

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) Chapter (I) -Knowing AD/HD

Children and adolescents with AD/HD often experience difficulties in learning, as well as social and family life. They need diversified support, including medication and psycho-education. In addition to school and community support, it is also important for parents to understand and support their children. There are 3 chapters in this parent education series, on knowing AD/HD, its treatment and support, as well as tips for parents when supporting children with AD/HD. It is hoped that through this parent education series, parents can have a deeper understanding of this disorder so that they can nurture their children in appropriate ways.

(I)	Knowing AD/HD
(II)	Treatment and Support (Part 1): Medication Proper Behavioural Management
	Treatment and Support (Part 2): Changing the Mindset Enhancing Executive Skills
(III)	Tips for Parents
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Symptoms

AD/HD is a childhood developmental disorder. Children with AD/HD are significantly different from those without AD/HD of their age in attention, activity level and impulse-control, such that they may experience more difficulties in learning, as well as social and family life. Common symptoms include the following:

1. Inattention, including:
 - Short attention span
 - Having difficulty concentrating
 - Being easily distracted by extraneous stimuli
 - Having difficulty organising tasks and activities
 - Missing out details
2. High activity level, including:
 - Difficulty staying on seat in class
 - Often fidgeting with hands or feet
 - Keep fiddling with items nearby
 - Excessive talking
 - Hard to keep quiet
3. Impulsiveness, including:
 - Acting without thinking about the consequences
 - Blurting out answers before questions are finished
 - Often disturbing others
 - Lack of patience in waiting
 - Lack of patience in following steps

Cause and Effects

So far, although the causes of AD/HD have not been completely confirmed, research studies suggest that it may be related to the disorder of brain neurotransmitters. There are also studies pointing out that the volume of the brain of a child with AD/HD may be smaller than that of a normal child by 3-5%, with the frontal lobe and temporal lobe more significantly affected. In fact, the frontal lobe is the brain area which is responsible for attention and impulse control¹.

According to Professor Russell A. Barkley, a clinical professor of psychiatry, children and adolescent with AD/HD have difficulties in the development of executive function and self-control to varying degrees, including having difficulty suppressing impulsive response, have shorter working memory and weaker emotional control, have weaker planning and organising abilities, so they often fail to control their behaviours as children and adolescents of the same age.

Referral, Assessment and Support

If parents suspect that their children may have AD/HD, they should initiate contact with the Special Educational Needs Coordinators, class teachers, student guidance personnel or social workers of the schools. The schools can then further understand the student's learning and social adaptability. In public sector secondary and primary schools, student support teams will, subject to parental consent, refer the students to professionals, such as educational psychologists, for a comprehensive assessment, so as to understand the students' emotional, social and learning performance and needs. In addition, parents can seek referral of their children to the Child Assessment Centres of the Department of Health (<https://www.dhcas.gov.hk/en/>) through professionals for assessment services. If students need further professional diagnosis, the specialists will refer them to the psychiatrists.

In Hong Kong, AD/HD is diagnosed by psychiatrists or paediatricians with relevant professional training. Medical doctors will understand children's difficulties from multiple perspectives. In addition to clinical observation, medical doctors will also learn from parents about the children's developmental history, behaviours in different settings (including school, home and social settings), the severity and duration of difficult behaviours; as well as other relevant information collected from school teachers.

With regard to support, school professionals, including educational psychologists, school social workers and guidance teachers, will jointly discuss appropriate support strategies to cater for the students' emotional, social and learning needs. These may include optimising classroom teaching strategies, arranging peer support, formulating incentive systems and providing add-on group training and individual guidance. Good home-school collaboration is very important for helping children and adolescents with AD/HD. Parents should maintain close communication with teachers so as to understand their children's learning needs and overall adjustment in school, to come up with consistent strategies to facilitate the development of the children.

If you are interested in the symptoms or diagnosis of AD/HD, you may refer to SE Newsletter Issue no.42 – “How to Enhance the Executive Skills of Children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder” (Chinese only) for further information. <https://sense.edb.gov.hk/en/integrated-education/information-for-parents-and-the-public/special-education-newsletter/38.html>

Reference:

1. Institute of Mental Health of Castle Peak Hospital: Attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), from https://www3.ha.org.hk/cph/imh/mhi/article_02_01_01.asp