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*Empowering ADHDers  
and their families to  
live life to the fullest*

*Unlocking ADHD is a registered charity and a social service agency under the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) since 2023*

## **AWWA INCLUSION EXPERTS + UNLOCKING ADHD (MAY 27, 2023) EMPOWERING TEACHERS TO EMPOWER STUDENTS - QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

*Please note that the responses below are from the panelists own experience and do not represent an organizational position nor are the responses below intended to be medical advice. Please consult a mental health professional for more specific input on your child or student's situation*

*For more resources on ADHD – please visit Unlocking ADHD – [www.unlockingadhd.com](http://www.unlockingadhd.com)*

### **DIAGNOSIS**

- 1. From my understanding, ADHD is now being diagnosed in Primary School onwards (age 7 and above). Hence, does that mean that there will never be ADHD students in childcare? One of my preschool students is diagnosed with Executive Function Disorder. How different is it from ADHD?***

There are cases of children who may be diagnosed with ADHD in childcare on a case-by-case basis, though it is not common. The reason being during those early years, children are still developing and there can be many other factors to consider, on top of early intervention.

Executive Function Disorder is likely the term doctors use to identify some challenges faced by the child, but is not a formal diagnosis of ADHD. If a child presents with executive function challenges, it is best for the parents to check with the child's doctor on what they are referring to when they say the child has Executive Function Disorder.

- 2. There seems to be a lot of stigma on ADHD and it is rather hard to convince the parents to bring their child for checks and diagnosis even by telling them the symptoms. Is there any suggestion to help convince them?***

We should focus on the issues arising from the symptoms and the current and potential impact on the child and family. Try to refrain from using labels - some parents are working on an "emotional" level and we want to reach them at the rational level - so we stick to the facts in the conversation.

Reframe this as being in the parent's / child's best interest, and not as a stigma/negative issue - it is more of being able to access help in a timely manner to unlock a child's potential.

- 3. What advice do I give a parent who has a stigma on getting their child diagnosed? Especially when they are concerned that it will affect their career or not getting employed.***

Examine what the issues are - sometimes it is the issue on the parents' side. There may be underlying concerns. Thus, it may be better to focus on symptoms rather than labels.

Addressing the symptoms earlier in life can give the child a better future, i.e. lesser mental health issues, better self-esteem, and in terms of education/career options - to potentially perform better in school. If a child is doing well or has found an area of strength/interest, the child will thrive and thus it will have a positive impact on the future career

Executive Function skills are important for life and if parents are aware of this and can support their child - this would be very helpful.

The other suggestion is to share about people with ADHD who are doing well in life - we have some examples in our Restart ADHD starter kit for adults - <https://bit.ly/restart-adhd>

- 4. *I feel that my child might be suffering from ADHD and going through low self-esteem struggling with school work. What is the first step I can take to get her diagnosed so that she can get the exam accommodations that might benefit her.***

The first step would be to speak with your child's form teacher so that your child can be connected with in-school support, e.g. Special Education Needs (SEN) Officer or a counsellor. They are also able to link you with the REACH team for intervention.

If you would like to access subsidized care for an ADHD diagnosis, you can take your child to the polyclinic for a referral. The main institutions offering support would be the Child Guidance Clinic (under the Institute of Mental Health), KK Hospital and National University Hospital. These hospitals offer comprehensive support from diagnosis/assessment, to therapy, e.g. psychological services, education therapy, occupation therapy, speech therapy, etc. Do be aware that there is a waiting list.

If private clinics are an option and time is a factor, then consider this route first. You can also simultaneously find out more about ADHD to understand it better. For exam accommodations, a psychologist who can do an educational psychology assessment will be helpful. Other private clinic professionals who can help would be a child and adolescent psychiatrist or pediatrician familiar with ADHD (e.g. developmental and behavioural pediatrics) who can also prescribe medication if appropriate in your child's situation.

- 5. *How do I help a teen who was recently diagnosed with ADHD but is very unhappy with his diagnosis. He is in denial and refuses to be helped, insisting that he is fine. But parents say that he is acting up at home and currently in school as well, getting into fights and disrupting his classes.***

Peer support is helpful. We have a video on the Unlocking ADHD YouTube about Thriving with ADHD featuring Kai, a youth 'ADHDer.' There are also videos under Youth-4-Youth about last minute exam hacks, the psychology of gaming, and an interview with our two youth volunteers on Mothership.

Other youth resources include the Unlocking ADHD Discord server (accessible on the UA website), and resources on YouTube such as 'How to ADHD' and 'ADHD Dude'

## **SOCIO -EMOTIONAL**

- 1. *Since there may be an overlap where a child could have social emotional challenges as well as learning needs, which one should we address first? It is good to be concurrent. However, I see a need to address emotional issues first such as those outside school before addressing the learning needs such as dyslexia. For your advice.***

The most important issue is to address the relationship - the emotional aspect, to provide security to the child. In many instances, we encourage parents and teachers to develop a good relationship with the child where the child feels heard and safe. Once the emotional issues have been addressed, there will be greater buy-in for the learning strategies.

- 2. *My daughter has ADHD. She has met issues with peers since primary school even until now when she is in secondary 1. Are there any services which I may engage to aid her in this? She lacks motivation to do better because of peer issues.***

Unlocking ADHD has a private Facebook community of over 2,800 parents and adults - please join and ask your questions there. You will find others in a similar situation and can share experiences - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/unlockingadhdsupportgroup/>

We also have a video by Executive Function coach, Seth Perler, on helping struggling students to shine - <https://bit.ly/preview-sethperler-EF>.

### **3. Most ADHD children suffer from social skills, how do we guide them on teamwork activities?**

It is important to explicitly build in group work exercises and the expectations- i.e turn taking and calm communication and sharing ideas. Teaching explicit Social Skills through group intervention delivered by the SEN officer or another member of staff, as part of class time can help the child and other classmates.

## **DEVICES**

### **1. Is there any evidence linking the use of devices with ADHD?**

ADHDers tend to be dopamine seeking - devices provide a very strong dopamine hit and this is addictive because of the way it makes them feel, e.g. excitement, they can progress to higher levels, bright colours and sounds, etc - gaming and social media which are available on devices are more fun than homework/revision or reading physical books.

Knowing this potential issue, it would be better to minimise or have controllable device use early on - limit the time but still provide access, so that the child learns to manage the device use. It is important to have alternatives to device use - sports and other CCAs are very important for engagement and also for the dopamine boost.

### **2. Is it possible that prolonged device use (Eg mobile, ipad) causes children to show many ADHD inattention symptoms, but they are actually not children with ADHD?**

It is a valid point that device use may create a situation where a child displays ADHD traits. There is a debate over nature vs nurture. Regardless of official diagnosis, we do know from research of the negative impact of devices on children whether they have ADHD or not.

ADHDers are more susceptible to addictions due to their impulsivity and lower levels of dopamine. They thus seek out activities which provide this and devices which enable them to access social media and games are a natural attraction.

### **3. Students are expected to use their learning devices in class now (iPads). Books and hardcopy worksheets are not used as much anymore. What are some specific strategies to help teenagers with ADHD to have better organisational skills especially how they are expected to use their iPads now?**

Technology has benefits when used properly.

- Do make use of the electronic timers in the device to inform students on the time left, to help them pace themselves.
- They can create checklists within the device that they can easily access to know what they need to complete.
- It is also helpful for them to record their voice that can then appear as text, to take away some of that load on typing each word out.

## **BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT**

### **1. How do we help the child to differentiate between "I cannot" and "I won't"? Most of the time, the child would verbalise "I can't" but it is quite evident that it is an "I won't" action of aggression without triggers.**

- Identify what the child can do and build it up. Build up the exposure to increasingly challenging activities
- Use chunking of the activities using a Now, Next and Then Board with an egg timer or analogue timer. This is to build in motivation.
- Use inclusive scripts to build confidence and self-esteem.

It is also important to understand a child's personality - the "I can't" may show a lack of confidence, or learned helplessness - so try to see if there are situations to give the child "small wins" to celebrate which can be built on to give confidence.... incremental improvements should be celebrated to give the affirmation needed

**2. *Is there any suggestion for ADHD students who engaged themselves in activities/ small talks that interrupt the class?***

- Try to give small incentives to them, or appeal to their sense of justice/fairness, e.g. encourage them to let their friends have an opportunity to speak
- Help use some of their energy by getting them to run errands for you
- Thank them for their enthusiasm and suggest they write down the questions to ask later, etc
- Use positive behaviour management techniques - highlight a learner who is demonstrating the desired behaviour and praise them,
- Directive communications - cue the learner showing the low-level disruptive behaviour, by saying a script, "XX, we need to get back to learning, we have 10 minutes left, after that I will check in with you to see how you are doing"

**3. *How do we address or correct undesirable behaviours in children with ADHD? Is there a proper way/s? Could you share some tips on that?***

- Focus on the behaviours that you want to encourage and affirm / magnify these positive behaviours when it occurs - Don't give too much attention to the negative behaviours
- We often catch our kids doing something wrong - if we can catch them doing something right - it sets a more positive tone and the child would want to have the warmth of the positive interactions. It wires the child's behaviour pattern to the desirable behaviour.
- ADHD children respond better to carrots rather than sticks - affirmations and encouragement are important - it is something they don't get enough of - reference the slide about ADHD children receiving 20,000 more negative feedback by the time they are 12

**4. *It was mentioned that children with ADHD do not really respond well to rewards and consequences. One of the strategies recommended was to use rewards. Could you clarify this?***

Children with ADHD are more likely to respond well to **immediate** rewards. So knowing what motivates the child is important and when they display a desired behaviour in the classroom, it is best to immediately address that. Rewards and consequences are an effective tool when used appropriately.

**5. *If I keep allowing the ADHD student to move around and take breaks, she is not able to keep up with the other students. This will definitely take a toll on her grades which will, of course, soon lead to anxiety and stress etc. How should this be managed?***

- Sometimes getting a child to sit in class quietly is by allowing them movement in non-disruptive ways, e.g. wiggling their toes in the shoes, manipulating putty/blue tack, etc - so that there is an outlet for their energy
- Give them errands to do for you..... and praise them for this
- When she or he sits quietly on occasion - notice that and praise their behaviour - this will encourage more of the desired behaviour.

**6. *How can I be more patient with my child with ADHD? Sometimes it gets too much to handle and I feel like just 'letting them be'.***

You are normal - we all struggle with managing our frustrations.... and sometimes it is "easier" to walk away.....Kids need to be secure emotionally and to know we love them as they are - then they will have more buy in on working with parents in areas of challenge.

**7. *May I know how to help my child who struggles with organising his things? He tends to be very messy and his teachers feedback that he is unable to organise his things and very slow to pack. What form of therapy would help with this?***

Executive Function training would help the parent to support the child - Unlocking ADHD has the Empower Foundation workshops to help parents to understand Executive Function skills and support them at home

Sometimes the child does not instinctively know what to do - we need to do alongside them, and show them visually what we want and what it looks like. Taking a photo of the neat room and printing out to show them allows them to "visualise" it so that they know what you want.

**8. A lot of good advice given, e.g. building bonds, understanding the students, addressing the kid's interest, but this is tough in a full mainstream class x the number of classes a teacher has. Any other help we can get?**

The key is to be mindful when interacting with the child - teachers face constraints in the classroom but where we can be positive or focus on strengths and affirmation, that would be helpful

## PEERS

**My daughter has ADHD. She has met issues with peers since primary school even until now she is in Sec 1. Are there any services which I may engage to aid her in this? As she lacks motivation to do better because of peer issues.**

Unlocking ADHD has a private facebook community of over 2800 parents and adults - please join and ask your questions - you will find others in a similar situation -

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Addressing social skills or through cognitive behaviour therapy or group learning may help with reading social cues, social anxiety and communication issues. In some situations, there may be issues with regulating her emotions.

## LEARNING ISSUES

**How did you overcome or help yourself in the dyscalculia issue? We have similar kids as well in school**

Professionals such as an Occupational Therapist can assess and come up with a programme to practise skills and help the child develop those areas over time- then sometimes these can be reinforced in school with the SEN Officer

My dyscalculia was not diagnosed when I was in school... I only realised it in the past 1 to 2 years when I was in my 50s.....

- There are some good books on the market about approaching maths - I cannot remember the author offhand but Carol Dweck and Angela Duckworth are helpful.
- Sometimes it is addressing the emotional/anxiety aspects of maths.... so start off with easier sums and let them build confidence.
- Sometimes it is the self talk - the child tells himself that he is bad in maths or doesn't like maths which becomes a self fulfilling prophecy....
- if one can reframe maths to be fun, it can make a difference.... or show how learning maths will be useful towards the child's goals/interest in life

## MEDICATION

**1. With regards to medication, some of my students have been recommended to take fish oil by their psychologists. Does fish oil have an effect on managing symptoms?**

Some doctors recommend Omega 3, etc - this can be helpful as a supplement but should not be the main approach for ADHD. It is like a choice between taking a bicycle or driving - both may take a person to the destination but one is more efficient

**2. Individuals with ADHD have difficult sleep patterns. Do ADHD meds tackle sleep issues?**

ADHD meds may or may not help with the sleep issues as everyone is wired differently. There are things that we can do to improve sleep hygiene

- establish winding down routines, stop device use about an hour before bedtime.
- have less "exciting" activities before bed, e.g. reading a book, etc.
- It is important to remove devices from the bedroom as it is tempting for a child to want to be online.

- Alarms can be the old-fashioned alarm clocks... rather than the phone alarm.
- 3. *A handful of parents have shared feedback that after giving medication for their child with ADHD, their child becomes very restless and zombie-like. Also after the medication wears off, their hyperactivity increases.***

Maybe it is the recalibration phase and the parent can revert to the clinician to reassess the dosage- based on a Paediatric Developmental Assessment.

- Dr Dan Shapiro has good resources on medication - please refer to <https://www.unlockingadhd.com/should-i-medicate-or-not-medicate-my-child/>
  - It is important to have close communication with the doctor when starting medication and track the symptom eradication and side effects using a medication journal/diary - there is a free medication trial template on Dr Dan's website ([www.parentchildjourney.com](http://www.parentchildjourney.com) - look under resources)
  - ADHD meds should NOT make a child zombie like - there may be an issue with the dosage or type of medication and this needs to be addressed with the prescribing doctor.
  - I would highly recommend that parents equip themselves with knowledge about ADHD medication as the level of education on medication in Singapore is not sufficient - Dr Dan has a 2 session pay-what-you-can online course on ADHD medication and you can also refer them to that.
  - medication will wear off and there are strategies to deal with the drop off too
  - parents can join the Unlocking ADHD virtual support community and attend our events for more information - visit [www.unlockingadhd.com](http://www.unlockingadhd.com) website
- 4. *How can I encourage a primary school age boy to take the medicine suggested? His mother left it to the child to decide.***

Children need to be at a certain maturity level to make decisions on important issues like medication..... Sometimes there may be fear of stigma or being different, or being teased by friends if they see him taking medication - so perhaps explore a little to find out what the underlying issues are.

## **EXECUTIVE FUNCTION**

- 1. *Do all the executive functioning skills deficits in the previous slide always present together in a person with ADHD?***

About 90% of those with ADHD have executive function (EF) issues - the good news, however, is that EF is coachable..... So it is helpful to learn more about ADHD so that we can support them, as educators.

In Feb 2023, Unlocking ADHD had EF expert, Seth Perler, share about how to help struggling students to shine - a preview is available at <https://bit.ly/preview-sethperler-EF>

- 2. *I notice students who display some of the behaviours of ADHD, who are also very bright. How do I figure out if the appropriate response is to coach the student on exec functioning skills OR if it is better to present the student with lesson materials that provide extension or enrichment to address their intellectual level?***

Executive Function (EF) is the basis of navigating life successfully - focus on this..... if they have the interest, and extension/enrichment in the subject is something they would like, this is also good.

## **ADULTS**

- 1. *What are the key strategies for adults with ADHD to cope with work and life? Any recommended resource site? Is medication still a big part of the strategies? Obviously, some concern on side effects of long term medication.***

- Unlocking ADHD has launched RESTART -- the first adult ADHD starter kit - it is a roadmap for adult ADHDers and has a self-assessment tool - <https://bit.ly/restart-adhd>
- please join the Unlocking ADHD facebook and discord community

- there is a good resource on medication at <https://www.unlockingadhd.com/should-i-medicate-or-not-medicate-my-child/>. While it is aimed at children - the principles also apply to adults. It is important to get accurate information about medication so that we can make informed decisions
- 2. *I personally feel that these strategies are more applicable to young children , as a teenager and young adult is not easy to convince, esp reducing digital device usage. Maybe you can share more on this?***

For older kids - it is a challenge to change habits - so it is more of appealing to their reasoning - Unlocking ADHD just concluded a series with Dr Dan Shapiro of Parent Child journey on working with challenging teens and young adults - check out Dr Dan's resources at [www.parentchildjourney.com](http://www.parentchildjourney.com)

- 3. *A lot of strategies are for primary school children. Please share some strategies for secondary school.***

Many of the same strategies would work for secondary school too.

UDL- Universal Design for Learning

- 4. *It may be difficult to have cushions / standing desks / resistance bands in a typical school setting. Students with ADHD are usually seated near the teachers. Are there any other options for mainstream government schools to help support the students? Putting in mind the needs of the other children in class as well. Thank you for the idea of having brain breaks (short physical activities), I practice it a lot in my class and it helps students a lot.***

Building in a movement break within the lesson, or doing a task in the class- ie giving out books, organising material or delivering a note to a key adult. It is the movement that is essential and knowing when to implement it, and read the behaviours that show the child becoming dysregulated.

- 5. *For the pomodoro technique, if my child can only focus for 5 mins at a time, how much break should I give them? Is it still 5 mins?***

Adjust to suit the child - part of this is age dependent and also specific to the child. Think of this like a gym - slowly work on building up the muscles

The Pomodoro Technique can be adjusted in this situation to fit your child's attention span. You may experiment with the following modified Pomodoro Technique:

- Set a timer for five minutes to work intently.
- Give a short pause of two to three minutes after the timer sounds.
- Repetition of the 5-minute work periods and 2- to 3-minute breaks is required.

You can establish a structured schedule that encourages focus and provides frequent opportunities for reward by changing the intervals to your child's attention span.

## **RESOURCES**

### ***Any book recommendation for ADHD in children?***

- Dr Russell Barkley has a great book - <https://www.guilford.com/books/12-Principles-for-Raising-a-Child-with-ADHD/Russell-Barkley/9781462542550>
- For Executive Function - Peg Dawson has a Smart but Scattered book - <https://www.smartbutscatteredkids.com/books/>

## **CHINESE**

### ***How to get a non Chinese child with ADHD to concentrate on chinese lessons?***

- The ADHD wiring is interest based - and novelty based
- find a way to make chinese lessons fun or give something small (tokens or affirmations) to encourage them when they attend class or make progress



- Gamifying eg there is an app for language - Duolingo - also makes it fun
- show that knowing Chinese is cool....

### **SELF ESTEEM**

***Is it helpful for the ADHD child (below 12 years) to be aware of their own diagnosis? Will letting them know that they have ADHD empower them or will it demoralise them further?***

- It really depends on the child's maturity and also the parent's comfort level
- there are books on explaining about ADHD to children- There is also a video/website by Dr David Rendall called The Freak Factor for kids that presents things in a fun way - on the unlocking ADHD website - there is a book review of a child friendly book
- The key is for parents or teachers to be neutral to positive when speaking of ADHD... not negative

### **ODD**

***Helping a child with oppositional Defiant Disorder, how is it similar and different from ADHD? Any idea where I can get help from?***

- Read up about Oppositional Defiant disorder - sometimes tones can trigger a child - so it is important to be mindful of how communications/actions can be seen from the child's perspective.
- Vargini shared about Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria - so their sense of shame/rejection may result in protective behaviour of opposition/aggression.
- Empathy is a good approach - to connect and engage with the child.

If child is below 7 years old, do consider getting a referral from the polyclinic to see the doctor at KKH - Department of Child Development. They may make appropriate recommendations and referrals to suss out factors relating to child's behaviour, be it ODD, ADHD or other possible causes.

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