What is ADHD?

ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and is a condition of the brain that makes it difficult for children to inhibit their spontaneous responses, which includes everything from movement to speech to attentiveness. All children struggle to pay attention, sit still, or listen and follow directions. However, for children with ADHD, these kinds of behaviours are so frequent and severe that they interfere with their ability to function.

Some facts:

- ADHD is one of the most common childhood neuro-developmental conditions. According to Indian studies, three to five out of every hundred children have some form of ADHD.
- It occurs in all racial and socio-economic groups and is four times more common among boys than girls.

ADHD is a neuro-divergent way of being, which means it is a different way in which the brain functions as compared to the majority. It is commonly diagnosed in childhood and carries on into adulthood. With proper support and the right interventions, individuals can learn to deal with nearly all of their ADHD symptoms and go on to lead independent adult lives.
What does ADHD look like?

ADHD rarely looks the same in any two individuals and children with ADHD can show signs in any or all these areas.

- **Inattentive:** Trouble focusing their attention, concentrating, and staying on task. They may not follow directions well, may miss important details, and may not finish what they start. They may daydream too much and seem absent-minded or forgetful and lose track of things.

- **Hyperactive:** Fidgety, restless, and easily bored. They may have trouble sitting still or staying quiet when needed. They may rush through things and make careless mistakes. They may climb, jump, or roughhouse when they shouldn't. Without meaning to, they may act in ways that disrupt others.

- **Impulsive:** Act too quickly before thinking. They often interrupt, might push, or grab, and find it hard to wait. They may do things without asking for permission, take things that aren't theirs, or act in ways that are risky. They may have emotional reactions that seem out of proportion for a situation.

When is it regular kid behaviour and when could it be ADHD?

It's normal for children to be distracted, restless, impatient, or impulsive. These things don't always mean that a child has ADHD. However, it is time to take a closer look, when the signs of hyperactivity, impulsivity and/or inattention:

- Are noticeably greater than is expected of children their age or developmental level
- Were present when the child was very young, usually before age 7
- Present themselves across different environments and situations e.g., at home or school or play
- Impacts their functioning (relationship with peers, family members, learning) in different settings
- Are not the result of a child being defiant or not being able to understand tasks or instructions

A lot of times, signs of ADHD are observed and reported by the school as issues in self-control, distractive or inattentive behaviour. Pay close attention to any such feedback given by teachers.
The specific cause of ADHD is not known, but research shows that both genetics as well as physical environment may be predisposing factors. It is thought that if someone in your family has ADHD, it is more likely that your child will have it as well.

ADHD is NOT caused by too much screen time, poor parenting, or eating too much sugar.

Why did my child get ADHD?

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I have just received an ADHD diagnosis for my child. What should I do?

You are probably going through some difficult emotions. Some of you may try to wish the news away by denying that your child has ADHD and some of you may have a lot of apprehensions about how it will impact your child. All these emotions are perfectly natural. Every family’s journey of acceptance of their child’s condition is different. Some accept it overnight while some take more time to come to terms with it. Take your time to process all this new information. You will find acceptance at the end of it. However, do not delay in getting the necessary help for your child - the sooner a child receives interventions, the better it is for them.
What kind of interventions does my child need?

Early identification and intervention increase the likelihood of positive long-term outcomes. If given the right support, your child will learn to cope with most of the symptoms of ADHD.

In most cases, ADHD is treated with a combination of behaviour therapy and medication. Behaviour therapists work with caregivers to strengthen positive behaviours and eliminate unwanted or problem behaviours. They also suggest modifications of the child’s environment to support/improve behaviour e.g. establish routines and schedules; organize home to minimize distractions; using visuals etc.

It is important to know that ADHD cannot be treated with ‘strict discipline’ or ‘punishments’. In fact, punishing a child with ADHD for difficult behaviours is not just ineffective but also counterproductive.
Are there any medications my child can take to help his ADHD?

There are medications to help ADHD symptoms. It is important to remember that these medications are meant to treat the symptoms of ADHD, and not ADHD itself. The most common type of medication used for treating ADHD is called a “stimulant”. These stimulants will have a calming effect on your child. They will reduce hyperactivity and impulsivity as well as improve your child’s ability to focus, work, and learn, but medication that may be right for one child may not be right for another.

These medicines also come with side effects that vary from child to child, the most common being decreased appetite and sleep problems, anxiety, and irritability. Some children could have mild stomach aches or headaches. It is important to talk to your child in a gentle and frank manner to understand how the medication is affecting them. Sometimes what the child reports may sound improbable to us, but it is important to trust what they say and discuss it further with a doctor. Please note that these medicines are not addictive.

How will ADHD affect my child’s education?

Children with ADHD often face a difficult time at school as the symptoms of ADHD, such as inability to pay attention, difficulty in sitting still or controlling impulses, directly impact academics and the school experience.

It is a useful approach to communicate and collaborate closely with school staff as soon as you get the diagnosis and advocate for the necessary support and accommodations for your child. Take help of doctors and therapists, and other parents to learn about strategies that help children with ADHD perform better at school. A few strategies include:

- Minimize distractions in class
- Allow break time to move around
- Ensure clear instructions for tasks
- Allow alternate modes of testing
Along with the support from teachers, you can also seek special education services/therapy. These primarily focus on academics and can support children to perform to the best of their abilities in school and help them build up their confidence and self-esteem.

30% to 50% children with ADHD may also have specific learning difficulties, which leads to difficulties in reading, writing and mathematics. In such a situation, both the specific learning difficulty and ADHD need to be tackled separately.

What can I do to help my child?

- **Understand your child’s condition**: The more you learn about ADHD, the easier it is for you to understand your child’s behaviours and the better prepared you will be to identify and leverage their strengths. Be patient with yourself, you may not have all the answers at once. Ask for information, speak to those who know more, learn from the professionals who are helping your child and other families who have walked this path before you.

- **Support your child unconditionally**: Children with ADHD often feel they’re letting others down, doing things wrong, or not being "good." Protect your child’s self-esteem by being patient, understanding, loving and accepting. Build your child’s resilience by letting them know you believe in them and see all the good things about them.

- **Discipline with purpose and warmth**: Children with ADHD are sensitive to criticism. Correcting their behaviour is best done in a way that’s encouraging and supportive rather than punishing. Learn from your child’s therapist, what discipline approaches work best for them.

- **Create learning moments at home**: You know your child the best and spend the most time with them. Your child’s learning is not limited to the clinic. There are many opportunities at home to help your child learn social, emotional and self-organization skills. Involve other family members in the plan. However, don’t try to take on too much. Do only what you can and what both you and your child enjoy.

- **Find a buddy for your child**: Children need company in their own peer group. It can be tough for children with ADHD to make friends, so you may need to help identify a buddy for your child who may be a friend or a sibling or a relative. Take this buddy into confidence about your child’s challenges and ensure they spend time together. This buddy can evolve to be a trusted guide and most importantly a friend.
Focus on your own well-being and mental health: Parenting a child with ADHD can be overwhelming. It is important not to neglect your own needs. Get sufficient rest, take time to do activities that you enjoy (e.g. listening to music, yoga, chatting with friends, etc.). Talk to your extended family and share the child’s diagnosis. Family members can become your greatest source of support. It is also important for both parents to be involved in caring for the child, so that both of you know what to do and can give each other an occasional break. Don’t hesitate to seek help if you experience anxiety, sadness or any such issues.

Connect with other families: The most important thing you need to know is that you are not alone. There are many other families dealing with similar challenges. Get to know other families of children with ADHD. They can be a great source of helpful information, advice, and emotional support. Joining a parent support group, especially in the initial stages of your journey, is very beneficial.
Additional Resources

Family Resource Center (FRC) at Ummeed is a team of parents of children with disabilities, who are available to offer support to families and guide on available information & resources. Please connect with the FRC team via email: frc@ummeed.org or phone: 8591850804:

- To talk to another parent
- To get support, suggestions, insights & advice
- To be a part of a parent support group (English or Hindi).
- To have a space for fun activities & socializing with other families
- To be updated on all ummeed activities and events via a whatsapp group

Training Programs at Ummeed:
Ummeed conducts various workshops for caregivers on rights awareness, inclusive school experiences, toilet training, preparing for puberty, handwriting, mealtimes, behaviour management and mental health sensitization.

View on https://ummeed.org/all-courses or e-mail training@ummeed.org; or send a WhatsApp message on 85912 91603 to know more.

Developmental Disabilities India (DDI): Developmental Disabilities India is a new YouTube channel dedicated to awareness about developmental disabilities. It has informative videos on various disabilities as well as tips-based videos by parents and professionals. Scan the QR code to subscribe.

Suggested online resources:
- https://add.org/
- https://www.additudemag.com/
- http://www.ldonline.org/
- https://www.understood.org/

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