environmental factors may also play a part in the child's behaviour in school. For example, family stress (e.g., divorce, job of loss, bereavement) can have a significant impact on a child's behaviour. As teachers, it is important to consider what may be going on at home in the family or within the community the child comes from.

Each person has their own personal and cultural history, developed through their experiences of childhood, with their families and with their communities. The anthropologist Franz Boas used first the metaphor of “cultural glasses”, implying that no one can perceive reality its full or in the same way as another human being. Each person's personal history impacts the “glasses” through which they view the world (Boas, 1989).

When observing and making judgements about how challenging or acceptable a child's behaviour is, the adult is always seeing the child through their own personal 'glasses' which impacts on their response to that child. This – in turn – impacts on the child's behaviour and development. Children find themselves in many different situations and often, expectations of different environments (school, home and community) may not be the same. Sometimes, what appears to be challenging behaviour in the school environment may simply be the child behaving in accordance with accepted norms of their experiences in other environments. Likewise, the opposite is true. Factors influencing behaviour

- » biological: physical health, disability, genetic vulnerability, current state (fatigue, hunger)
- » biological-psychological: temperament, intellect
- » psychological: self-esteem, coping skills, social skills, emotional regulation
- » psychological-social: family relationships, trauma
- » social: peer relationships, family circumstances and influences, school, environment, cultural influences, communication skills
- » social-biological: effects of drugs

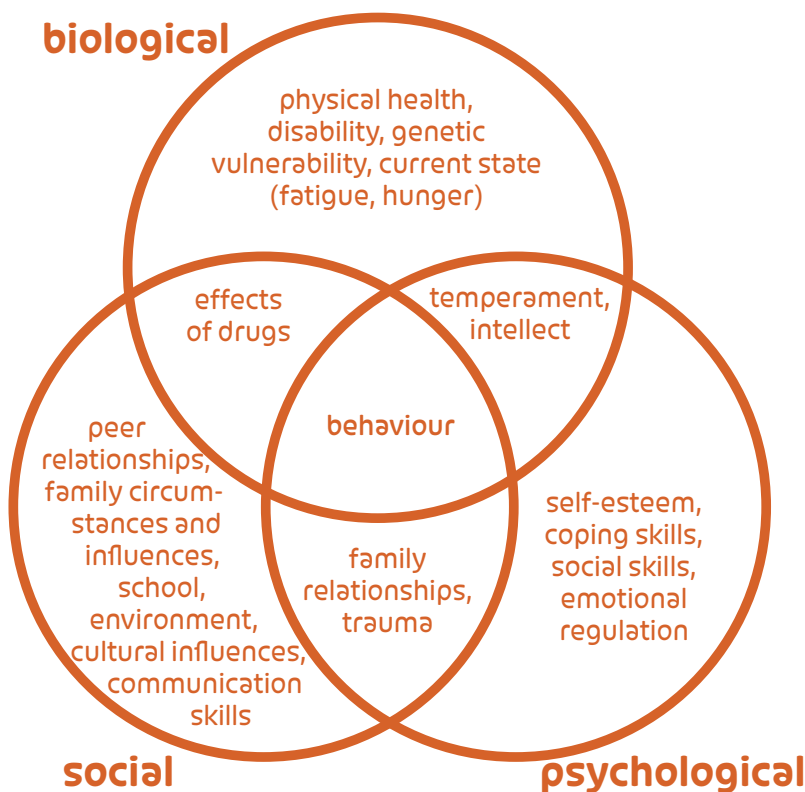


**FIGURE 3. AN ILLUSTRATION FOR BOAS' CULTURAL GLASSES METAPHOR**

Most children will demonstrate some challenging behaviours occur at some time or another. It is often difficult to distinguish when these behaviours are temporary or a symptom of a more serious problem. It is important to remember that – even if challenging behaviour is ultimately attributed to a more serious problem such as ADHD – the environment, family, and community effects are still

essential to consider. Additional difficulties in these environments may create further challenges for the child who may already be struggling to cope.

Competent professionals should decide whether the child's challenging behaviour is part of typical development patterns, normative responses to difficult circumstances, or a sign of a more significant developmental issue, such as ADHD. Teachers can play an important role in this process, in terms of identifying when a child needs to be referred for a diagnosis. However, regardless of whether the child has a diagnosis or not, teachers and parents are able to support children as they develop the ability to regulate their behaviours and emotions.



**FIGURE 4. FACTORS INFLUENCING BEHAVIOUR**

It is important to always try observe the child's behaviour without the judgement that may come from our existing 'glasses'. We must also try to understand their different environments, abilities and external experiences. This does not mean that we accept challenging behaviours, but it does mean that we:

- » seek to understand what's going on behind the child's behaviour (e.g. biology, psychology, society, culture, and environment)
- » work with parents and the child to agree on certain expectations for behaviour for the school environment

**FIGURE 5. TOO MUCH STIMULATION CAN LEAD TO CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR**



## Test yourself:

- » Can you identify 6 types of challenging behaviour?
- » Can you identify 2 environmental causes of behaviour?
- » Can you identify 2 personal causes of challenging behaviour?
- » How can culture impact on challenging behaviour?
- » How does our cultural 'glasses' impact on our view of challenging behaviour (e.g., when we make decisions or assumptions)?

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## Unit 2 ADHD

### 2a What is ADHD?

#### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will:

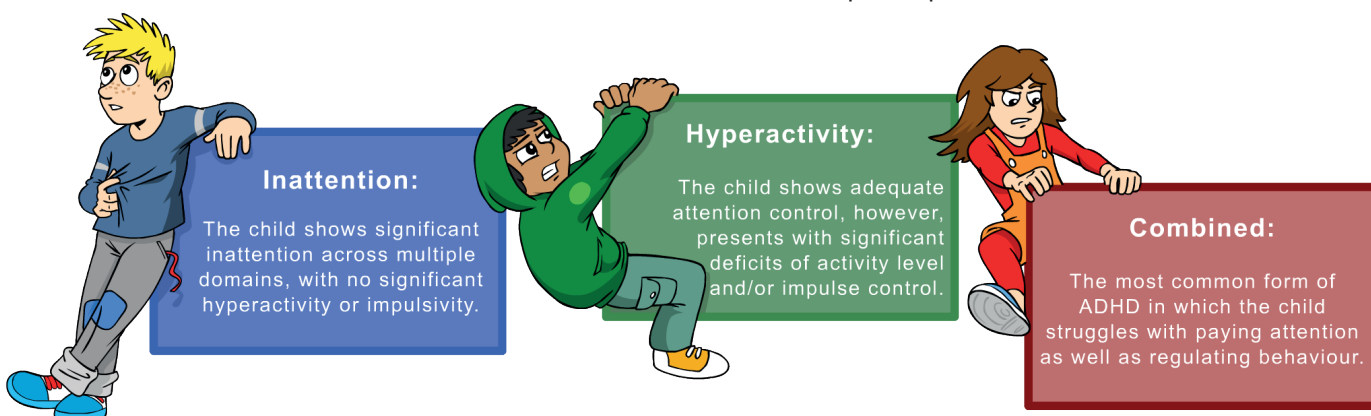
- » Recognize the signs, symptoms and current medical views of ADHD in early childhood
- » Have an overview of the process of diagnosis and treatment for ADHD in early childhood

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder associated with hyperactivity, impulsivity, and/or inattention. Not all children with a

diagnosis of ADHD have difficulties in all these areas, but all will struggle with at least one (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

ADHD is a neurological developmental disorder. This means that it is present from birth, and has associated neurological deficits or differences. ADHD may be linked with differences in brain development patterns,

**FIGURE 6.**  
TYPES OF ADHD



#### Inattention:

The child shows significant inattention across multiple domains, with no significant hyperactivity or impulsivity.

#### Hyperactivity:

The child shows adequate attention control, however, presents with significant deficits of activity level and/or impulse control.

#### Combined:

The most common form of ADHD in which the child struggles with paying attention as well as regulating behaviour.

with some brain areas taking longer to develop than in typically developing children. ADHD is also often genetic; it tends to run in families and be passed down to children from one or more family member. ADHD is the most common developmental disorder of early childhood, and occurs in approximately 5% of the population. It is three to four times more common in boys than in girls (Polanczyk et al., 2007). However, girls tend to have more difficulties with attention than hyperactivity, which may go unrecognised, and therefore undiagnosed. Girls may not show signs or symptoms until later (Murray et al., 2019).

As we saw in the previous unit, development is complex, and so when we think about ADHD we need to consider the contribution of a complex combination of factors, including biology, psychology, and the social and environmental experiences of the child. While we are not able to change the biology of the child, we ARE able to change the child's environment, which can mean that there are less things that the child fails to cope with (e.g. a child with ADHD finds sitting still more difficult than others, so we can shorten the amount of time that they are expected to do so). In this way, we can increase opportunities for learning and success and reduce the likelihood of difficulties often associated with ADHD in later life. We know from years of research and practice with children with ADHD that the earlier a child gets the help and support that they need, the less likely he or she will have related problems later in life (Halperin et al., 2012).

### **How to recognise ADHD?**

ADHD refers to a group of challenging behaviours, with three types of ADHD acknowledged:

- » **Predominantly inattentive**
- » **Predominantly impulsive/hyperactive**
- » **Combined type (including inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity)**

#### **Predominantly Inattentive Type ADHD**

As you are reading this, there are many things happening around you – the background noises around you, the view from the window the things you have to do today. As you read about each of these things, it is likely that you turned your attention to them briefly and then turned your attention back to reading the words on the page.

There are lots of different types of attention, which all allow us to cope with the demands of day-to-day life. If we do not pay attention to the bus coming down the road when crossing the street, we would be in danger. If we do not pay attention to a friend when she speaks, she might not want to be our friend anymore. If we do not listen to our bosses, then we might not keep our job. As we get older, we must pay attention for longer and use attention to perform increasingly complex tasks. Attention is dif-

ferent for all people. In the case of typically developing children and adults, some people will have a strong attention span, while others may be a little more easily distracted (Czigler, 2005), but these different attention spans will not prevent them from participating in the things that they need to do.

How do you know if a child in your class is having difficulties with attention?

- » **Overlooks or misses details, makes careless mistakes**
- » **Has problems sustaining attention during tasks or play time**
- » **Does not seem to listen when spoken to directly**
- » **Has problems organizing tasks and activities**
- » **Avoids or dislikes tasks that require sustained mental effort**
- » **Loses things necessary for tasks or activities**
- » **Is easily distracted by unrelated thoughts or stimuli**
- » **Cannot focus on a single activity**
- » **Gets bored before finishing the task**
- » **Has hard time listening to others, attention is distracted easily Does not follow through on instructions and processing information**

#### **Predominantly Impulsive/Hyperactive Type ADHD**

When a child does not seem able to stop and think about their actions, or seems to move or talk more or faster than other children, we might refer to these behaviours as impulsivity and hyperactivity. When it comes to ADHD, hyperactive-impulsive behaviours happen because the child has difficulty processing information as well as stopping an action. For example, a child may be playing with a jigsaw puzzle, when they see a bird outside the window. The child may jump up and run to the window, knocking the puzzle to the floor, not because the child planned to do so, but because the first time that they think about the action may be AFTER they have already done it. This is why, with children with ADHD-like behaviours, you may often find that they are very sorry after they do something because their actions were not intentional.

#### **How do you know if a child in your class struggles with hyperactivity and impulsivity?**

- » **Fidgets with hands or feet and squirms in their seats**
- » **Leaves their seats in situations when staying seated is expected**
- » **Runs or dashes around or climbs in situations where it is inappropriate**
- » **Is unable to play or engage in hobbies quietly**

- » Is constantly in motion or “on the go,” or acts as if “driven by a motor”
- » Talks nonstop
- » Blurts out an answer before a question has been completed, finishes other people’s sentences, or speaks without waiting for a turn in conversation
- » Has trouble waiting his or her turn
- » Often interrupts or disturbs other during a conversation
- » Is very impatient with others
- » Makes inconsiderate comments
- » Struggles to control their emotions
- » Is prone to temper tantrums
- » Interrupts or intrudes on others, for example in conversations, games, or activities, rather than first asking if they can join
- » Is restless and squirms too much
- » Cannot sit still during activities like eating or reading
- » Resist doing controlled activities – fidgets and is reluctant to perform the task

#### **Other behaviours associated with ADHD in early childhood**

There are other behaviours that are associated with ADHD in early childhood. These are not part of the diagnostic criteria for ADHD, but may be worth looking out for:

- » Aggressive behaviour during play
- » Absence of caution with strangers (friendly, occasionally helpful)
- » Too bold/careless
- » Poses danger to themselves or others with their carelessness and fearlessness
- » Lack of awareness of time
- » Find planning difficult
- » Problems going to sleep at night and/or have difficulty waking up
- » Problems making and keeping friends
- » Difficult relationships with adults
- » Do poorly in school, despite having ability and intelligence
- » May have motor or sensory difficulties (e.g. they may find it hard to sit upright for long periods of time).
- » Weak verbal and visual memory
- » Difficulties remembering series or sequences (e.g., days of the week, months).
- » Difficulties with listening and

understanding speech

- » Disturbed speech, for example, recalling the correct word or stuttering

Note of caution: It is important to keep in mind that all of the behaviours listed above may be found in typically developing children during early childhood. These behaviours are only considered a “symptom” of ADHD if they are extreme or stronger than expected, if a large amount of them are present, or are very different from the typical behaviours of other children of the same age.

### **Understanding Diagnosis and Treatment for ADHD**

Prior to school age, any diagnosis of ADHD should be handled very carefully, as the presence of ADHD-like behaviours is not necessarily an indicator for ADHD. Kindergarten-aged children tend to move a lot and may appear to be somewhat hyperactive and they may often be easily distracted. This does not necessarily mean they have ADHD; it may mean that the skills required to manage their attention have not yet developed.

Most kindergarten children are able to maintain their attention for approx. 10 minutes, but children with ADHD tend to change their activities every few minutes (AAP, 2000). At this age, a diagnosis of ADHD is only considered when the symptoms of extreme activity and impulsivity require continuous, constant monitoring to avoid injury.

#### **The process of diagnosis**

There is no blood or biological test to diagnose developmental disorders. Clinicians make judgements about a child’s behaviour, often from discussions with those who spend a lot of time with the child and through comparisons with behaviours expected of other children of the same age and gender. So, as kindergarten teachers, you are likely to be closely involved in the diagnostic process, and may be asked questions or required to complete a questionnaire.

Diagnosis of ADHD is performed by a trained clinician, and depends on the individual child and the suspected disorder. The diagnosis process often involves:

- » observations (of the child in school or at home);
- » clinical interviews with parents and teachers;
- » teacher and parent questionnaires about behaviour.

Getting a diagnosis doesn’t do much good alone. It may be needed so that the child gains access to treatment and those working with the child know what’s going on and what they can do to help. Without the right kind of supports, children and families affected by ADHD can experience a lot of stress and long-term negative outcomes (e.g., divorce, low self-esteem, school failure, school dropout,

risk behaviours like drugs and sex, etc.). However, ADHD is a very treatable condition and with the right types of supports, children with ADHD can develop into successful adults.

### Co-occurring conditions

When ADHD is present, there are a number of other conditions that may commonly occur. These include:

- » Specific learning disorders (e.g., dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia)
- » Sensory processing difficulties
- » Dyspraxia
- » Anxiety
- » Depression
- » Tourette syndrome
- » Compulsive-related disorders
- » Oppositional defiant disorders
- » Conduct disorder
- » Autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) (Young, S., Toone, B., & Tyson, C., 2003)

### Treatment options

Once a diagnosis of ADHD is given, many different types of treatments should be made available for the child and their parents. Treating the different symptoms of ADHD requires more than one professional and/or treatment – so that the child can learn to manage their ADHD and get on the road to success. Treatments / services usually target specific areas / behaviours.

Typical treatments for ADHD include:

- » Parent training
- » Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)
- » Speech and Language Therapy (SLT)
- » Occupational Therapy (OT)
- » Play Therapy
- » Anger Management (with the help of behaviour therapy)
- » Special Education Accommodations
- » Medication

This manual focuses on what can be done at school to support the needs of children with ADHD. ADHD is not an illness or a disease, so is not “cured” by medication. For some children, medication can help to manage some of their symptoms in order to enable them to participate in learning. Although medication may be prescribed before the age of 5 in severe cases, medication is not usually given to children before they go to school. This is why this manual refers to ADHD-like behaviour: a child may not YET have a diagnosis of ADHD, or may only demonstrate some of the symptoms, but may nonetheless cause difficulty for the child and their environment. The

strategies and methods in later chapters can be applied in their case as well.

It is important to remember that being told that the child has ADHD may be difficult for parents. When receiving a diagnosis, parents may experience a varied range of emotions, from sadness, to anger or relief and optimism. Whatever their reaction, remember that it is acceptable and it is important to support parents to make sense of and adapt to a new way of thinking about and living with their child.

### When to refer for diagnosis

It might be time to think about sending the child to a clinic for a diagnosis under the following circumstances:

- » the concerning behaviours have been on-going for an extensive period of time (e.g. 6 months or more)
- » the concerning behaviours do not match the child's developmental level (i.e. are notably different from other children of the same age)
- » the concerning behaviours are happening across several situations and environments (e.g. at home and in school)
- » the concerning behaviours occur in several different kinds of relationships (e.g. parents, teachers, peers, siblings)
- » the concerning behaviours are relatively severe
- » the concerning behaviours harm the child's ability to get involved with and complete typical learning opportunities and developmental tasks (e.g. developing appropriate social relationships or pre-reading skills) (OCD, 2005).

### Test your knowledge:

- » **What is typical of inattentive behaviour?**
- » **When is a challenging behaviour a cause for concern or when do we need to think about referring the child to diagnosis?**
- » **What can the role of the kindergarten teacher be in the diagnostic process?**

## 2b ADHD and Executive Functions

### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will:

- » Understand what executive functions are
- » Understand how executive functions develop
- » Understand how and why children with ADHD struggle with executive functions

### What are executive functions:

Imagine that your child's birthday is in two weeks and you are planning a party. Think about all the things you need to do. First, you will have to decide what day the celebration will be on, the time and the place. Then you'll need to prepare and send out invitations to the right people, without forgetting anyone. You'll also need to figure out the menu, and plan the activities that the children will play. There is a lot to think about, plan, and do.

To succeed at this task, you need to use your executive functions. Executive functions are high level thinking skills that allow us to complete complex tasks. In our party-planning example, our ability to organize, make decisions, prioritize, inhibit actions that are not important and find strategies to ensure that nothing is forgotten are all examples of executive functions.

A lot of complex human behaviours are based on executive functions.

Executive functions work like the conductor of an orchestra (Brown, 2013). In an orchestra, there are many different instruments, all of which have to come on or stop at the right time to make the music. If one is out of sync with the others, the orchestra doesn't make music, but rather it makes noise. Similarly, if different mental processes are out of sync, it is difficult for children to figure out their external worlds and organise their response to it. Without conductors of orchestras for our mind, we end up in a bit of a mess.

Similarly, our behaviours are based on a lot of different mental processes (e.g., attention, memory, planning) that work together in various combinations. If they are not working together in the right way, behaviour can appear a little chaotic. So, a child might do something (action) before they realise they have done it, we call this impulsivity, where a behaviour happens before the person has had a chance to notice (attention) and decide what to do (e.g., planning, flexibility).

Executive functions begin to develop in the early years, go through a period of rapid development during adolescence, and are fully developed by young adulthood. Although not fully developed, a number of pre-executive functions are already apparent in early childhood. Since difficulties with executive functions are commonly asso-

**FIGURE 7. EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS, LIKE A CONDUCTOR IN AN ORCHESTRA, ENSURE HARMONY**





ciated with ADHD as children get older, it is important to understand how executive functions develop and what we can do to support pre-executive functions in early childhood. The following are examples of types of pre-executive functions:

- » **anticipation** - I know what happens after what and based on the signs I expect the event to happen (e.g. I hear the sound of plates and cutlery, so I know we'll shortly have lunch)
- » **choice of goal** - I know what I want to achieve (e.g. I want to build a tower out of bricks)
- » **planning** - I think over what I want to do and how will I achieve it (e.g. I know that I don't want the tower to fall so I place the bigger bricks on the bottom)
- » **short-term memory** - I keep in mind the information I need (e.g. an imaginary picture of the tower I am building)
- » **attention processes** - I focus on the things I need to focus on and ignore unnecessary information
- » **inhibition** – I don't undertake behaviours that are not related to reaching of my goal (e.g. I do not start playing with the truck I found in the box while looking for a cube)
- » **sort order** - understanding of succession (e.g. I first build the lower level of the tower, and only then begin the next one)
- » **cause and effect** – I know my behaviour has consequences (e.g., I don't push the tower because I know it will fall down)
- » **pairing** – I can identify elements that belong together (e.g. I stacking cubes that fit together)
- » **start-stop processes** – I know when to stop one action and start another (e.g. I dig in the box to find a matching cube; once found, I stop searching and continue building);

Execution functions are therefore required

- » to plan and make decisions,
- » to identify and correct mistakes,
- » to evaluate situations and apply the correct behaviour,
- » to combine different types of information to allow goals to be achieved and
- » to adapt behaviour flexibly to a changing environment.

Executive function allows the following behavioural competences:

- » Intentional, goal-directed, or purposeful behaviour;
- » Focusing, maintaining, and shifting attention;

- » planning and organization;
- » inhibition;
- » ignoring distractions;
- » selecting an appropriate strategy for problem solving;
- » self-monitoring, search for mistakes, monitoring (continuous self-monitoring);
- » flexibility;
- » change (i.e., one does not get stuck in the task but can quickly change tasks/strategy);
- » multitasking of parallel activities.

Studies identify four major skill/function areas as central to the proper performance of the executive function system. Below we will briefly describe them, so you can:

(a) observe the child's behaviour and analyse what may underlie behavioural difficulties and

(b) support the child in developing necessary skills to reduce challenging behaviours

**Working memory:** We need to be able to store information for enough time to perform operations with it. For example, when playing 'Finish the story' with children, the child has to recall statements that have already been made while, simultaneously, recall matching, meaningful words relevant to the story to be able to contribute. Working memory does not only store information just received from the environment, but also those that we have "copied" from our permanent (long-term) memory to perform a current task.

**Behaviour inhibition:** The basis for self-regulating behaviour is our ability to suppress unwanted behaviour in certain situations, to demonstrate sufficient self-control and to stop certain actions. For example, when a child waits until the kindergarten teacher finishes a tale and does not jump up and down in their seat to indicate that they know the end of the story.

**Cognitive Flexibility, Flexible Change:** We are able to change our behaviour and our problem-solving strategy according to a given situation. For example, afternoon enjoying a good laugh with the children when they tell funny stories, we then have to move on to a different task such as setting the table.

**Attention:** Involves several processes:

- » orienting/alertness (the ability to increase one's alertness when needed to follow a stimulus of high priority)
- » selective/focused attention (the ability to focus on one source of environmental information while ignoring other information)
- » divided attention (the ability to attend and respond to multiple tasks at the same time)

- » vigilance/sustained attention (the ability to maintain alertness for a long period of time to complete a task) (Brown, 2013).

### **Difficulties with Executive Functions**

In cases where executive functions do not work effectively, it will impact day-to-day life, for example:

- » a disorganized or “scattered” brain
- » forgetfulness
- » easily distracted
- » unable to sustain attention
- » forgetting instructions (especially ones with multiple steps)
- » planning and completing a task (especially one with multiple steps)
- » putting down and forgetting personal items
- » interrupting or intruding on other people

If the development of executive functions is impeded for any reason, consequences in everyday life may be:

- » forgetfulness;
- » distraction;
- » unable to sustain attention;
- » forgetting instructions (especially with multiple steps);
- » planning and completing a task (especially with multiple steps);
- » putting down and forgetting personal items;
- » interrupting or intruding on other people.

Differences in the development of executive functions are closely associated with ADHD. Although ADHD re-

fers primarily to the problem of attention and activity, the problem of executive functions may be what causes ADHD-like behaviour (Barkley, 1997).

Unfortunately, however, children who demonstrate these behaviours are sometimes labelled as unmotivated, lazy, or rude, when in fact, under-developed executive functioning may be the source of the difficulty. It is important to recall in these instances that these behaviours are not intentional and should be met with support and understanding as opposed to punishment.

Difficulties with executive functions are not only found in ADHD, they are also linked with other developmental disorders including autism (Hill, 2004), Tourette's syndrome (Tárnok et al., 2007), and other learning disorders (Reiter et al., 2005).

### **Test yourself:**

- » **What are executive functions?**
- » **Name 4 inattentive behaviour.**
- » **Name 4 hyperactive-impulsive behaviours.**
- » **If you have a child with ADHD in your classroom, what things might they struggle with?**
- » **Name 3 types of executive function deficits and how they might impact on the day-to-day life of a child in your classroom.**

## 2c ADHD and the Environment

### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will:

- » Identify how – for all children – different types of learning environments might support or limit learning
- » Understand how common learning environments present particular challenges for children with ADHD-like behaviours

### Creating an Inclusive Environment

All child development is impacted by the environment. When we are working with children with differences in development, we need to create an even more nurturing and supportive environment. And we need to create an environment that supports these differences.

Research suggests that, without appropriate and professional support, people with ADHD often:

- » drop out of school early,
- » are less educated,
- » experience workplace problems (Young, Toone and Tyson, 2003),
- » are less popular among peers and have few friends (Neimeijer et al., 2008), and
- » their marriages frequently end in divorce (Young, Toone and Tyson, 2003).

In the early years, the brain develops at a tremendous rate and is particularly sensitive to environmental influences, while high levels of stress may harm development. So, children need environments with:

- » low stress levels
- » high levels of stimulation and challenges
- » emotional safety and security

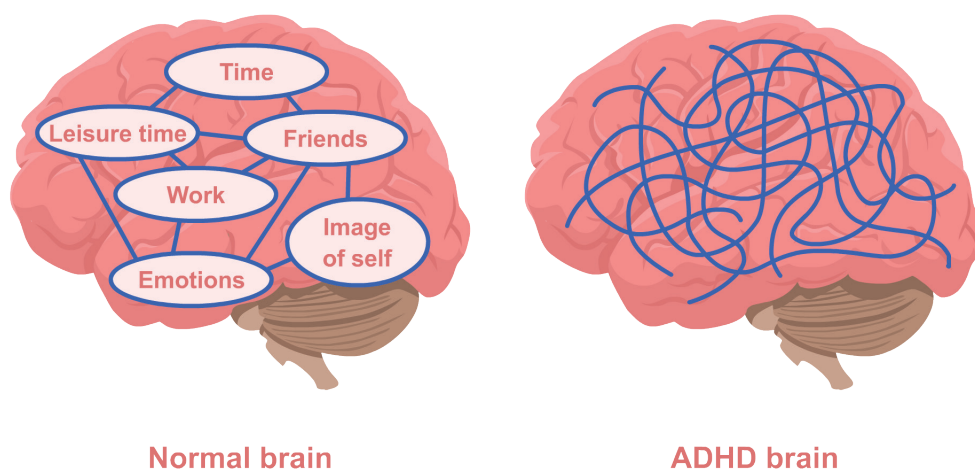
Some behaviours which look like ADHD may occur as a response to extreme emotional stress, but are not ADHD. When a child experiences emotional turmoil or trauma (e.g. neglect, physical or sexual abuse, severe stress, family conflicts exposure to crime, violence, substance use, and chaotic living conditions) their executive functions may not develop in a typical fashion, and they may show ADHD-like signs (ADHD Institute, 2019).

It is very important to note, however, that the environment does not “cause” ADHD, but it can trigger ADHD-like behaviours or make pre-existing ADHD symptoms worse (Livingstone et al., 2016).

Also remember that a child’s ADHD diagnosis does not mean anything about the quality of parenting. It is unhelpful for parents to think in terms of ‘blame’. One approach to supporting children with ADHD is to think of them as “wired differently” and to find ways to create supportive environments.

If a small child is not exposed to physical or other negative effects, their executive skills are beginning to develop and grow from birth to adulthood.

FIGURE 8. „THEY ARE WIRED DIFFERENTLY”



It is important that teachers are aware of ADHD, are able to identify if a child in their class needs support, and know how best to support children with ADHD-like behaviours. All children require attention, but children with ADHD-like behaviours need support, patience, attention, and understanding even more so. For the child with ADHD, we cannot underestimate the importance of their physical, social and sensory environments (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Many aspects of the environment may be difficult for a child with ADHD-like behaviours to deal with, perhaps due to demands that highlight particular areas of difficulties. So, it is important to consider the environment and the characteristics of the activities that they are being asked to complete.

Some examples of things that children with ADHD-like behaviours may struggle with:

- » Behavioural expectations (e.g., how long must the children sit quietly for, how much movement is there, what is considered “good” or “appropriate” behaviour).
- » A lot of stimuli in the physical environment (e.g. objects, noise, smell, etc.)
- » The type of activities or the way an activity is structured. For example, does the activity require the child to plan and enact a plan, does it rely on memory (e.g., do you give instructions verbally or do you expect the child to remember how they did something before), are there multiple steps involved in the activity or the instructions (e.g. complex board games)
- » Understanding and responding to social situations (e.g. agreeing to play a game that a friend prefers)
- » Emotionally provocative events (e.g. another child snatches their toy)

#### Changing Your Glasses and Behavioural Expectations:

In Unit 1, we talked about how we all see the world, the child, and behaviour through our own cultural glasses. These can be biased and based on what we think is im-

portant. When considering the environments, we create for children with ADHD-like behaviours, we want to make sure that we check in with ourselves and ask ourselves:

- » ‘is this behaviour challenging’?
- » ‘are my expectations ‘fair’?’
- » ‘what kinds of behaviours do I value or expect’?
- » ‘what behaviours are expected in the child's home / culture’ (if there is a mismatch between what is expected at home and in school, then this creates challenges for the child who has to navigate both)?

#### Test yourself:

- » **In what way can ADHD be influenced by the environment?**
- » **What aspects of the environment may be difficult for a child with ADHD-like behaviour?**

## 2d Strength-Based Approaches to Understanding ADHD

*“In special education, there's too much emphasis placed on the deficit and not enough on the strength.” (Temple Grandin)*

#### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will:

- » **Understand what a strengths-based approach is in early childhood settings**
- » **Identify strengths commonly associated with children who demonstrate ADHD-like behaviours**

As its name implies, a strength-based approach suggests that all people have strengths, and these are the building blocks to healthy development. A strengths-based approach does not think about development in terms of just survival, but rather focuses on positive attributes which support children to grow into “thriving” young people and adults.

The core of strength-based education is that

- » educators themselves first **discover their own skills and strengths** and then
- » use these to **recognize children's skills** to support their learning (Lopez & Louis, 2009).

The strengths-based approach believes that we need to identify what is good and positive about the person. The aim is to enhance development and to use strengths to overcome difficulties, and requires us to focus on strengths rather than difficulties. So, for children with ADHD-like behaviours, this approach encourages us to focus on what the child is good at, what they like to do, and who they might become. These will be the activities they will be able to perform at a high level, and which will support the development of self-esteem and willingness to try new things.

This approach does not deny that the existence of challenges, but focuses on techniques to recognize what works for the individual child, and which strategies need to be further developed.

To adopt a strengths-based approach, it is important to remember:

- » The learning process of children, and how they gain experience of the world, is dynamic and complex
- » Children learn and develop in different ways
- » Focus on what exists (as opposed to what is absent)
- » Find what works well for the individual child
- » When children and their educators (parents and kindergarten teachers) recognize and appreciate their individual strengths, the child is empowered and supported to learn and develop

So, we should ask the following questions:

- » What is working in my classroom?
- » When are the children in my classroom working at their best (and what's going on)?
- » What tasks or activities does the child complete without difficulty?
- » What does the child love to do?
- » What is the child good at?

Strength exists at two levels:

- » Internal strengths exist at the level of the child, which can be a characteristic, trait, attributes, skill, tendency, behaviour, belief, etc.
- » External strengths exist within the child's environment, which can include things like social relationships, services, resources, community, faith-based group or faith, etc.

Both internal and external strengths are important. By recognizing them, teachers can support the social and emotional development, as well as motivation, self-esteem, and well-being. Try to notice the individual strengths of each child: does he have strong verbal skills, a broad vocabulary, eloquent speech? Does she think logically, and solve problems well?

### ADHD-related strengths

Many behaviours characteristic of ADHD can be viewed as strengths when viewed from a different perspective. Some of these may (De Schipper et al., 2015) include:

- » Creativity
- » Energetic
- » Seeing the world in a different way
- » Exciting and fun to be around
- » Flexibility and spontaneity
- » Multi-tasking
- » Resilience
- » Risk takers

Strengths in the kindergarten can include:

- » the child's positive relationship with both the kindergarten teacher and the other children
- » the knowledge and attitude of the kindergarten teacher
- » structure, support and personalized, flexible barriers

### Test yourself:

- » **What does a strengths-based approach mean?**
- » **Where will you be able to find strengths?**
- » **Can you list 3 strengths linked to ADHD?**

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## Unit 3 Including Children with ADHD-like Behaviours in the Classroom

This unit explores practical strategies to support the inclusion of children with ADHD-like behaviours in the kindergarten, including creating supportive environments, adopting strengths-based strategies and developing executive functions.

Start off by reading through the sections to gain an understanding of the approaches and then decide which areas you want to target and what strategies you want to adopt with which children. This manual is designed to support you in your classroom, bearing in mind that you are the expert in your setting.

Use this manual with a “pick and mix” approach. Remember, a key principle to long term change or skill development is to start small and go slow. If we try and do everything all at once, we end up doing nothing. So, focus on what is a priority or a few priorities for you and your home.

### 3a Strengths-based approaches

#### Learning Outcomes:

**By the end of this section, you will:**

- » Develop strategies to identify the strengths of children, their families and their environments when faced with ADHD-like behaviours
- » Be able to apply strength-based approaches when supporting the development of a child with ADHD-like behaviours

As we read in Unit 2, the strength-based approach is a framework that can support our working with children. There are different approaches to strengths-based working. Here we will explore identifying strengths, using strengths and creating a safe emotional environment.

*“The fundamental goal of positive education is to promote flourishing or positive mental health within the school community.”*  
(Norrish et. al., 2013)

#### Changing your glasses

Applying the strength-based approach, we can change our glasses and consider many behaviours that are typically seen as challenging in a different light. For example, we can see a behaviour as “hyperactive-impulsive,” or we can see a child who has lots of energy, is interested and curious, and is willing to get involved.

#### Positive Education

Positive Education aims to develop wellbeing and happiness in children. These can be created using insights from Martin Seligman's PERMA model (Seligman, 2018). This model provides a helpful framework for us to use to develop positive learning experiences and environments for children with ADHD-like behaviours.

- » Positive Emotions
- » Engagement
- » Relationships (positive)
- » Meaning
- » Achievement

#### Positive Emotions:

Try to create learning experiences where children experience positive motions, like joy, gratitude, interest, and hope. This can be done through games or intentional activities.

Engagement is about being fully absorbed in an activity or task that gets the child to use a skill they have, but also one which is challenging, so they develop these skills.

Often times children are most engaged when they are using their strengths, so you might want to identify these first.

### Relationships:

Positive relationships (with adults and other children) is really important for development. Try and develop this relationship with the child with ADHD-like behaviour. This needs to be authentic and sincere. The child needs to feel genuinely cared about.

### Meaning:

A sense of meaning is important to all of us. You may get meaning from being an educator or from other areas in your life. We create a sense of meaning for children when we support them in feeling like they belong to and serve something bigger than themselves. Belonging to and serving something you believe is bigger than yourself;

### Accomplishment:

All children including or especially children with ADHD-like behaviour need to feel like they can be successful and work towards that, feeling like they have achieved something and mastered certain skills.

As teachers, we seek to provide learning experiences and experiences for success and mastery in what we do in the grouproom/school. This is particular important and necessary for children with ADHD-like behaviours, because they can sometimes experience a lot of challenges and failures.

## Creating a safe emotional environment

All children need a safe emotional environment. But given the challenges children with ADHD-like behaviours experience, the negative experiences, challenges regulating their emotions, and feeling out of control, it is especially important that they are provided with care and emotional nurturing.

### Some key principles:

- » Accept the child for who they are
- » Give them praise and opportunities to feel like they are capable and successful
- » Provide positive feedback and rewards
- » Use clear and consistent communication
- » Enjoy shared experiences
- » Demonstrate thoughtful, considerate behaviour

### Accepting the child

If I asked you to tell me why you became a teacher, what would you say? We all got into teaching for different reasons. Before we entered the classroom, we dreamt about the kinds of children we would work with and

the joy we would get from working with them. However, the realities of a modern-day classroom are often very different from what we expected and we are often faced with children who challenge us with their behaviour.

There are two things to remember here.

- » First, these children need our understanding; their behaviour is not intentional.
- » Second, it is often the children who challenge us who are the ones who need us most. Children with ADHD-like behaviours are often misunderstood and rejected, and kindergarten teachers need to demonstrate love and acceptance.

When we accept a child, we find it easy to pay them positive attention. If we accept that their ADHD-related challenges are a real difficulty for them, then we are more likely to provide them with the support they need. All positive change happens in the context of a positive relationship, and the start to all positive relationships is understanding, acceptance, and love.

How can we create the emotional security the child needs?

- » Make the child feel cared about.
- » Emphasize his/her strengths.
- » Tell him/her that he/she is important to you.
- » Engage him in as many activities as possible. Time and attention are the greatest gift a child can receive.
- » Communication is key: Allow the child to ask questions, take time to answer and to ask questions in return, and listen to they have to say.
- » Encourage them and believe in them. 'I know you can do it'
- » Make sure you create opportunities for success and enable them to learn new things.
- » Be authentic: If you make a mistake own up to it / be honest. If the child makes a mistake, be patient with them, they will learn from these mistakes.
- » Recognise and draw the children's attention to beautiful, interesting things - find them in everything and everyone.
- » Keep your sense of humour and laugh a lot.
- » Take care of another creature: Have a pet (in the kindergarten environment most often it is an aquarium or terrarium) or a plant, which the children can take care of.

**FIGURE 9.**  
**AN AGE-APPROPRIATE,**  
**COMPETENT TASK:**  
**WATERING THE PLANTS**



## Identifying strengths

In order to apply a strength-based approach, we need to identify the child's strengths, so that we can harness the positive attributes that can be built upon, whether these are within the child or their environment.

One way to think about the child's strengths is to think about them "at their best" you can talk to parents and colleagues about this. You can involve the child and talk to them about them "at their best" – maybe get them to draw a picture of themselves when they are at their best (Norrish, et al. 2013).

Using the space below, list all the words you think about when you think about "ADHD" (we covered a lot of these above) and try to reframe the characteristics in a positive strengths-based light. We have done the first few for you.

What do you associate with ADHD?	What is this in terms of strengths?
Hyperactive	Lots of energy
Impulsive	Interested in everything
Talks too much	
Lack of self-control	
Difficult to make friends	

**TABLE 1. CHANGE YOUR GLASSES WHEN LOOKING AT ADHD!**

Strengths are not only about internal strengths; they can also be in the environment. Think about the child you are working with that has ADHD-like behaviours. Can you list some of the external strengths the child has?

Child's name	
What strengths ...	
... are there at home? (e.g. positive relationship with mother)	
... are there in the community? (e.g. extended family are close by)	
... are there in the physical environment in the classroom? (e.g. loves art materials or reading time)	
... are there in the social environment of the school? (e.g. good social skills and wants to help or a teacher the child really likes)	
... are there the educational environment? (e.g. loves reading time)	

**TABLE 2. OBSERVE AND NOTE THE STRENGTHS OF THE CHILD**

Once you know what the strengths are, you can develop them or you can use them to achieve a goal.

Start with what they are capable of - the first steps in increasing self-esteem

To increase self-esteem, teachers need to be aware of the strengths and positive qualities of a child with challenging / ADHD behaviour.

A child's strengths include, for example:

- » curious, interested;
- » creative, characterized by unique ideas, games and problem solving;
- » shows deep interest in certain topics (that are interesting, important to him / her);
- » sensitive, increased need for love;
- » enthusiasm for doing certain things with great energy and vigour;
- » be able to inspire other children;
- » have a good sense of humour;
- » risk-taker, driven by discovery, curiosity;
- » affectionate;
- » has good organizational skills.

By observing and mapping the child's strengths you can not only boost their confidence, but it can also be a useful tool in solving challenging behaviours.

What we focus on or where we start to work, is the starting point for the child. The starting point should be what they can do (not what they cannot do or what they are not good at). Challenges then become opportunities to explore. If you start them off having experiences of success, then it's something to build on and creates hope and optimism for the child.

When you think about behaviour plans (or areas for development), try to include or start with something the child can do. This will create a feeling of success and achievement. You can build on this.

<b>Jimmy, 5 years old, hard to maintain his attention he has motor restlessness/is fidgety</b>	<b>Suggestions for interventions, supportive environment for Jimmy</b>
Being aware of strengths	Recognise his strengths! He makes other people laugh, invents exciting stories, able to origami many kinds of airplanes
Positive role model	His role model is his father, with whom he often fixes things at home



Assistive technology, universal learning environment	Emphasizing daily routines e.g. a musical signal indicates the change of activity; rewarding system if he has been persistent in a task-work (receive airplane parts so at the end he can exhibit the machine in the group), no one should sit right next to him during activities so he can concentrate more, and he can sit on a balancing sphere so micro movements help him focus his attention and release his mobility.
Strength based learning strategies	Tasks matching his interest (nature), taking part in group tasks
Enhancing human resources	Assistant kindergarten teacher role: helping the smaller children, telling stories, fixing broken gadgets
Strengthening positive view of the future	Strengthening self-confidence, helping to find the proper school

**TABLE 3. EXAMPLES FOR INTERVENTION AND CREATING AND SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENT**

A few other examples of activities you could use in your grouproom:

### Gratitude Excercises

People who keep being grateful for things in their lives are more optimistic, less depressed, less lonely and experience more positive emotions. This is especially important for children with ADHD-like behaviours.

The teacher should also practice gratitude exercises while teaching them to the children.

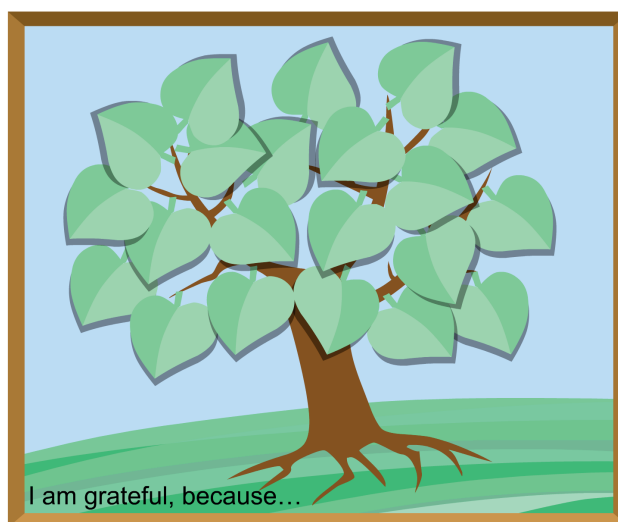
The teacher can start by writing a list of 3-5 things he/she is grateful for. In the next step, explain why you are grateful for these. A very high level of gratitude is when you write a letter to someone who has made a profound, positive change in your life. The next step is to hand over this letter to him that person.

There are several ways we can introduce the concept of gratitude to children:

- » we can integrate it into daily activities (for example, we can ask the children to say something they are grateful for

at lunch time or before going home):  
WHAT are you grateful for and WHY?

- » Good mood hunting;
- » Gratitude-tree (they can hang on it thanksgiving letter);
- » Gratitude -newspaper;
- » Gratitude conversation circle;
- » Gratitude collage or other artwork;
- » Unexpected good deeds - think together about ideas that children can do for others, to help others - and then you can talk about how they noticed that it is needed /it causes joy to the other, and how did it feel
- » Teach them to say thank you for things;
- » At storytelling: Read them books about gratitude (Positive Psychology, 2019).



**FIGURE 10. GRATITUDE-TREE**

### Meditation, mindfulness

Meditation helps children to calm down and concentrate, helps manage their feelings, and increase their self-confidence. Meditation is the conscious control of attention.

There are countless meditation practices that can be tested even with 2-3 years old children.

- » **Smelling** (Fragrance Meditation): Collect odorous objects from the garden and from the kindergarten- be it flower blossom, spicy, sweet, etc. (e.g. caraway seeds, ground coffee, lemon, mint, lavender, usual hand wash soap, toothpaste, etc.). Blindfold the children's eyes, then ask him to describe the scents - and at the end maybe recognise it as well.
- » **Nature-meditation**: during a walk, or in the yard, call children's attention to the sounds of nature (or of the big city) and listen to the smells and lights and shadows.

- » **Breathing-Meditation:** When we spoke about emotional regulation, we have already spoken about the importance of breathing. Get some feathers of birds, or make a paper pinwheel with the kids. One of their hands is holding the pinwheel, the other one is placed on their belly. They take a deep breath. As they exhale slowly, they observe how the pinwheel rotates and how the belly moves to feel the air inflow and outflow.



**FIGURE 11. MEDITATION HAS COUNTLESS BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN**

### **School and classroom ethos / culture:**

A strengths-based approach to ethos and culture, is one where relationships are seen as central, children's strengths and positive attributes championed, positive outcomes are seen as central to the ways of the school's policies and practices.

### **Test yourself**

- » Can you name 3 strengths associated with ADHD?
- » What are the components of PERMA and how can you apply these to your grouproom?
- » What are the key components to creating a safe emotional environment?

## **3b Environmental modification: Creating a Structured Nurturing Environment**

### **Learning Outcomes:**

**By the end of this section, you will:**

- » Be familiar with how to change the learning environment of a child with ADHD-like behaviours to suit their learning needs
- » Be able to apply the basic principles of structuring the learning environment effectively
- » Be able to develop boundaries and expectations for behaviour (child and group)

All children need the right type of environment to support their development. When we think of 'inclusion,' we think about creating a learning environment that supports all children, because all children are unique and need different things to grow and to flourish. When it comes to children with ADHD-like behaviours, the same principles apply: we need to find ways to create learning environments that support the individual learning needs of the child with ADHD-like behaviours.

*"Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid"*  
(a quote believed to be said by Albert Einstein).

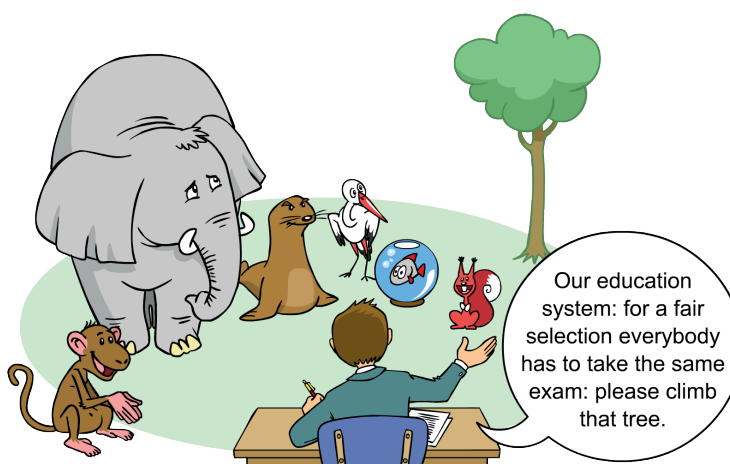
**FIGURE 12.**

**THE KEY TO SUCCESS IS A TASK MATCHED WITH THE ABILITIES**

### **A nurturing structured environment:**

A structured nurturing environment requires awareness and use of strengths, strength-based learning strategies, positive relationships and age appropriate communication. For children with ADHD-like behaviours, some key components of a nurturing structured environment include:

- » Structure
- » Flexibility
- » Assistive technologies (e.g. visual aids, daily routine, timers)



» Suitability and adaptation of environmental factors

» High yet realistically achievable expectations

While all children need clear structure and boundaries, this is particularly true for children with ADHD-like behaviour. A structured nurturing environment refers to the physical space, the order and timing of activities, routines, how activities are introduced, how transitions are managed, boundaries and expectations, and how these are communicated to the child.

When we provide consistent structure, rules, habits, routines, reminders, and boundaries, we provide children with ADHD-like behaviour opportunities to learn and cope with the challenges they face. Make use of charts and organisation systems. These should depend on the child and the situation – so be creative and personalise it in line with the child's interests. Visual aids and prompts (photographs, pictograms, humorous drawings, and flow charts) can help to focus attention, keep track of time, and structure time.

For example, by structuring the day and following clear routines, the child with ADHD can track events and recognize what comes after what. In this way, we structure the environment to support children who have not fully developed their planning skills and make their lives more predictable (thus providing emotional security too). Modifying and adjusting the external environment can support the learning and development of the child, but make sure not to over-structure the child's environment – leave space for child-centred learning, so that they have choice and autonomy to direct their own development, learning and experiences.



FIGURE 13. A SCHEDULE IS STRUCTURING THE DAY, SO THE CHILD WILL ALWAYS KNOW WHAT COMES NEXT

## Physical environment

The physical environment refers to the physical spaces around us. This includes buildings and rooms, the objects and materials in them, how spaces are arranged and decorated (e.g., seating areas, carpet), what it looks, smells and sounds like, and how it is heated and lighted – these can all have an impact on the experience of the child with challenging and ADHD-like behaviours. The physical environment can provide stimulation for growth but some aspects can also be overwhelming for some children. Creating a structured nurturing environment means paying attention to these things and making changes based on the needs of the individual children in your classroom. As all kindergarten teachers know, young children will often want to explore all aspects to their environment and safety needs to come first. If there is a child with ADHD-like behaviours in your grouproom, try to develop a well-structured physical layout. A cluttered, narrow, or disorganised space can be difficult to manage for children with ADHD-like behaviours so try to minimise these situations.

## Organisation of material - A place for everything and everything in its place:

A structured environment is in itself a reassuring factor for children. A lot of toys mean a lot of stimulation, which may cause distraction. If there are fewer toys in the sight of children with ADHD-like behaviours, they may be able to concentrate more and will be distracted less. If they have too many choices, they might be overwhelmed (Dauch et al., 2018).

Toys and other learning materials should have their own place. Large storage boxes and baskets are helpful, because they show the child clearly where the item goes.

Try to develop the simplest organisation plan (boxes with photos of what belongs inside, or cupboards with clearly labelled shelves) and keep items to a minimum. Encourage the child to help with keeping objects organized. We want the child to be stimulated and be able to explore new things and play with a variety of objects. However, try to keep these organised and it will help them order their inner world and outer world.

Make the concept of 'time' understandable (physical and visual):

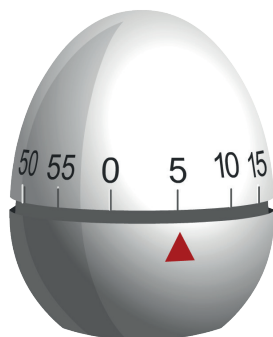
Children with ADHD-like behaviour can often struggle to understand and manage time. You can provide points



**FIGURE 14.**  
**A SHELF TO ORGANISE TOYS**

of reference in the environment to structure time. Indicate how long and/or how many times we are doing something and what will happen next. For example, you may have a schedule, using pictures or photographs, that show the sequence of activities on a day or every day. You can use a kitchen timer or hourglass to physically demonstrate the passage of time. For example, if you want them to work on a particular activity for 3 minutes, you might put three minutes on an egg timer beside them as they work.

**FIGURE 15. THERE ARE SEVERAL TOOLS TO TRACK TIME, E.G. KITCHEN TIMER**



### Managing stimuli

Children with ADHD can be particularly sensitive to the influence of sounds, scents, lights and other people in the environment. For some children with ADHD-like behaviour, this is especially difficult because they seek certain types of sensory input as a means of managing their sensory experiences. Without careful observation, we cannot know what type of stimulation is challenging for the child, and what type of stimulation is helpful for them. When thinking about the impact of sensory experiences on behaviour, it's important to remember that all children process sensory information differently. You might have read about popular sensory activities that are recommended, but very often, something 'popular' might actually make things worse for the specific child. It's key that any sensory intervention is personalised to the specific sensory needs of the individual child.

more quietly. This supports children who are sensitive to the noise in their environment.

- » **Provide quiet periods.** Try and built into the day as an informal signal or normal routine a quiet calm place where the child can go to calm down.
- » **“Take a break spot”** (e.g. quiet corner, chill out space, time out): If a child appears to be overwhelmed with the room's stimuli, we can provide him with a safe place, time and rest for a short while, alone or with an assistant.

**FIGURE 16. A VISUAL TIMER**



### Back to nature

For children with ADHD-like behaviours, being outside in nature can reduce ADHD-like behaviours, provide an outlet for hyperactivity and improve attention. Get children outside and back to nature. For example, go for a nature walk, run in a grassy area, or have them play in a mud kitchen. (Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2011)

### Setting Boundaries and Expectations

A part of creating a structured nurturing environment is thinking about the boundaries or expectations set for behaviour in the grouproom.

What are boundaries and expectations:

What we value in the grouproom situation, and the culture we want to encourage, is sometimes called the grouproom ethos. This is reflected in the way students, parents/carers, and schools staff behave and treat each other. Think about what it is that you value in your grouproom culture. These values will inform the types of boundaries and expectations that you set.

Boundaries and expectations help to create an atmosphere that enables learning, and they are there to teach children skills (especially about independence, self-control, and social skills). While the child's executive functions are still not developed, boundaries and expectations will support them in making good choices. Boundaries and expectations should not be about control, but should rather focus on providing structure and scaffolding for children while they learn. Rather than focusing on enforcement, try to encourage exploration within the boundaries.

Boundaries and expectations work best when they are developed collaboratively with the child. When doing so, the kindergarten teacher may need to explain why certain behaviours are important (e.g. they may need to explain sequences of events, cause and effect, etc.) and may need to repeat explanations. As the child develops more skills, the kindergarten teacher can step back and allow the child to solve problems and suggest new rules themselves.

Good boundaries do not limit the child's freedom, but serve as handrails to them, so the child knows what to expect. Of course, this does not mean that you have to stick rigidly to a set routine or lack flexibility when it comes to behavioural expectations, but clear guidelines, with open discussion of any exceptions support a sense of control and stability for the developing child.

How to set group boundaries and expectations:

Boundaries and expectations will be different for every classroom/school. You will need to figure out what the priorities are for your classroom based on two things:

- » **Think about the ethos of your classroom:** what kinds of values do you want to promote with your students? For example, being kind and showing respect for others are expectations based on the values of community and compassion.
- » **Think about the needs of the individual children:** Observe and note when, where, and why children struggle with certain behaviours. Boundaries and expectations should



be based on needs (i.e., what do the children need to learn to manage specific situations).

Creating boundaries and expectations:

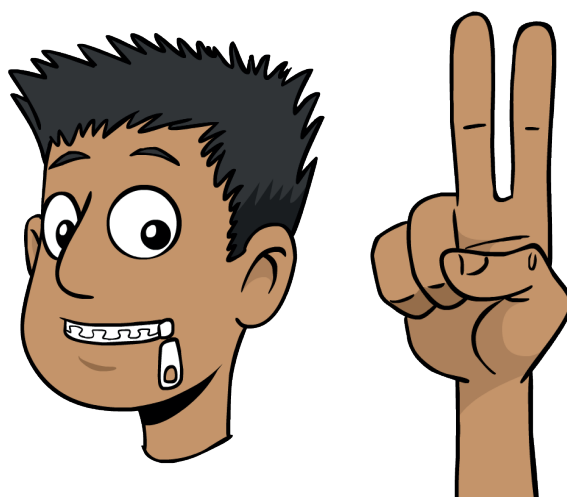
- » **Brainstorm:** First brainstorm what behaviours are most desirable and most challenging.
- » **Priorities:** Define a list of priorities. Start with the most important one or two. Over time, introduce more expectations.
- » **Set Good Expectations:** Whatever your priority, make sure it is identified as a positive/desirable behaviour. For example, rather than saying “do not hit on the playground” you might say “always be kind to others”. Remember, we are teaching behavioural skills.
- » **Set Boundaries:** Identify what is meant when the child/children do not achieve the expectation and what the consequence will be. For example, if the expectation is “always be kind to others”, what does being kind look like and what does not being kind look like (remember, we must be clear with children). What will happen if/when children are not kind? A logical consequence when a child hits is that the child must apologise and listen to how the behaviour impacted the other child.
- » **Explain:** Get all the children together and explore what's going on in the classroom and school, try to get them involved in identifying why it is a problem and see if they can come up with any solutions. Next, introduce the new boundary/expectation, and explain “why” the behaviour is important for everyone (you can explore this idea with the children too). You can have a sign or visual image, which will help this discussion and then you can put it on the wall in your classroom/school.

#### FIGURE 17. VISUAL PROMPTS

**Chair rule:** I am sitting on my chair

**Mouth rule:** I am quiet

**Hands rule:** If I want to say something, I raise my hands



- » **Remind:** Learning new behaviours happens over time. You may need to remind the children of the rule.

What is a good set of expectations/boundaries?

- » Simple, understandable, clear, obvious
- » **Achievable:** think age, ability, and what is realistic for children with ADHD-like behaviours
- » **Consistent:** boundaries and expectations only work if you stick to them, for the children they must be predictable.
- » Well considered
- » Respectful (of children and adults)
- » Gives the child freedom within limits
- » Have a few clear boundaries and expectations (less is more)
- » **Flexibility:** This happens in two ways. First, they need to be reviewed as necessary. Second, in a given moment, the teacher needs to figure out how to respond. While consistency is important, it's also worth remembering that the goal is to teach skills. When using them be flexible and think about giving the child options and chances to choose the right behaviour.

If children already know what the expectations and boundaries are, and they are not following them, you

need to gently remind them of the boundaries and what's expected of them. In the beginning, you will need to give a lot of guidance and support, because they will take time to learn and remember.

### *Dealing with transitions*

ADHD is linked with difficulties regulating attention, prioritizing, and flexibility. As a result, children with ADHD-like behaviours can find it difficult during transitions (e.g. coming to school, shifting between tasks or activities) or when unexpected changes occur. To avoid difficulties with transitions, try to provide structure and clearly communicate plans (e.g. what will happen this morning), in order to help the child with ADHD-like behaviours prepare for transition.

For example, you know that it is 5 minutes to 12, which is lunchtime, so you need to prepare the child who struggles with transitions. You might tell the whole group that clean-up will need to begin as it is almost lunchtime. You might then give the child with ADHD-like behaviours a specific reminder of what they have to do.

### **Test your knowledge:**

- » **What strategies do you know for structuring the environment?**
- » **What communication strategies should be used in children with ADHD or ADHD-like behaviour?**

## *3c Executive function*

### **Learning Outcomes:**

**By the end of this section, you will:**

- » **Understand the development of executive functions for children with ADHD or ADHD-like behaviour**
- » **Be able to apply your understanding of executive function to support children with ADHD-like behaviours**

As introduced in Unit 2, executive functions are high level thinking skills that allow us to complete complex tasks. Some children with ADHD-like behaviours struggle with executive functions (e.g. attention, planning, memory), which can impact on their behaviour. This section explores how you can develop pre-executive function skills in early childhood.

### *Developing pre-executive function skills:*

There are many opportunities to develop the pre-executive functions of the children in your grouproom. Indeed, the development of executive function is part

of the natural processes of development, especially in groupwork and it happens as children interact in the halls and classrooms of every kindergarten.

If we tune in to these natural processes, we can come up with strategies to target and develop them further, although some children will need extra support to do this.

- » **Identify:** Begin by observing the child and try to identify behaviours that are linked to executive functions. Below is a table that you can use to observe the child. Once you have identified executive function related behaviours, take some time to observe these behaviour(s) over time (at different times of day and different days).
- » **Develop:** Once you have identified a behaviour you want to develop, try to be creative in terms of its development. Development may involve some of the ideas below, you can also think in terms of structures and supports.

Name:..... Date:.....

*Observing self-regulation*

	Morning		Afternoon		Ideas for development
	How (describe with few words the actual behaviour you observed)	Was it age-appropriate?	How (describe with few words the actual behaviour you observed)	Was it age-appropriate?	
Keeping attention/focus					
Changing attention					
Expressing feeling of discomfort					
Delayed gratification (e.g., not getting what they want immediately)					
Expression of positive emotions					
Expression of negative emotions					
Empathizing with the feelings of other					
Meeting the rules, make others meet the rules					
Planning actions					
Organisation					
Choice, decision making					
Inhibiting behaviour					
Request for help					

**TABLE 4. IDENTIFYING ELEMENTS OF THE EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS*****Games and Activities Supporting the Development of Pre-Executive Function Skills***

(Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2014 and 2015)

Supporting children who struggle with planning, organisation, time management, sequencing, and attention can involve providing structures and support (e.g., a visual timetable, support with organisation). You can also develop pre-executive function skills in all children through activities and games, many of which you already use in your kindergarten.

Any activity which requires planning, organisation, and memory can be helpful. As we said earlier, these happen in the normal course of kindergarten life. Understanding this can enable you to tune in and understand why the child struggles with specific tasks and so come up with. For example, getting the child to tidy up their area requires them to observe and organise their space in their head first. Next, they need to come up with a plan to organise, hold this in their mind, and then follow through.

Storytelling can be used in a variety of ways to develop executive functioning skills. For example, when you tell a child a story, they need to pay attention, remember, identify the priority, and put the events into a sequence. You can develop these skills further, when children are ready, by asking them to retell the story to you. Making up stories can get children to develop a structure and put events into a sequence. Telling stories about their own experiences requires children to reflect on their experiences (which must be held in working memory) and explain the order or the way things happened (planning and sequencing). It can also be used as a prompt to explore feelings and behaviour. You can ask the child questions about why they or someone else felt the way they did or was there an alternative solution to the situation they described.

**Games:**

- » **Games with singing and movements** like playing a song, which when stopped requires children to freeze (inhibition).

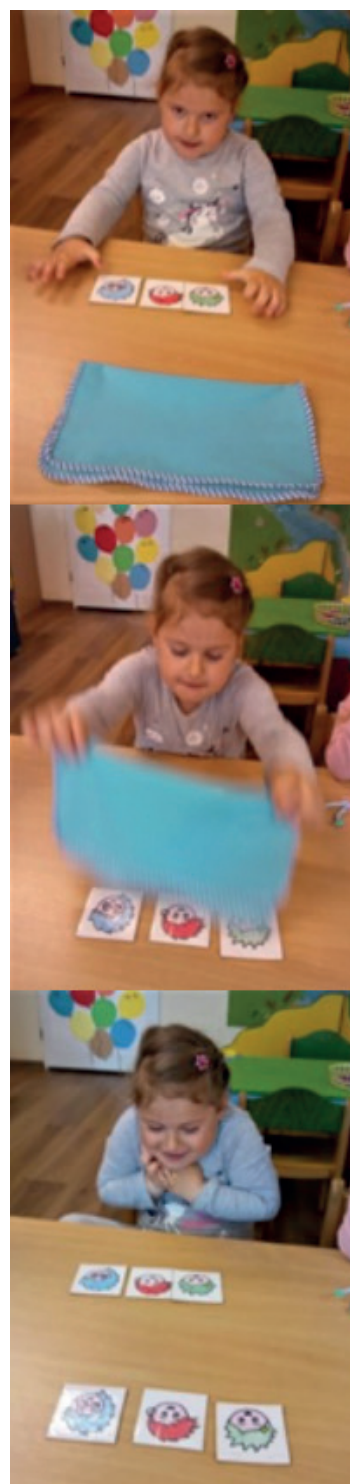
**FIGURE 18. CHILDREN PLAYING STATUE-GAME**

- » **Rhymes, traditional games, dancing, circle-games, or skill games** (e.g. target shooting, rope walking, etc.) can also be used to develop skills like sequencing, memory, organisation, and planning.
- » **Card and board games** provide important opportunities to make and hold a plan in mind.
- » **Matching or sorting games** require children to understand rules for organisation (e.g. grouping by shapes, colour, size, etc.), plan how they are going to do it and then follow that plan (holding their strategy in their mind while they do it). The use of puzzles also work well on the development of these skills.
- » You can work on developing memory by using **memory games**. For example, you could have a picture of three animals, a cow, a dog, and a cat. Show them to the child, then turn them over and ask the child to find the cat. As the child gets older you make the games more complex. You might have 10 cards, with 5 matching pairs, show them to the child and ask them to find all the pairs, and they can only turn over two cards at a time.
- » Some **fast moving games**, such as fast-moving ball games, dodge ball or football. These types of games teach things like rule following, decision-making, cooperation/teamwork and self-control, as well as burning off any excess energy.

Working in pairs or small groups develops attention, monitoring their own actions and those of others, and adjusting their actions to achieve a goal.

**Test Yourself:**

- » **Can you come up with an activity or game that you can use with your students that develops planning skills?**
- » **Can you come up with an activity or game that you can use with your students that develops memory skills?**

**FIGURE 19. A CHILD PLAYING MEMORY-GAME**



### 3d Working with Emotions and Developing Emotional Regulation

#### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will:

- » Understand emotional regulation
- » Understand how to support the development of emotional regulation of young children with challenging and ADHD-like behaviours

Emotional regulation refers to the ability to recognise, understand, manage, and appropriately express emotions. It is also a key area where children with ADHD-like behaviours often struggle.

First of all, it is important to say that there is nothing wrong with feeling an emotion. Emotions are not good or bad. Emotions are not wrong or right. They just are. The problem with emotions is in their expression. For example, if a child gets overly excited and jumps on another child or if a child gets angry and hits another child, the other child may get hurt. We need to teach children how to understand and manage their emotions to ensure that their behavioural response to their emotions is appropriate. This section provides strategies to try and develop emotional regulation in early childhood.

#### Accepting, naming, and exploring emotions:

The first step to being able to regulate your emotions is knowing you are experiencing an emotion and knowing what that emotion is. To begin with, create opportunities and spaces to teach children about emotions and to talk to children about their emotions.

The proper vocabulary to name emotional states is important. Teachers can teach these through stories (especially when emphasizing emotional words), they can teach children to associate emotions with particular facial expressions, and then children try to identify (on pictures) and then imitate these facial expressions. You can teach children to name their own emotional experience using structured activities. For example, when a child comes into class in the morning, a part of the routine can be to identify which emotion they associate with themselves and how they feel.

Discussing emotions should be part of everyday practice within your classroom. Children should feel free to express emotions, so long as they do it appropriately, and should be rewarded when emotions are expressed appropriately. When a child is trying to explain how they feel, do not ignore or reject emotional experiences. You can support them being able to name their own emotions. For example, you might say, “Oh that sounds very upsetting” or “I can see why you feel angry” or “Wow

that does sound very exciting”. When you help them name their own emotions it makes the child feel accepted and understood and it also enables them to be able to identify and name their own emotions in the future. For example, you might say, “I noticed you got frustrated when you were working on that puzzle” or you could say, “You look very worried”. After they start to be able to recognise it, you might ask, “how are you feeling?” and if they cannot tell you, then you can work with them to identify it.

Naming and exploring emotions can also become part of story time or the sharing or observing of experiences. For example, when reading Goldilocks and the three bears, you might ask the child what emotion Goldilocks felt when she woke up and saw the bears and you might ask them how they would feel if it happened to them. Exploring emotions should be done at every opportunity.

#### Managing Emotions:

A part of emotional regulation is

- » being able to manage how you feel and also
- » decide how to express your emotions (i.e. your own behavioural response).

Emotional expressions should be of proper intensity (not too low or too high). In order to control this, children need to monitor the intensity of their emotional experience and learn to manage their emotional experiences.

Monitoring emotional experiencing can be done using the idea of a

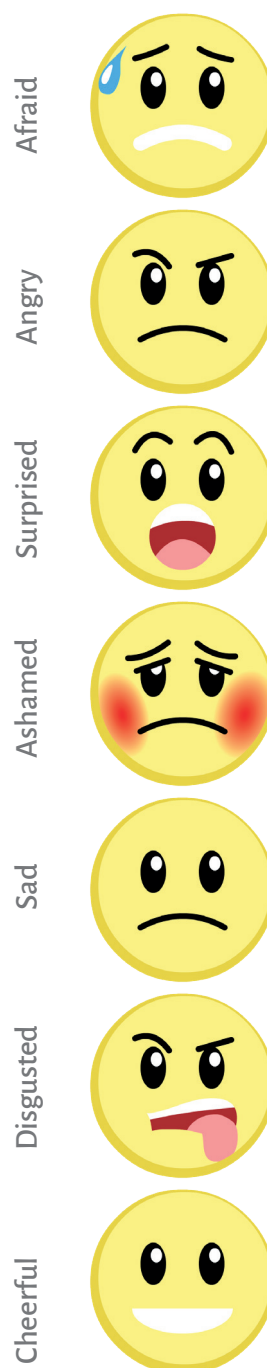


FIGURE 20. EMOTICONS DEPICTING VARIOUS EMOTIONS

thermometer, as long as the children in your grouproom understand this concept.

This simple tool

- » helps the child look at how they are feeling,
- » helps them self-regulate, and
- » helps them recognize intense emotions in their body and mind.

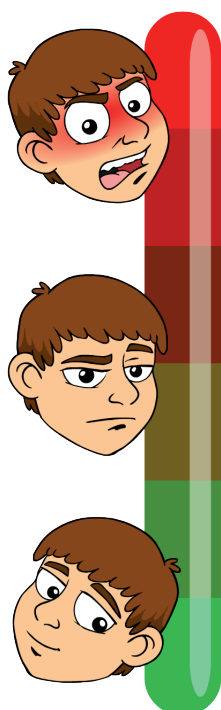
First, the child/children will need to know what a thermometer is. Once they understand this concept, you can explain how the weather changes with the seasons, and the thermometer monitors this. In a similar way, people all have emotional thermometers. Tuning in to how we feel or where our emotional thermometer is at is important. If our emotional thermometer is getting too high, then maybe we need to do something or change something to bring it back down. You can use a picture to represent the emotional thermometer (or get the child to draw it out). These can be used for one child or have a large one on a wall. This can be returned to as part of everyday structured activities (e.g. morning routine) or as events unfold across the day.

An alternative way to express this idea might be through using a balloon (ranging from one which is deflated to one which is inflated to the point of bursting).

It is not advisable to use the emotional thermometer (or balloon) in a highly elevated state of emotion. Wait for the child to feel calmer and then can identify and discuss with the children what emotion and intensity led to the unacceptable behaviour.

To use the emotional thermometer properly, you need to talk with the child in advance to illustrate each emotion (we can use faces with emotional expressions, drawn faces, or emojis).

Talk about the emotions involved in the pictures.



- » What does that emotion mean?
- » What happens before, what usually triggers the feeling?
- » What facial expressions are associated with it?
- » What do I look like and how do I feel when I feel that emotion?

**FIGURE 21.**  
**EMOTIONAL THERMOMETER TO SHOW THE INTENSITY OF A GIVEN EMOTION**

Use the emotional thermometer according to the child's age. In case of younger children work with just a few emotions. If they are very young, just use a smiling face and a sad face. With a bigger child, we can expand the range of emotions and introduce a "thermometer" for the intensity of emotions, which can also indicate the temperature of a particular emotion (Burg, 2014; Muriel, 2018).

Some examples

- » **The Big Smiley emoticon:** Expresses happiness. I'm very good, and I know that because I have a wide smile and laugh even.
- » **Emoticon with a calm face:** I'm quite fine. Everything is alright. My face is relaxed.
- » **Sad face emoticon.** I have very little energy, the edge of my mouth is narrowed, I am sad and cry.
- » **Emoticon with an angry face:** Something very annoying is happening right now. It is not a good feeling at all. I do not want to smile anymore, in fact, I rather make my teeth and narrow my eyes.

### *Strategies to cope with emotions*

(Hallowell & Ratey, 1994)

It is important that the teacher or parent teaches not only the recognition and naming of emotions, but also the coping strategies a child can use when experiencing a particular emotion. Play in the form of a role play how he/she behaves when he/she feels a particular emotion. Practice strategies when children are in a calm, balanced state. Come back to the topic of emotions more than once. Practice ingesting these behaviours so your child is more likely to execute them when he is angry or anxious. Once the child or children begin to be able to recognise and name their emotions, and when those emotions are becoming too strong/high, they will need strategies to be able to manage these emotions. It's worth making a list of what NOT to do: wrecking, swearing, fighting, etc. It is ok to be angry, it is not to destroy things.

A child can learn to manage intense emotional experiences by self-soothing or distracting themselves, or can ask for help from teachers. Do not forget that, even in kindergarten, children need an adult to be able to regulate their emotions in an appropriate way. The ability to cope with stress or emotions is essential for everyday life, so we need to start practicing early.

Self-soothing is the process of soothing oneself. A mother may rock and sing to a baby to sooth them to sleep, but as children age, they increasingly need to be able to sooth themselves. Sometimes focusing on the emotion or the experience and trying to quieten it or relax it away does not work. Distracting techniques can be helpful too.

Below are some techniques you can teach your students, to support them in managing their emotions. As with all skills, they will need to find what works for them and practice them.

- » **Breathing:** Focusing on breathing can be very soothing. Teach the child to take deep breaths through the nose, hold for three seconds, and then breathe out through their mouth. You can use a feather in the beginning to get the child to focus on breathing out through their mouth or tell them to imagine them blowing out a candle. This can soothe them on a physical and an emotional level as we focus on the body and relaxing its physical response to emotion. It's also a distraction to focus on breath rather than the emotion
- » **Visualisation:** Try to get the child to think of a beautiful memory or their safe/happy place (e.g. bedroom at home, grandmothers garden, or the forest in Narnia). When they feel themselves getting upset, they need to recall that beautiful place. The more “real” they can make it, the better. When you are teaching them this strategy, start out by asking them what they see, what can they smell, are other people there, what colour are the walls, etc. The image needs to be clear and easily recalled, so that they can use it when they feel emotions intensely.
- » **Get physical:** Sometimes it's good to use the whole body. Let the child do gymnastics exercises to lower their energy and feel good by running, jumping, doing ten squats, wristbands, air boxing, or get down on the ground and squirm like a snake on their belly all the way along the corridor from the classroom door to the toilet and back again.
- » Have a “**chill out corner**” or “quiet corner” in your classroom. Sometimes children can get overwhelmed by their environment and their emotions. It's helpful to have a space in the classroom that is a safe quiet place to go and have some alone quiet time. You can portion it off from the classroom (e.g. a corner or a tent) where children want to go – a place that is cosy and comfortable. You can even use sensory toys or objects, which can help the child relax. Please do not use this space as the place they are sent when they have challenging behaviour. It should never be used as punishment. You want this space to be happy and desirable. If you use it for punishment, it will not help to self-soothe.
- » **Pressing the pause button:** You want the child to be able to recognise when they are getting upset, rather than reacting negatively. You want them to press the pause button to give them time to think and calm down before reacting. The pause button works best if the child has a backup strategy, that is, a plan for what they are going to do once they have pressed the pause button. It might be some of the things listed above or it could be that they are going to do something they enjoy, like sit in the reading corner or put their head on a desk for a few minutes.
- » When you see a child getting upset, you can **divert their attention** with tiny tricks. For example, you might point to the clock: “See how fast you can calm down so we can continue our day.”
- » **Motivation:** An important aspect of emotional management is the ability to use emotions and thought to achieve a goal. For example, if you give a child a marshmallow and tell them if they don't eat it for 3 minutes you will give them 2 marshmallows. In order to achieve the goal (getting two marshmallows) the child needs to regulate their emotions and the behaviours (don't eat the one marshmallow). The child can use distraction techniques, like putting the marshmallow out of sight or focusing on other things (e.g. the bird outside the window) to help him/her achieve their goal. The child who can manage their emotions - to delay what they want immediately, in order to get a greater reward in the long run, is probably going to find life and work easier in the long run. In early childhood, by teaching children strategies (e.g. distraction techniques) and explaining the greater reward at the end, we can over time support them as they develop the ability to self-motivate.



**FIGURE 22.**  
**QUIET CORNER**  
**IN THE KINDERGARTEN**

## Teaching problem-solving and alternatives for behaviour:

When a child behaves in a challenging manner, ask them an open-ended, empowering question to help them feel that they have choices.

Poor	Better
Why did you yell at him?	What led up to this situation?  Can you explain to me how that happened?
Why did you say / do that?	I'm not sure I understand.

**TABLE 5. QUESTIONS TO CLARIFY THE SITUATION**

When you understand the behaviour a little more, explore behavioural alternatives with the child. For example, you might say, "I understand that when he wouldn't share the train with you, you became frustrated and so you grabbed the train from him. Is there anything you could have done differently?". Explore alternatives and try and get the child to identify a better strategy. Plan with the child, what they will do next time. For example, they might try self-soothing or distracting (e.g. getting another toy to play with).

Don't expect the child to apply a new strategy after one conversation, but the more you talk to him / her about it, the more likely that he/she will try it sooner or later.

You can use games and role play to name and develop awareness about emotions. You can also use games to get children to understand the effect their behaviour has on other people, like other children, sibling, parents/carers, and teachers. Role play with the child what they will do in situations where they feel frustrated or angry.

Imaginary play enables children to develop rules to guide their actions in playing roles. They also require "holding of complex ideas in mind and shape their actions to follow these rules, inhibiting impulses, or actions that don't fit the 'role'. (...) While younger children tend to play alone or in parallel, children in kindergarten are learning to play cooperatively and often regulate each other's behaviour—an important step in developing self-regulation." (Harvard, 2014)

Planning the play can be a good way to organize play. "Children decide who they are going to be and what they are going to do before they start playing, and then draw their plan on paper. Planning means that children think first and then act, thus practicing inhibitory control". Of course, the spontaneity and creativity of the game should remain, and the drawing is just an introduction to the play activity. "Planning play in a group also

encourages children to plan together, hold these plans in mind, and apply them during the activity. It encourages social problem solving, as well as verbal language development." (Harvard, 2014)

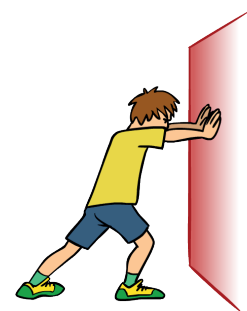
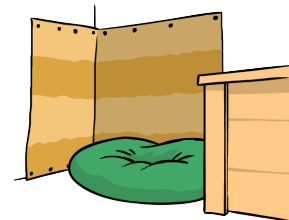
"Recognise what motivates a child to perform at their best. Encourage the child rather than praise them: focus on celebrating the behaviour and effort, not just the result. Say things like, 'I've noticed that when things get difficult you just keep trying – that's fantastic'.

Model how to remain calm and in control when you are tired, angry or fed up. Say, 'I've had a tough day at work – can we talk about this later when I've had a chance to relax?'" (Atkins, S. 2017)

## Temper tantrums and sensory meltdowns

Children with ADHD-like behaviours can have outbursts of emotions. Before trying to modify the behaviours that may occur during these outbursts, we need to figure out what's triggering it, and what happens afterwards.

All behaviour (positive or negative) is the result of a child's emotional state. Children experience the same range of



**FIGURE 23. EXAMPLES FOR BEHAVIOUR ALTERNATIVES IN CRITICAL SITUATIONS**

PLAY WITH PLASTICINE!

BREATHE DEEPLY!

FIND A CALM PLACE!

PUSH THE WALL!

PRESS A STRESSBALL!

LISTEN TO MUSIC!

emotions that adults do, but often do not know how to verbalise or manage their feelings. As a result, observed behaviour may be challenging.

If we perceive misbehaviour as intentional, a natural response may be to punish the behaviour. However, if we recognise that the child may be struggling with difficulties, we may be more encouraged to seek ways to provide support.

There are two common types of outbursts: temper tantrums and sensory meltdowns. These two are not the same, even though they appear very similar to each other. If you learn to recognise the differences between these outbursts, it can help you learn how to handle them.



FIGURE 24.

**STRONG EMOTIONAL OUTBURSTS CAN BE SCARY FOR THE OTHER CHILDREN, FOR THE TEACHER, BUT ALSO FOR THE CHILD PRODUCING THE BEHAVIOUR**

### Temper Tantrum

This usually happens when children want to achieve something. In this type of outburst, the child expects us to react.

When having a tantrum, a child is aware of the safety of himself and his environment and is also aware of his behaviour and can stop when he gets what he wants - or if he sees that he is not getting anywhere because we are not reacting to his behaviour.

What can the kindergarten teacher do in the case of a temper tantrum?

- » You can let the child know that you see what he/she is doing and you know what they want, but you will not give in to what they want. For example, you might say, "I understand you are angry that they will not give you

that toy, even though you really want it. I see you want me to pay attention to you and when you have calmed down, we can talk about it".

- » **Talk about the situation:** Once the tantrum has subsided, talk to the child, let them know that it is OK to feel something (e.g. angry or hurt), but it is not OK to do XYZ (i.e. clearly describe the behaviour that was unacceptable).
- » Discuss with the child that the next time they find themselves in such a situation, what they can do differently, how they can express (without shouting) their anger in a different way.

### Sensory Meltdown

We usually think of children as having five senses – vision, touch, smell, taste and sound. But actually, there are two more that are important to be aware of – the sense of movement (vestibular function) and the sense of the position of our bodies in space (proprioception). Not all children experience the same sensory input in the same way. For example, for some children, the noise of a neon light might seem very loud and difficult to ignore, while other children may not even notice it. It's the same sensory input, but the way that the brain interprets the sensation can differ significantly between children. Sensory meltdowns happen for children who may be struggling to interpret sensory information in an adaptive way.

A sensory meltdown happens when the child has received sensory input that their brain does not know how to interpret. In evolutionary terms, our brains are wired to protect us and ensure our survival – if our brain perceives a sensation that it doesn't know how to process, our brain automatically thinks that we are in danger and

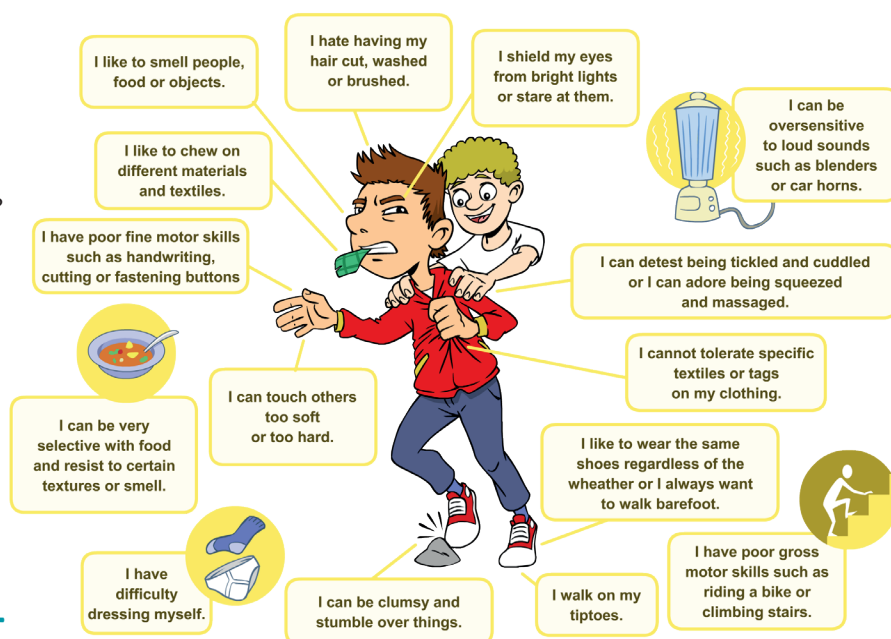


FIGURE 25. SITUATIONS THAT CARRY THE RISK OF SENSORY OVERLOAD

will respond either with a 'flight' response (run away) or a 'fight' response (attack). Once our brain learns that a sensation doesn't actually pose any danger, it will eventually ignore it (this is called "habituation").

Think of walking from your quiet car into a busy classroom with lots of noise and activity. At first, the noise sounds extreme and overwhelming and you might need a minute to get used to it. A child runs up to you and starts speaking to you, and you can barely hear them over the noise—you have to pay extra attention to the child in order to drown out the background noise of the other children. At that point in time, ALL the new noise sensations are still being processed by your brain, which isn't yet sure whether the noise represents something to be wary of, and so you are essentially paying attention to every single sound that hits your ears.

Now think of the same classroom after you have been busy in it for a few hours. The same child runs up to you to speak and you seem to hear them much better. This is because your brain has identified that the various background noises are not actually a threat—your brain has gotten used to them (habituated to it) and so 'allows' you to stop paying any attention to what you don't need to be paying attention to. But if there is a sudden BANG of a dropped toy, you will quickly turn your attention back to the noise once again.

The brains of children who experience sensory difficulties often don't know how to effectively interpret sensory information in a way that allows them to pay attention to the sensations that they need to pay attention to and ignore the sensations that they don't need to pay attention to. This is an exhausting state to be in, and children who struggle to process sensory information effectively will often demonstrate emotional difficulties as well.

## Sensory meltdowns

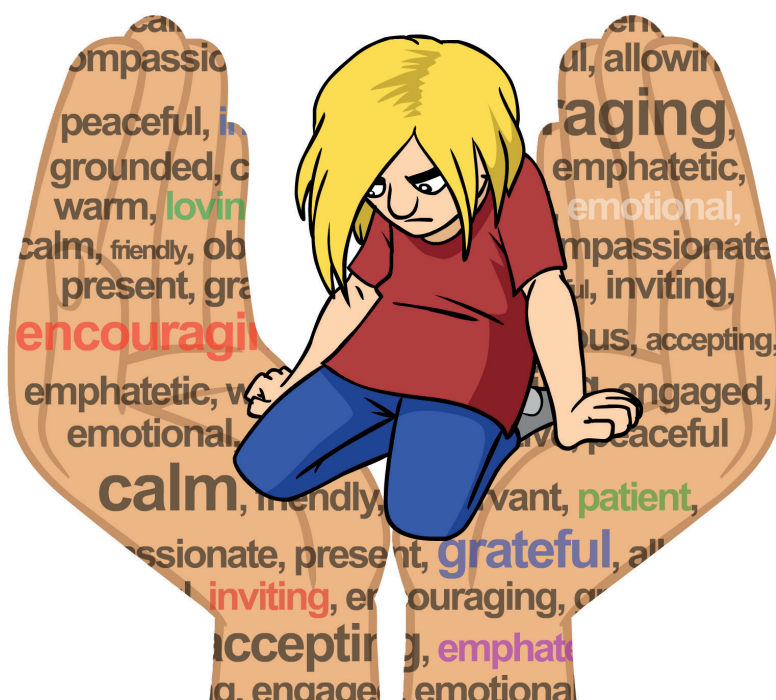
Sensory meltdowns are more extreme than tantrums. In this situation, the child completely loses control over his/her behaviour, and may lose his/her sense of danger. If we know what triggers a sensory meltdown (and we can spot the warning signs), then we can teach the child to also spot the signs, and by working together avoid the meltdown. If we can not stop the complete collapse, we will have to wait till it passes by.

Meltdown can usually end in two ways:

- » tiredness: the children get exhausted in crying/yelling
- » the amount of sensory stimuli is reduced (e.g. the child is removed from the situation)

What can a kindergarten teacher do in case of sensory meltdown?

- » Be prepared. If you know a child's specific sensory triggers, you can anticipate what may cause them difficulties and remove the child from the situation before they are overwhelmed
- » Each child is unique and sensory meltdowns are not the same for all children. Don't assume that one child's sensory preferences and aversions are the same for all children
- » Try to understand what's triggering a sensory meltdowns by observing patterns:
- » **What events triggers the meltdown?** Sensory meltdowns may be exacerbated by hunger or tiredness. Try to notice what sensory events tend to happen before a sensory meltdown
- » **Avoid problem situations.** Do not force a child to face sensory experiences that they find challenging
- » **Have a quiet space** in the kindergarten, for example, you can offer the child noise cancelling headphones if this helps them to remain calm
- » **Know the signs of escalation.** If you detect warning signals in time, you can calm down the more sensitive children in time, before they have lost control



**FIGURE 26.**  
WE HAVE TO HELP THE CHILD TO  
FIND THE STRATEGY THAT HELPS  
THEM TO COPE WITH  
THE MELTDOWN

- » **Be patient and calm** and show empathy to the child

During the meltdown

- » Make sure everyone and everything is safe.
- » **Meltdown may be scary for the teacher, too. Try to stay calm.**
- » Accompany the child to a more relaxed place. Provide him/her with a low-stimuli environment.
- » Plan what you are going to do after the meltdown, **how to get him back to the group.**

After the meltdown

- » Leave time for the child to rest and recuperate. When the child begins to calm down, he/she may feel embarrassed or bad about the outburst. They are also going to be emotionally and physically exhausted. Give him/her time to gather their thoughts and get back to themselves again.
- » Find the right time to talk about what happened, and do so in a supportive manner. (Morin, 2018)

## Aggression

Another difficulty commonly associated with ADHD is aggression. This is often linked with difficulties regulating emotions.

Aggression refers to any behaviour which harms others (e.g. hitting, calling other people names, biting, etc.). Obviously, aggression can be a problem for all children, regardless of whether they have ADHD or not. Aggression, especially if it is putting the child or others at risk, cannot be accepted and cannot be tolerated in school or at home. Sometimes aggression can be the result of an impulsive response to a situation, but it still cannot be accepted and requires management.

Determine the problem.

Every time the child is physically aggressive, tell him that he has caused pain and should never hit others.

Describe exactly what she/he was like when he lost control, what she/he was doing and what she/he could do differently. Instead of giving an order (e.g. “do not fight”), try to work together to figure out what's causing the behaviour and what she/he can do to change it.

Some questions you can ask the child are:

- » Can you tell me what led up to you hitting him?
- » What do you think about hitting him, do you think it was right?
- » How do you think it made him feel?
- » How would you feel?
- » Can you think of something else you could have done to help you deal with feeling angry?

(e.g. talk to a kindergarten teacher, express yourself with words, or just move away)

- » **What are you going to do next time?**

Exercise typical or difficult situations in the form of role-play.

Role play gives the child the opportunity to experience other, more effective forms of behaviour, and this experience is like training a muscle. Exercising this skill will help the child to react properly in real life.

It is very important during the role play that the negative role (e.g. a child slipping into aggression) is always played by the teacher. Role play should serve to demonstrate more of a positive example than replaying an aggressive situation. Dolls can also be used to illustrate a negative situation, and then positive examples and ways of solving them will be presented based on the suggestions of the children.

### Don't be afraid to ask for help!

If the child often has aggressive outbursts and meltdowns, which cannot be helped by using the strategies in this manual, then do not wait until it becomes completely unmanageable, ask for help from a specialist.

### Test yourself:

- » **What is emotional regulation?**
- » **Can you identify two ways that you can support children naming and understanding their own emotions?**
- » **What is the emotional thermometer and why is it helpful?**
- » **Can you identify two strategies to support children managing their emotions?**
- » **What's the difference between tantrums and meltdowns?**
- » **Can you identify two things you will do differently when trying to change aggressive behaviour?**

## 3e Behaviour modification

### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will:

- » Be familiar with the Antecedent-Behaviour-Consequence (ABC) Model for supporting children with ADHD-like behaviours
- » Understand strategies of positive behaviour support for children with ADHD-like behaviours

Behaviour modification techniques aim to develop, strengthen, maintain, reduce, or modify behaviours. These include:

- » **Supporting the development of new behaviours** (these are the behaviours a child has not yet begun to develop)
- » **Strengthen existing behaviours** (these are behaviours a child has begun to develop, but needs further support to achieve e.g. a child has begun to attempt to wash their hands, but they still need to learn all the steps and dry afterwards).
- » **Maintaining established behaviours** (these are behaviours that the child has mastered, which you wish to reinforce e.g. a child has learnt to organise their materials, and you wish them to continue to do so)
- » **Modifying a particular behaviour** (these are behaviours that need some refining - e.g. it is okay for a child to express anger, but they should not do this by screaming)
- » **Reducing challenging behaviour**

Behaviour modification techniques are based on the idea that when a child behaves in a certain way they are doing it for a reason. Before trying to change a behaviour, teachers need to try and understand what the “function” of the behaviour is. Once the function of a behaviour is understood, teachers can use different techniques to change or shape the behaviour.

### A-B-C: Antecedent-Behaviour-Consequence

The ABC model says that all behaviours (including challenging behaviours) serve a „function“. The behaviour has a purpose, the child uses the behaviour as a way to get things they want: to escape / avoid something unpleasant; to get attention; to get access to items or materials; and/or for self-stimulation / sensory reasons.

The Antecedent-Behaviour-Consequence (ABC) Model depends on the ability to observe the child's behaviour in context, looking at what led up to a behaviour (antecedents), observing the behaviour itself, and what comes after the behaviour (consequences).

Once we understand the behaviour, we can then work towards changing it.

- » **Antecedents** (triggers) happen BEFORE the challenging behaviour
- » **Behaviour**: this is the specific behaviour (e.g. a challenging behaviour) – this is what your focus is, this is what you want to modify/change
- » **Consequences**: happen AFTER the behaviour

### Step 1) Identify the Behaviour

- » Select one behaviour that you want to change or modify.
- » Make sure that the selected behaviour is something you can see and measure. For example, the child gets up from circle time and wanders around the classroom is something you can see, and you can measure (e.g. you can count how many times the child does this over the course of 10 minutes).
- » Do not pick a behaviour that you cannot easily describe and measure, for example, “a bad attitude” or “being moody” are hard to measure.
- » Decide when and where you are going to measure it. For example, if it is infrequent, then you may want to take note every time the behaviour happens. However, if it happens a lot, then decide to measure for specific periods (e.g. 20 minutes three times a day for 1 week).

### Step 2) Observation

Using the ABC model depends on the quality of your observation. So take time to plan and do the observation. You could ask for help from teaching assistants or other colleagues.

**Schedule:** Decide when you will observe the behaviour. This will depend on the challenging behaviours you are aiming to observe. You might select a specific time of the day, which you space out over the course of a few weeks. You might choose to observe when a child presents with a specific behaviour – each time the child acts a certain way over a few days or a few weeks.

**Record:** Use a table and record the behaviours you see. The more details about the behaviour you have, the better placed you will be to analyse the behaviour and understand its function.

**Objectivity:** Your “observation” needs to be objective. This means that we need to record only what we actually see. Try to record without interpretation, judgement or jumping to conclusions. In the beginning, just write



down what you see in terms of the behaviour and write down what was going on before and after the challenging behaviour occurred.

Note the Antecedents (triggers)

- » These are the events that occurred before the behaviour, leading up to it or triggering it.
- » These events include things in the **environment** (e.g. noise, sound, light, social demands like

having to share with other children, needing to tidy up, or having to sit still in a circle).

Note the Consequences

- » These are the things that happen after the behaviour.
- » A child's behaviour (wanted or unwanted) is often increased or maintained by the consequence.

ANTECEDENT	BEHAVIOUR	CONSEQUENCE
What happens directly before that “triggers” the behaviour	What the person does (defined in measurable, observable terms)	What happens directly after the behaviour, from student's perspective. What does the student GET or AVOID?

**TABLE 6. THE ABC MODEL**

### Examples

ANTECEDENT	BEHAVIOUR	CONSEQUENCE
Teacher hands out a math worksheet with word problems	Student says he won't do the work and calls the teacher a name	Teacher sends student out to buddy classroom (AVOID Math worksheet/classroom activities)
Peers refuse to let the student join their game	Student cries and yells	Teacher comes over, problem solves a solution (GET adult attention in the form of help)

**TABLE 7. EXAMPLES FOR THE ABC MODEL**

### Step 3) Analyse the Behaviour:

After you observe, move on to your analysis, and start to look for patterns in behaviour (what's similar) or if something is different why was it different in that situation.

Let's look at an example of the A-B-C model.

First, select a behaviour to observe and record over the course of a week. This should be an area that you think is an area in need of development for the child, e.g. “does not tidy away toys”.

## Observation

Date / time	Antecedents	Challenging behaviour	Consequence
Monday morning	Child shows signs of losing interest in what they are playing with	Child leaves toys on floor	Goes to the shelf and takes another item and begins to play with it
Tuesday lunchtime	Teacher explains to the children that they can go out and play once they have cleared away their toys	Child dumps toys on the shelf and goes outside to play	Teacher notices the toys have not be placed carefully on the shelf. Goes outside and makes the child sit on a bench
Wednesday lunchtime	Teacher explains to the children that they can go out and play once they have cleared away their toys	Child dumps toy on the shelf and goes outside to play	Teacher notices the toys have not be placed carefully on the shelf. Goes outside to find the child, and tells him to go back inside. Child starts shouting in protest and the child is removed for the whole of playtime
Thursday morning	The teacher reminds children that they will not be able to go to lunch unless their area is clean	At lunchtime, the child leaves the toys beside the shelf and goes out to play	The teacher goes outside and removes the child from the play for a short time. The child gets upset and starts to shout and refuses to go back inside.

**TABLE 8. OBSERVING THE CHILD WITH THE HELP OF THE ABC MODEL**

Analysing the behaviour in the above example:

- » The child did not attempt the task
- » The child was reminded immediately beforehand (this could be due to memory or planning difficulties)
- » The child may not understand what is involved in the instructions (tidy away your toys)
- » The child may have planning difficulties and so may not know how to do the steps of tidying up
- » The child may not have experience of putting things away from their home culture (e.g. at home piling things on a shelf may be used for organisation)

#### Step 4) Create a Strategy

Once you have a better understanding of some of the behaviours and their functions, you can develop strategies to modify the behaviour. The behaviour modification techniques can be applied to the antecedent and/or the consequences based on an understanding of the function of the behaviour is the behaviour trying to achieve (e.g. get attention, avoid an activity that the child does not understand or know how to do).

Analysis	Strategy
<p>You might start to notice that the child will behave in certain ways, such as ignoring the teacher or wanting to go outside (challenging behaviour) whenever they are asked to sit in circle time or asked to sit quietly and focus on a task independently. You might see a link between these tasks and think that the child struggles to sit quietly for long periods (environmental demand as an antecedent).</p>	<p><b>Adapt antecedent:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Break down the time the child is required to sit still for (if they struggle to do 10 minutes, then do 5 minutes).</li> <li>» Provide an egg timer so that child knows how long they need to remain at their task.</li> </ul> <p><b>Adapt consequences:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Reward the child as they work towards achieving their goal. Be consistent in consequences if they do not achieve their agreed goal</li> </ul>
<p>You might start to notice certain behaviours that may be linked to certain emotions (emotional state as an antecedent) for example, becoming excitable after lunch.</p>	<p><b>Adapt the antecedents:</b></p> <p>Create a calm structured environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Provide a routine for coming back into grouproom after lunch. Use visual aids or prompts to remind the child about the steps of the routine</li> <li>» Reduce the amount of information, stimulation (e.g., noise), and excitement</li> <li>» Teach the child to use calming techniques and give them a prompt to remember to use them when needed.</li> </ul>
<p>Child struggles to tidy away mat and materials after an activity (behaviour) because they do not understand or remember how to organise these materials ways (antecedents).</p>	<p><b>Adapt antecedents:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Provide a visual aid to remind them of what they need to do and the steps involved.</li> </ul> <p><b>Adapt consequences:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Begin by rewarding them if they complete some steps and as the behaviour strengthens, provide rewards when the entire task is complete.</li> </ul>
<p>A child starts shouting (behaviour) when another child wants to play with them and their toys (antecedent). As a result, the other child leaves them alone, which makes the child feel better in the moment (immediate positive outcome for the child). However, the consequences are challenging behaviour for teacher and other children and potential social implications.</p>	<p><b>Adapt antecedents:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Teach the child about sharing and start activities with them and another child.</li> </ul> <p><b>Adapt consequences:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Reward them when the share and play with other children.</li> </ul>

**TABLE 9. CREATING A STRATEGY BASED ON THE ABC MODEL**

## Useful tips to the A-B-C model

### Start Small and Go Slow:

Select 1-3 specific behaviours you want to modify. Begin with one behaviour and complete your ABC observations and then your analysis.

### Focus on Positive Outcomes:

Identify the behaviour you want to change (the challenging behaviour) and define it as something positive or desired. In the example used above, the challenging behaviour was “child does not tidy away toys”, the positive behaviour or desired behaviour “is able to tidy away toys independently”. Remember, this is about developing behaviour.

### Achievable:

Make sure that the desired behaviour is something that the child can do (with support). Over time, you can make the behaviour more complex, but start out with something specific and something which is a slight improvement on current behaviour. Once they have achieved this, you can increase the complexity of what you want – this is called shaping behaviour.

### Focus on rewards:

Rewards teach children what they should do (rather than what they should not do). Children with ADHD-like behaviour may not respond to punishment (McBurnett et al., 2008). The aim of the ABC model is to develop the desired behaviour.

Positive reinforcement is one of the most effective behaviour modification tools. It can be done in several ways. Work out what rewards worked before for the individual child, and what motivates them. (Barkley, 2013).

- » **Verbal praise:** We've mentioned before that praise is most effective for children with ADHD-like behaviour when it's immediate (due to impulsivity and forgetfulness). All children benefit from praise when it is specific and communicates to the child the desired behaviours we want to develop. So, praise the effort, rather than the child. For example, if a child finishes their lunch and tidies their area, and we say, “you're such a good girl,” we may inadvertently be giving the message that – it

they forget the following day – they are a “bad girl”. It's much more helpful to say something like, “I noticed that you were able to sit still for a long time today at lunch, even I know this is sometimes hard for you. You also cleaned up after yourself so well, well done.” (Dweck et al., 2014)

- » **Non-verbal reward:** We don't always have to use our words – sometimes a touch on the shoulder, an encouraging look, a thumbs up, something positive or playful. In this way, we let the child know we notice them and they are important.
- » **Tangible reward (stars, stickers, smileys):** A tangible reward is something the child can see and hold. Teachers can develop a rewards system for the child or the class. For example, every time you see the child being kind or sharing with another child, they might get a smiley face sticker on the wall or in a copy book. They can keep this in the locker or take home to show their parents – you could even develop a system that works both at home and in school. Once the child has a certain number of smiley faces, they might get something they want, like time doing something they love (e.g. painting).

### Rewards need to be:

- » **Appealing:** The same rewards will not work with the same level of intensity over time. They will need to be changed, to keep the child interested.
- » **Immediate:** When it comes to children with ADHD-like behaviours the reward needs to be immediate, so make sure you reward directly after the positive behaviour.

Catch the child being good! (Massachusetts Medical Society, 2000.)






















	 Lay the table	 Air the room	 Cleanup	 Hand-wash control
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				

FIGURE 27.

INVOLVE CHILDREN IN THE TASKS OF THE GROUP AND REWARD THEIR ACHIEVEMENT!

**Reward Charts:**

You can try to develop a reward system. When the child meets expectations or demonstrates the desired behaviour, they get a token (e.g., sticker, star, check). When the child reaches a certain number of tokens, then he/she can have a reward (e.g., time at an activity he/she loves). Get creative: You can create a reward chart with the child. (Barkley, 2013)

**Consequences:**

It is best to focus on rewards. But, if you want to use consequences try to avoid punishment, ignore challenging behaviour, and use logical or natural consequences.

**Avoid punishment:**

Try to avoid using punishment. A child learns very little from punishment and it may not be effective for children with ADHD-like behaviour.

Punishment is anything negative (e.g., telling a child not to do something, a negative consequence like having to sit in timeout, or a cross look).

Avoid shaming the child for their behaviour.

**Ignoring challenging behaviours**

Try ignoring challenging behaviours. Often children use challenging behaviour to get something they want (e.g. attention), so ignoring the behaviour may prevent reinforcing it.

**Logical or natural consequences:**

If you are going to use consequences of a negative nature, then try using logical consequences or natural consequences.

Logical consequences are responses to challenging behaviour that seek to be respectful of the child, teach them something, and do not cause any shame or embarrassment. An example of a logical consequence is making up for what was done (e.g., Sam shouts at Sara, and so Sam needs to say sorry to Sara and listen Sara tell him how it made her feel) or a loss of privilege.

Natural consequences are things that happen naturally without parent interference. For example, Tara refuses to eat her dinner and so is hungry in the afternoon.

Where possible, consequences should be discussed and agreed with the child beforehand, that way, the child understands them and knows it's about a specific behaviour and not about them. They are still a good and loved child, but their behaviour may be unacceptable.

**Children's voice** – Include the Child in Understanding the behaviour and developing a strategy:

Make sure you include the child in the process of using the ABC model. Practice is most effective when children

are involved in analysing and co-creating a strategy (and selecting the best type of reward).

The aim is not just to reduce challenging behaviour but rather to develop the child's own skills (e.g. behaviour control, knowledge of self, awareness). By involving them into the process, we talk with them about this, we support this development.

Make sure the child is aware of the positive behaviour. You can make positive behaviour cards (visual reminders) about the desired behaviour. Make sure the child knows what behaviour is desired (behaviour) and what reward (consequence) they will receive when they do it.

**Explain sequences:**

Executive functions mean that children with ADHD-like behaviours can have difficulties with sequences, so some children do not always make the connection between their behaviour and the consequence. For example, they may be confused if another child doesn't want to play with them after they shouted at them. You can explain or use visual tools here (e.g. comic strips) to explain the sequence of events, in terms of getting them to understand their challenging behaviour and to support the development of positive behaviours.

At the early stages of shaping new behaviours, children might need a lot of reminders and feedback. If we think the child is starting to show a challenging behaviour, we can say, "I see you are getting frustrated, remember if you share with your friends, then you will get a sticker on your chart". This can be a reminder to adapt the antecedent and achieve the desired behaviour.

**Be adaptable:**

You may need to repeat the ABC model. Sometimes our analysis (or our interpretation) isn't always correct and/or children's needs will change over time. You may need to redo the ABC and come up with a new strategy.

**Do not always expect immediate results, the key to modify behavioural strategies is time and persistence.**

**Test Yourself**

- » What does ABC stand for?
- » Why should you involve the child in the ABC model?
- » Can you identify and explain three different ways to reward behaviour?
- » What should we be mindful of when verbally praising children?

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## Unit 4 Working Collaboratively with the child, parents, and others to Support Children with ADHD-like Behaviours

### 4a Working with parents

*It takes a village to raise a child. (African proverb)*

#### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will:

- » Understand why partnership working with parents and the child is key to achieving positive outcomes
- » Have techniques for working with parents to flexibly apply your knowledge about supporting children with challenging or ADHD-like behaviours in different environments (home, school, community) including:
  - » Cultural awareness (of self and others)
  - » Negotiation and communication techniques
  - » Collaborative goal setting and respect for differing priorities

Understanding and supporting a child with challenging and ADHD-like behaviour requires the cooperation of teachers, school staff, parents/carers, and community services. This unit explores working in partnership with parents and other professionals to support the inclusion of young children with challenging and ADHD-like behaviours.

#### Educational plans

At the core of inclusion lies the creation of environments where all children can participate and learn. When children need extra support with development or to manage challenging behaviour, an educational plan may be a useful way to facilitate inclusion. Such a plan should be developed in partnership with parents/carers, the child, and other relevant professionals within the community.

As a teacher, you may have a central role in developing an individualised educational plan. When doing so, it is worth considering:

- » What's the plan for the school/classroom?
- » What's the plan for when the child is at home?
- » What other community services are needed? (Lombardi, 1992)

#### Positive teacher-parent relationships

A strong positive relationship between parents/carers and teachers is essential for all children, but it is especially

important when it comes to children with challenging and ADHD-like behaviours. The skills discussed in previous units are learned most effectively when home and school work together. This ensures consistency of messages for the young child.

#### ADHD within the family

ADHD can have a significant impact on the entire family system, which is important to think about when considering the most effective ways of working with parents. Foremost, when considering the evidence for a genetic basis of ADHD, it is worth bearing in mind that the parent/carer may also have ADHD. Almost half of the parents of children diagnosed with ADHD may also be struggling with ADHD themselves (Starck et al., 2016), which may make it difficult for them to support their children and provide the right environment for their child's needs.

Parents with ADHD may find it harder to provide an organised, structured home environment. They may find it more difficult to provide routine and to set good boundaries and expectations. They may find it difficult to regulate their own emotions, and so they may be less patient with the child. Home-life might be somewhat chaotic (Murray & Johnston, 2006).

Even if the child's parents/carers do not have ADHD, having a child with ADHD-like behaviours at home may cause stress within the family (Firmin, 2009). In today's society, raising children can often bring challenges - often families do not have the extended family or community supports, which they once may have had. Raising a child with ADHD can be associated with additional stresses specific to the diagnosis.

As a result of issues with inattention, hyperactivity, impulsivity, executive functions, and emotional regulation, parents/carers can feel physical and emotionally exhausted. There may be financial difficulties too (Johnston & Mash, 2001; Theule, Wiener, Tannock, & Jenkins, 2013).

## Stigma

To stigmatise or discriminate against someone is to treat them unfairly with disgrace or disapproval due to the problems they have. People who are stigmatised can be labelled as 'different' or 'bad', and so are rejected, excluded and devalued by their communities. In some cases, people may 'blame' the parents/carers and the child for the challenging behaviours. When it comes to ADHD, people may not be sympathetic and understanding, like they might be with other difficulties.

When parents/carers experience stigma they might be more likely to:

- » Feel isolated and rejected. They may feel more stress.
- » Feel blamed for their child's difficulties and feel like they are 'bad' parents (leading to guilt and shame).
- » Avoid supports and treatment, because they want to avoid feeling further stigma.

## Why is important to work with parents?

The first educational environment that the child experiences is the family home. Parents/carers may have particular views on parenting, due to their own experiences, how they were raised, and their cultural background. While teachers and other professionals can provide essential information, it is important to respect the educational environment of the child's home, and to work in partnership with the parents to create a home environment for the child which is stable and provides children with continuity and predictability (Barbour, 1996). To feel safe, secure, and to learn behavioural skills, children with challenging and ADHD-like behaviour need clear structure. This is best achieved when this structure is consistent between home and school.

Collaborative working with parents not only benefits the child, but can also benefit parents in a number of ways (Barbour, 1996; Gestwicki, 1992; Patrikakou, 2008):

- » **Emotional Support.** Parents may be under a lot of stress, may not know how best to support their child, and may have less support than others
- » **Practical support and information.** Teachers are experts in child development (Barbour, 1996). You can support parents to develop positive parenting skills and strategies to teach their children behavioural skills.
- » **Feel Included.** Schools can also provide a space where parents/carers and children feel valued and included, that is, they do not feel stigmatised. You can influence parents' views of schools and teachers and build long-term cooperative relationships. You can foster supportive relationships with other parents in the school.

- » **Positive outcomes for the child.** When teachers help parents to understand, accept, and use clear educational plans, positive outcomes for the child ensue.
- » **The relationship that a parent/family has with education starts early.** It can often be based on their own childhood experiences, but also can be affected by the relationships they have with the kindergarten where their child first enters education. If parents do not get involved early, they are unlikely to get involved later (Barbour, 1996). When working effectively with parents, you are setting foundations for the future of the child's education in many different ways.

In addition, collaborative working with parents can also benefit you (the teacher) and your kindergarten by:

- » Developing a more individualised and comprehensive educational plan for the child with challenging and ADHD-like behaviour.
- » Increasing the likelihood that the plan will be used. Parents can support what the teacher is doing in school.
- » Increasing understanding of what is causing challenging behaviours and possible solutions (everyone has a different piece of the puzzle).
- » Sharing useful information and resources about what works for the specific child.
- » Sharing information about the culture of the family and the child's background, history, and their strengths (personal and strengths at home).
- » Creating a community of practice.
- » Parents can be the teacher's spokesperson or advocate; they help broaden opportunities, may improve the school and community's infrastructure, speak to authorities, etc.

## Challenges to the parent-teacher relationship

Early childhood educators are often the first child-focused professionals that parents/carers engage with, so they can have a big impact on how parents/carers view education. This relationship should ideally facilitate a supportive, and mutually respectful relationship. Ideally, the first encounter with nursery and kindergarten should be caring and supportive. However, there are some challenges to cooperative working and it's important to be aware of the things that can impact the teacher-parent relationship, such as parents' own childhood experiences, differences in cultural background, and current experiences.

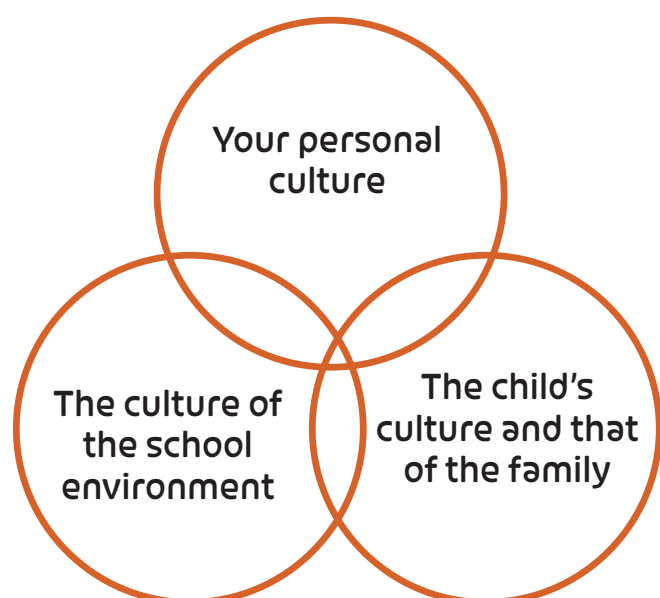
Parents who had their own negative childhood experiences with kindergarten or with education in general (for example, because they showed ADHD-



like behaviours) may find it difficult to trust teachers (Swick, 1994). It's also possible for parents/carers to pass this distrust and fear to their child unknowingly. When ADHD-like behaviours are involved, the parent-teacher relationship may be challenging. Some of the things that could negatively impact this relationship are (Gwernan-Jones et al. 2015):

- » **Parents may be experiencing blame, guilt, and stigma.**
- » Parents hope that their children will be happy at school and performing well. When there are difficulties, these hopes collapse, and parents may feel anxiety, frustration, and anger.
- » **The teacher or school may only contact the parents if a problem occurs.** Parents may feel that teachers only see the problem or view their child as a problem (rather than seeing the child's strengths and potential).
- » When a parent disagrees with the teacher, the teacher might view the parent as being resistant or defensive, rather than listening to and hearing what the parent is saying.
- » Parents may feel humiliated or embarrassed by the teacher. They may feel that the teacher is stigmatizing them and their child.
- » The relationship between parents and teachers can become complicated by cultural differences. Different people and different groups 'see' behaviour differently. What is considered 'normal' in one context may be seen as 'different' or 'bad' in another. This may lead to parents/carers feeling judged

**FIGURE 28. THE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE FAMILIES AND THE INSTITUTION IS ALSO AN ENCOUNTER OF CULTURES**



### **The meeting of three cultures:**

Your personal culture/The culture of the school environment/The child's culture and that of the family. Such a situation is often also difficult for a teacher. The teacher may feel blamed and criticized for failing to solve the problem and to handle the child's challenging or ADHD-like behaviour. It can be difficult to look positively at the child who "seems" to be not listening, overactive, impulsive, and who does not seem to respond to methods that work with other children (Wheeler, 2010).

### **Developing the parent-teacher relationship**

Co-operation is key. Parents/carers need to feel like the relationship is positive, supportive, and respectful. In other words, the relationship is about "co-operation" between parents/carers, wider families, and teachers. When parents/carers feel that they are part of a co-operative relationship, they are more likely to use an educational plan at home and the parents/carers are more likely to accept the teacher's advice and support (Bowman et.al, 2001). Try to make sure that you foster a partnership relationship when working with parents, as opposed to telling them what to do. Remember, you are the expert in early childhood education, but they are the expert in their child.

It can help if the parent can come into the school or classroom and see how the child is getting on, either on a typical day or when there is something different (e.g. playground, puppet theatre). Often challenging behaviour can be recognised more easily when there is a group of children, which sometimes does not happen at home. Parents and teachers need regular meetings or catch ups to support the child with challenging or ADHD-like behaviours.

### **Approaches to Communication**

A positive parent-teacher relationship is based on effective communication. Within early educational contexts, two types of communication may be apparent:

- » **One-way communication:** parents/carers are sent information about the class or school (e.g. newsletters and message boards). This kind of communication is very important in delivering information, but it does not help parents to get involved – in this type of communication, the parent is a passive recipient of information.
- » **Two-way communication:** allows both parties to share information, concerns and feelings. Frequent two-way communication is very important when supporting children with ADHD-like behaviours. It sets up a good relationship between parent and teacher, builds understanding, confidence, and cooperation. It allows you to better understand the child and

better support the parents. As a result, the child's needs will be understood and supported. Two way communication can happen in the child's home (you could ask to visit the family), over the telephone, setting up group visits, parent-teacher conferences, afternoon counselling/consulting hours, or even brief conversations when the parent drops off or picks up the child. You could make use of a **structured form of communication** such as a booklet they bring home and into school. In this way, both parent and teacher have access to messages and can keep each other informed about the child's progress. Make sure that you include the child. Let them know what is being talked about and let them input if they want to. It's also important for these messages to include positive information about strengths and achievements.

Communication should be useful. During communication, it is important for the teacher to keep in mind that parents, like everyone else, are most likely interested in content that they think is useful to them. Equally, teachers need the communication to be useful, and when facilitated to be done well, it is more likely to be (Mendoza et al, 2003).

#### Communication about difficult subjects:

When it comes to children with ADHD-like behaviours, the communication can sometimes be about difficult subjects. Talking about difficult subjects is stressful for both teachers and parents. Sometimes these discussions are about practical things (e.g. being on time when dropping off or picking children up). However, the most stressful discussions are about difficulties with the child or the child's challenging behaviour. When talking about these issues with parents of children with ADHD-like behaviours the conversation may feel charged with blame

and emotion (see above). So teachers need to have good communication skills and to be able to negotiate with the parents to avoid negative influences when having difficult conversations with parents.

The following tips may support parent-teacher communication (Barbour, 1996; Sanabria-Hernandez, n.d.):

**Try active listening:** Let the parents/carers know that their views and beliefs are heard and understood. The parent needs to feel like they are partners and experts in their child – let them share their knowledge with you and actively show interest in what they share.

**Avoid blame, criticism, and anger:** When talking about the child, make sure that the focus is on exploring the situation with the aim of better understanding current challenges. Make use of 'I-messages' to ensure that communication is positive, trusting, and collaborative (Wheeler, 2010).

**I-messages:** To lessen any potential feelings of upset, you can speak to a parent/carer in the first person and focus on your experiences / thoughts / feelings. None can be angry with you for how you feel or your perceptions, as long as they are not accusations. So, begin by describing the situation and why it is a problem. Be careful, do not accuse them or their child, you don't want them to try and defend their behaviour or their child. For example, if the situation is that the child runs in the hallway and you are concerned for their safety and the safety of others. You could say, "We try to ensure that all children walk through the hall, because we want them to be safe and for other children to be safe". Next, describe the behaviour / issue. You could say, "I asked them three times not to run in the hallway, but this didn't seem to be understood, so I am wondering does this happen at home and do you have any suggestion for what we could try?" rather than "they do not listen when I tell them not to run in the hallway" or worse "they

never listen to me". You are leaving the possibility open that you are at least partly responsible for the situation. By extension, you need to work together with child and parent to find a solution. Make sure you are specific and focus on one or a few specific situations. Be careful here, do not use words like 'always' or 'never'. For example, do not say, 'he/she never listens to me' or 'he/she is always knocking things over'. It's not about other behaviours and these words usually don't work, they make people want to defend themselves. Avoid making generalisations.

FIGURE 29. ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS



**Trust is key:** The teacher has to win the parent's trust to work with them (a win-win situation). The aim is to avoid working against each other (a lose-lose situation). As the teacher, try to be patient and understanding. It's very important that we find ways to manage our own emotions too.

**Good audience:** It's important to listen to what the parent says. Parents will often say or give you more information than you asked for. Let them talk, be encouraging, and use silence and space to talk. Be a good listener.

**Clarify strategies:** For children with ADHD-like behaviours, it is important for you to know what strategies the parents use at home now or in the past, which may give you some ideas about what you can try in class. Some things to ask:

- » What strategies do you use now?
- » What works for your child at home?
- » Have you used anything else in the past?
- » What has worked in the past?
- » When is the challenging behaviour less or absent?
- » When, in the past, was the challenging behaviour less or absent?

**Repeat:** Talking to teachers may be stressful for parents, regardless of whether we are discussing positive or negative issues. When we are stressed, communication is harder and we find it more difficult to understand what is being said. When talking to parents provide information in a number of different ways (repeat yourself) and give lots of examples.

**Describing behaviour:** Teachers spend a lot of time with children in different situations (games, meals, etc.) and have the opportunity to observe behaviours that may not be present at home. Teachers can also view the child's behaviour within a group of children of a similar

age, which parents might not get to see at home. When there is challenging behaviour, it's important to focus on the behaviour rather than characterise the child.

Be specific and be objective in your descriptions.

When it comes to ADHD-like behaviours, parents usually are aware that there are challenges. But sometimes, these types of behaviours are only noticed for the first time when the child enters education. Try to remember that you don't need to diagnose the behaviour or give these behaviours a label. The teacher's job is to collect information that can help schools and parents develop positive behaviours. When talking to a parent, simply describe the child's behaviour, do not diagnose, label, guess, or make assumptions.

**The power of words:** The words we use to describe behaviour, situations, and people are very powerful. We need to be extra careful of the words we use to describe the child, their behaviour, the parents, and the parent's behaviour. When we are describing behaviours, the aim is for parents to see or accept the challenges and to work together. We need to be careful how we describe behaviours. Do not use words that are negative, devaluing, or could possibly harm the child or parent's self-esteem. Words can hurt or destroy, but they can also build self-esteem, trust, and respect.

**Feedback Sandwich** - Talk about 'Strengths' and 'Areas for Development': It is important to be positive when talking to parents. Use the 'feedback sandwich' method. Even when talking about problems or concerns, the teacher should start and finish the conversation with a positive remark.

<b>Bread (positive feedback)</b>	Pete is so much fun to be around. He has so much energy and is interested in everything. Yesterday we spent most of break time trying to catch crickets and we had some much fun chasing them.
<b>Filling (areas for development)</b>	At the moment, we are really trying to work on developing Pete's organisation skills. I think because he is so curious, he will often get up and get a new toy off the shelf without tidying away the toys he was playing with.
<b>Bread (strengths)</b>	I really think that his interests are one of his biggest strengths. It's that curiosity that is what learning is all about.

**TABLE 10. THE FEEDBACK SANDWICH-METHOD**

**Give them time:** When parents are made aware of challenges or difficulties, they may feel guilty, fearful, confused, angry, or helpless. Make sure you give the parent time to think about and process what has been said. Give them a chance to ask questions. Be patient and understanding if parents don't react positively, but try not to take it personally, it's not about you.

**Collaboration – be a team:** Working with parents is all about working together. It's important to discuss and celebrate success and achievement just as much as (if not more than) challenges and areas for development. As the teacher, you need to stress the importance of working together as a team in support of the child.

**Use lots of “we” language.** For example, you might say things like, 'what are we going to do?', 'how do you think we are getting on?', 'we really need to think about this one', or 'this is going really well, we are doing great!'

Focus on what can be done if you work together. Let parents know you are there for them if they need help or support. Suggest dates for follow-up and recommend others who can also support or be part of **the child's team of champions** (e.g. parent groups to discuss the situation).

**Share Information:** As the teacher, you can support the parent by giving them books, videos, DVDs, leaflets, websites and any other information you have about the following:

- » Typical development
- » ADHD and ADHD-like behaviours
- » Positive parenting strategies

**Ask for feedback:** We are all learning – children, parents, and teachers. As part of your learning, it is useful to get feedback from parents (individually or in group sessions). This feedback could be focused on teaching practices and methods, children's learning and experiences, kindergarten, etc. Be prepared for positive feedback and for feedback regarding areas for development.

**Practice:** Before meeting with parents, practice or role play the conversation with a colleague if a difficult conversation is anticipated. Some things to think about to help develop the parent-teacher relationship (Walker, n.d.):

- » Try to look at every situation from the parent's point of view.
- » Parents should be given all the information they need about the school's policies and practices. Parents (like most people) do not like surprises. Give them all the information they need about kindergarten's agenda, expected behaviour, special programs, etc.
- » Teachers should show parents respect, kindness, and a willingness to work in partnership.

Through your behaviour you show the parent that you care about them and their child, and that you only want what is best for them.

- » Be open to creative ways of understanding the situation and to coming up with strategies (with the parent) to support the child.
- » Require parents to communicate with teachers. Without this, the teacher cannot work constructively with the child.
- » Try not to complain to the parent.
- » Do not ask the parent to give the child consequences for things that happened within the kindergarten.

### *A Model for Co-operative Working*

An approach to collaborative problem-solving with children has been developed by Ross W. Greene (2010). According to Greene, if children could do well, they would do well. When challenging behaviour occurs, it is caused by an unsolved problem or an under developed skill. When collaborating with children and parents (in the next section), you can use his three-step approach.

#### **3 Step Process:**

- » **Empathy:** Teacher gathers information in order to clarify the child's / parent's concern or perspective on the unsolved problem. The teacher should reassure the child / parent that trying to solve the problem is not just up to the teacher, it needs to be done by working together.
- » **Define the Problem:** The teacher communicates their concerns or perspective on the unsolved problem.
- » **The Invitation:** the teacher and the child / parent brainstorm solutions to address the unsolved problem (these are your strategies).

One option for collaborative working “with” parents is based on the Collaborative Problem Solving model. Before you meet the parent/carer ensure that you:

- » Complete the ABC to identify the unsolved problem, challenging behaviour, or areas for development
- » Come up with your priorities (stick to 1-3 priorities at most). Be aware that parents will also have their priorities, but it's good to have these prepared as a start to the collaborative process. However, these need to be flexible and open to change / reinterpretation based on parent's perspectives and priorities. Co-create an understanding of the problem.

- » Have developed ideas for some strategies you think might be useful to address challenging behaviour or support those areas for development. However, these need to be flexible and collaboration is that you are open to using parent suggestions and co-creating strategies.

The first time you talk to the parent about wanting to collaborate:

- » Establish a positive relationship
- » Explain why you want to meet. Use the communication strategies described above.

- » Make sure it is clear to the parent that you want to work together to come up with the solution.

Once you have a shared understanding of the problem and the solution or strategies, you need to agree on shared goals. This stage is very important. It ensures that people are clear about the outcomes (i.e. what the child needs to achieve), what needs to be done (consistent strategies at home and in school), and what each person is supposed to do (i.e. roles and responsibilities). When creating goals, you can use the SMART model for goal setting.

<b>Specific</b>	Goals need to be specific. What exactly do you want the child to achieve?
<b>Measurable</b>	Parent and teacher need to be able to measure when the child has reached the goal and if they are making progress towards it.
<b>Achievable</b>	Goals need to be achievable for the child. While “sitting still for the whole 10 minutes of circle time” might be a worthwhile goal, it might not be achievable for a child who struggles to sit still for 2 minutes. Make sure that goals are age-appropriate and set children up for success.
<b>Relevant</b>	It is important for goals to be relevant for the child at home and in school. While you might choose to focus on some goals in school, for a range of reasons (e.g. not relevant at home or cultural differences), when setting shared goals these need to be relevant to both contexts (i.e. home and school).
<b>Time-bound</b>	When do you expect that the child will be able to achieve the goal? Set a clear timeline for progress, which you will review (this may be weekly or monthly) with a clear date in mind for when the goal will be achieved. It's better to start small and go slow. Setting short-term goals is best, particularly at the outset.

**TABLE 11. THE SMART MODEL**

Once you have agreed the goal, set up a time to meet and discuss progress. This doesn't need to be a formal meeting; you might have a quick chat after school on Friday's to talk about progress during the week.

Parent events are a great way for schools to work with parents. Parent events can be run entirely by the school or they can be done in collaboration with other professionals and services in the community. Specifically, for the child with challenging or ADHD-like behaviour, these events may:

- » Develop trust, respect, and positive parent-teacher relationships
- » Offer opportunities for teachers to give out information about the school
- » Offer opportunities for teachers to provide information or workshops to develop parents' knowledge, understanding and skills
- » Offer schools/teachers opportunities to get feedback from parents

### Test Yourself:

- » How does ADHD affect the family?
- » What is stigma and how does it affect parents?
- » Identify two challenges with developing the parent-teacher relationship?
- » Explain three things you can do to develop a positive parent-teacher relationship?
- » Identify and explain three different communication techniques you can use with your parents.
- » What is the feedback sandwich?

## 4b Working with Children

### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will

- » Be able to adopt effective strategies for communicating with children with ADHD
- » Understanding why including children's voice and working with children with challenging behaviour is important and how we can achieve this in practice

### Communication with the Child

As emphasised throughout this manual, children with ADHD-like behaviours can process information differently from typically developing children. As a result, communicating with children with ADHD-like behaviours can sometimes be a challenge. Below are some suggested strategies for communicating with children with ADHD-like behaviours to get and keep their attention, be really clear (think of executive function difficulties), and support motivation and management of emotions.

#### Getting and keeping attention:

Try to do the following to get and keep the child's attention:

- » When you want the child's attention, **call them by their name**
- » **Make sure the child is listening:** you might wish to touch their arm to get their attention
- » **Don't assume that eye contact means attention:** a child may be listening to you even if they are not looking at you
- » **Permit fidgeting:** many children with ADHD-like behaviour find it easier to listen if they are fidgeting. Consider giving them a squeeze ball, a rubber, or a toy
- » Children with ADHD-like behaviour often find it easier to communicate in one-to-one situations
- » **Use physical space well:** communication is better when you are close to the child. When you

are not, come up with a verbal signal to use. Get down on the child's level, so get on your knees or sit on a chair so that you can look them in the eye

- » Keep it **simple**
- » Keep it **short**

#### Communicate clearly and provide structure:

Children with ADHD-like behaviours might struggle with complex instructions, or they may quickly forget what was said.

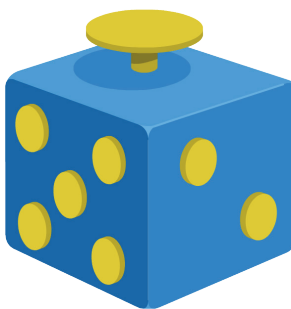
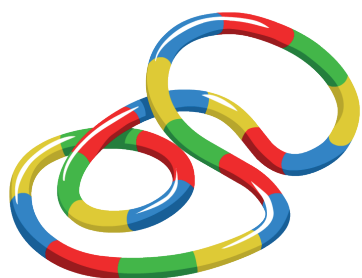
- » **Be clear:** If you are giving instructions, then tell them clearly with obvious, concrete instructions. Avoid complex directions or requests. Use simple words and simple sentences.
- » **Break it down for them:** When giving directions or explaining something break into small steps. Once they have done one step, you can then ask another small manageable task.
- » **Don't ask, tell:** Be clear - are you making a request or are you giving instructions.
- » Use **repetition** effectively
- » **Use communication aids:** For children with ADHD-like behaviours it can be helpful to have communication aids to help with memory, sequencing, etc. This may be achieved with a story board showing sequence of steps, images of what is expected of them, or non-verbal gestures that only you and the child understand
- » **Be predictable:** use the same instruction in often occurring, similar situations, phrasing the same way, with minimal choices
- » **Check for understanding:** When you have spoken with a child, make sure they have heard and understood.

#### Motivation and Emotion

Use communication to encourage motivation to start and complete a task. Be careful to avoid emotionally triggering communication styles (Myers, 2014).

- » **Watch your tone:** Children with ADHD-like behaviour can be sensitive to tone. Communicate in a soft, calm, gentle, but firm tone

**FIGURE 30. FIDGETS**  
TANGLE FIDGET  
FIDGET CUBE  
FIDGET SPINNER



- » Follow the **child's preferred communication style**: Depending on the child, you may want to speak in a whisper (to get their attention focused) or to speak a little more quickly
- » **Give choices**: within the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, provide the child with choices and respect them
- » **Using fun, play, and competition**: You can try and get them motivated by making things into a fun or competitive game

### Children's Voice: working "with" children

The idea of children's voice is a student-teacher relationship, grouproom, and whole school community that values and respects children's right to have their views heard and listened to.

This approach sees children as experts in their experiences, their behaviour, and what works and doesn't work in practice. So, teachers work "with" children to gather information about their behaviour and educational experiences, that leads to better educational strategies and supports, children who feel more empowered, and the development of skills within the child (e.g., communication, self-awareness, and self-advocacy).

It's important that you don't only listen to what the child says, you need to respond to this and let them know you have listened to them.

### Accessing voice

When children are young and/or have difficulties communicating, you might need to adapt how you work with them and gather information. Creative and visual (image-based) activities can be a helpful way to explore issues and gather information from young children with ADHD-like behaviours

- » Drawing and other art-based techniques, such as draw-and-tell (e.g., get the child to draw a picture about a specific situation and explain it to you)
- » Photo voice (e.g., get a child to take photos of their experience and explain why they took it)
- » Maps of grouproom or playground (created with / by the child or images you create to support discussion)
- » You can find images (e.g., pictures you create, in books, photos) and talk to the child about it.
- » Using other methods of the artist's practice (e.g., storytelling, clay, dance).

Try to tap into the child's preferences around communication. For example, if the child loves to move, creating a dance might be a useful tool.

Remember the principles of good communication discussed above, in terms of keeping it simple and

structured to support difficulties children have with attention or processing information.

### Collaborative Problem Solving:

Again, drawing on Greene's (2010) collaborative problem-solving approach, when collaborating with children, you can use his three-step approach which he designed for use with children.

Before you meet with the child, identify the lagging skills and/or unsolved problem. By definition, CPS is "collaborative" and so based on communication between student-teacher.

### 3 Step Process:

- » **Empathy**: Teacher gathers information in order to clarify the child's concern or perspective on the unsolved problem. The teacher should reassure the child that trying to solve the problem is not just up to the teacher, it needs to be done by working together.
- » **Define the Problem**: The teacher communicates their concerns or perspective on the unsolved problem.
- » **The Invitation**: the teacher and the child brainstorm solutions to address the unsolved problem (these are your strategies).

### Test Yourself:

- » **Can you name three communication strategies you can use with children with ADHD-like behaviours?**
- » **What is children's voice?**
- » **Can you name a way that you will try to use with a child with ADHD-like behaviours in your grouproom?**

**FIGURE 31. THE MAP OF THE GROUROOM WITH THE EYE OF A CHILD**



## 4c Working with other professionals and the community

### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will

- » Know how to advocate for reducing stigma associated with challenging and ADHD-like behaviours
- » Be able to advocate for early identification and support for children with challenging and ADHD-like behaviours with:
  - » Other health-care professionals
  - » Other education professionals
  - » Other social care professionals
  - » Other people affected by ADHD-like behaviours

Often, children with ADHD-like behaviours, their families and the school/teachers need additional support from other professionals and services. This section considers how to work within your community to address stigma and to work with other professionals.

### Stigma

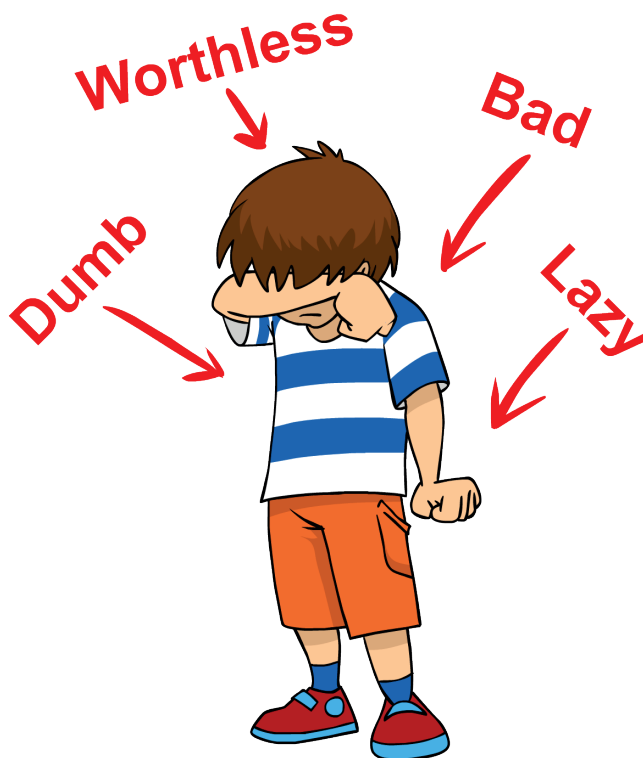
We discussed stigma in the last section. But, it is so common when it comes to ADHD and the effects are so serious on children and families that we need to explore it again here, because tackling stigma involves the whole community and the people within that community. As mentioned, stigma is about negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviours towards particular children, people, or groups based on something about them that is seen as 'different,' 'abnormal' or 'bad'. As a result, people are often labelled negatively and excluded, rejected and devalued by society. People may also be treated unfairly with disgust or disapproval.

#### What causes ADHD-related stigma:

- » A lack of knowledge or understanding about ADHD
- » Negative attitudes or feelings towards children and families affected by ADHD/ADHD-like behaviour
- » Children with ADHD-like behaviours or people with ADHD being seen only as a disorder or an illness
- » Discrimination and unfair treatment of children with ADHD-like behaviours that places limits on their education or other opportunities (e.g. being excluded from school)

#### Stigma can be:

- » **Public stigma** – where society or communities hold negative thoughts, feelings, or behaviours toward people affected by ADHD
- » **Self-stigma** – when the person (or the child) believes and accepts these negative thoughts from the community and they come to believe them. They see themselves as 'different' or 'bad' or 'abnormal' or 'less than'



**FIGURE 32. THE EFFECTS OF STIGMA CAN BE WORSE THAN THE PRIMARY DIFFICULTIES.**

Sometimes the effects of stigma can be worse than the primary difficulties. Stigma can harm a child's sense of self and their beliefs in themselves, which may influence all of their future behaviours, school, friendships, and work.

#### What you can do to tackle stigma:

- » Develop your own knowledge and understanding of ADHD
- » Teach others about ADHD
- » Teach others about stigma (e.g. have an anti-stigma campaign in your school or community)
- » Talk with others about ADHD in an open and positive way



- » Recognise and challenge stigma when you see others doing it or you see it on TV
- » **Be careful of your language** – think about how you talk about ADHD and the child with ADHD-like behaviours.
- » Think critically about your school, classroom, and community. Where is there stigma and what can you do to change it?

### Working with other services

The kindergarten can be a source of information, a gatekeeper or communicator with or between other services (e.g. health and social care), so that the child and their family are supported. It's helpful for your school to develop a list of local services in order to support families who need to access them.

Teachers can help families find and use resources and services in the community. This can be done by having leaflets or brochures around your school (e.g. on a table by the door where parents pass every day) or giving them to parents. If you have relationships with particular services, they might visit the school, to provide you or other staff members training or advice. You can also put parents/families in touch with these services.

One of the main aims of kindergarten is to ensure that the child can transition to the next educational stage smoothly. For children with ADHD-like behaviours, it is very important that kindergarten teachers communicate with primary school teachers (when relevant and with suitable permission). The kindergarten teacher and the schoolteacher should share information about the child and their family, let school teachers know what works best for the child, what their strengths are and what their areas for development are.

Co-operation between different care providers reduces costs and increases the availability of services for children and families. Access to services can improve children's school attendance and performance. (Foy et al. 2014)

When it comes to children with ADHD-like behaviours, co-operation between professionals and services is very important and comes with many advantages (Curran, 2018):

- » Reduce barriers to diagnosis and treatment
- » Reduce barriers to care and support (e.g. lessens pressure to medicate children)
- » Reduce stigma, misinformation, and prejudice around behaviours and diagnosis
- » Increase teachers' knowledge and understanding about ADHD and how to treat or support children affected by it
- » Ensure greater success for interventions/ outcomes for the child. When kindergartens,

health and social care, and parental interventions are coordinated, the outcomes are better for children (Bowman et al. 2001).

As discussed earlier, ADHD often requires different types of treatments and educational supports. There needs to be a whole team approach to understand the child's difficulties, plan effective interventions, and provide the interventions the child needs. The team might include:

- » teachers
- » special education teachers
- » kindergarten psychologists
- » kindergarten doctor and/or nurse
- » kindergarten social worker
- » developmental specialists including occupational therapists and/or speech and language therapists
- » parent
- » child

Different members of the team will bring with them different kinds of knowledge, different perspectives, they can explore ideas, sharing strategies and resources, as well as sharing the workload in terms of using interventions. The team will depend on your locally available services and the resources that you have in your school.

Collaborative working is built on trust, respect, and good communication. **Some suggestions for collaboration with other professionals:**

- » You may have local or national frameworks (e.g., policies) or informal networks to support you with collaborating with other professionals. Use these where possible and where they do not exist try to develop them (e.g., are there professional organisations in your area).
- » Think about your role and responsibility to the child, family, and school. What can you do and only work within your boundaries of ability and safety.
- » Remember self-care is important, so don't take on more than you can handle.
- » Think about what information you have or you can access, what information might you need and how you might be able to get it.
- » Take time to understand the cultures and practices of these professional services (e.g., psychology, clinics, OTs, social workers). Think about where / how you can contribute to what they do and what they can do to support you.
- » Be proactive in terms of communicating and collaborating with others. Try to support and intervene when needed. It can take time to develop relationships with other

- organisations, but it can be time well spent.
- » Think about the ethics of giving information to other people (e.g., do you have the consent of parents to discuss the child's situation with others or can you do it anonymously) and your areas of expertise.
- » Consider how you could resolve differences positively when there is conflict of opinions or disagreements.
- » Collaboration can benefit from a person or persons to work as the key workers (who bring people together) and manages these relationships. The teacher or another staff member in a school can do this or a parent.

### **Building relationships within the community:**

To support the child's needs, the school should build relationships with the community and with other services. Some potential partners for you and your school may be: local businesses, other schools (elementary school, secondary school), universities, charities or non-profit organizations, family and child welfare centres, nursing service, pedagogical services, mental health service, etc.

**Areas for improving community co-operation may include:**

- » **Improving communication within the community:** members of the community are often unaware of good practice that is going on in the kindergarten
- » **Sharing good practice** (between schools or with other services)
- » **To discuss and identify where the goals and work of the community and the school overlap.** It's helpful to know where there are common values, aims, or practices. This will enable you to figure out how to work together toward achieving common goals.
- » **Integrating services for children and families and education:** Cooperation between families/ children and services (including education) ensures that the child is supported
- » **Creating clear lines of communication and policies** about how you work together
- » Use the kindergarten building: you can offer the space within the school to the community to use in a variety of ways (e.g. meetings, youth clubs, parent training, professional training, information forums, ADHD information and training, etc.) This can provide extra income for the kindergarten and make the kindergarten a part of the community in many ways.

- » **Lessen stigma** - community relationships can also help parents and children with ADHD-like behaviours to become less stigmatized

### **Support Groups:**

Peer support is a very effective tool for supporting children and families. For children, they can learn a lot from others who have similar difficulties. For parents, they can share their experiences with others who have similar difficulties and experiences.

Try and find local support groups and you can let parents know about them. If you have a number of children with ADHD-like behaviours in your school or local areas, you can even set up a group yourself.

### **Test Yourself:**

- » **What causes stigma?**
- » **How can you reduce stigma?**
- » **What professionals and services exist in your local community?**
- » **Can you identify three reasons why it is good to work with other services?**
- » **How can you develop relationships with others in the community?**

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