

A Coach's Guide to Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

About this guide

This is a guide to coaching children with ADHD. Not all children with ADHD have a diagnosis, and the good news is that the tips and strategies in this guide will be helpful when coaching any very active, impulsive and distractible child – whether they have a formal diagnosis of ADHD or not. It's been written with sports coaches in mind, but we hope it may also be useful to youth leaders, scout and guide leaders, PE teachers and anyone else who works with children and young people.

At the back page of this guide is a form which is designed to be completed by the child's parent or carer, in discussion with the coach and the child themselves, to open a conversation about what will help the child to get the most from the coaching experience.

ADHD and sport - a brilliant combination

Children with ADHD are a huge asset in your team. An ADHD player or athlete who is passionate about their sport will usually give 110%. They bring:

- Energy
- Personality and humour
- Loyalty and commitment
- Ingenuity and an ability to think differently
- A strong sense of what is fair
- An ability to motivate others
- Amazing resilience and ability to “bounce back” time after time



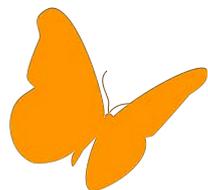
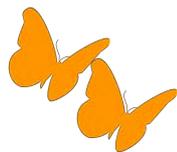
Playing sports is also fantastic for children with ADHD

By increasing the levels of the neurotransmitter chemicals dopamine and norepinephrine in the brain, and using up excess energy, regular exercise and playing sport can help reduce ADHD symptoms and result in better concentration, appetite and sleep. Sports can help children develop strong social skills. It's good all round!

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition with three main symptoms:

Inattention



Children with ADHD have a short attention span. They find it hard to concentrate and are easily distracted. They may be very sensitive to small sounds and sights which others wouldn't notice.

They may quickly forget instructions, especially if given a lot to take in at once. They also find it hard to organise themselves and tend to lose things.

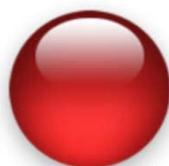


Impulsiveness

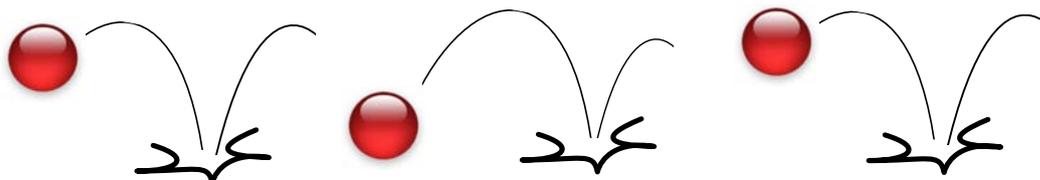


Children with ADHD sometimes act without thinking through the consequences. They may find it hard to wait their turn and may interrupt others. Children with ADHD are often described as fearless – but sometimes this means taking risks or doing things which are not wise.

Hyperactivity



Children who have ADHD may be restless and find it hard to sit still or do one thing for very long. They need to move about and may fidget. They can be boisterous and overly competitive, particularly if they haven't had a good night's sleep – a common problem in ADHD as children find it hard to wind down after a day of activity.



Some children have Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) – without the hyperactivity.

Some people have described ADHD as like having a Ferrari brain with bicycle brakes! But... children with ADHD can concentrate for long periods of time on things which really interest them. This is called 'hyperfocus' and is one of the many positive aspects of ADHD.

Sensory problems

Many children with ADHD have sensory issues, meaning that they are hypersensitive (over-sensitive) or hyposensitive (under-sensitive) to sounds, lights, touch, taste and smell. Being hypersensitive may mean that they find noisy, bright or very stimulating situations overwhelming and this can make them very anxious. Hyposensitivity may mean that they seek out extra stimulation – for example by touching people or things inappropriately, or making noise. Sensory problems are also very common in children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and quite a number of children have both ADHD and ASD together.

So why does this matter?

Children with ADHD get told off much more than other children for being careless, being 'irritating' or seeming not to listen when someone is talking to them. But blaming children with ADHD can make things worse by creating a negative cycle where kids act out and those looking after them criticise them.



Focusing on the positives – no matter how small – can break this unhelpful pattern.

Sometimes other children find children with ADHD hard to get along with because they may be disruptive and may not realise how their behaviour affects others. Children with ADHD can also be very easy to wind up and sometimes other children may take advantage of this and set them up to behave badly. But children with ADHD want to make friends and can be great fun to have around.



ADHD medication

Some kids with ADHD are prescribed medication to help with concentration and reduce hyperactivity. The most commonly used are the stimulant medications. It may seem strange to prescribe a 'stimulant' to a child who is overactive – but these drugs work by stimulating those parts of the brain which control behaviour and regulate activity.

Different forms of ADHD medication have different lengths of action – short acting ones may work for a few hours and longer acting ones for most or all of the day. It's worth finding out whether a child you are coaching is on medication and whether this may be wearing off during your session. It may be possible to give a top up dose, or adjust the time when the medication is given in the morning if this would help.

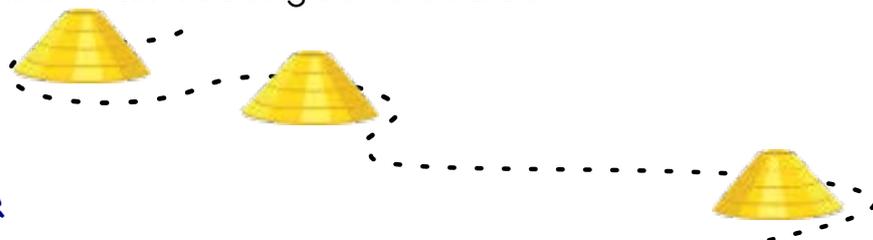
9 Top tips for coaching kids with ADHD



1. Go one to one

Kids with ADHD respond really well to one to one attention.

If possible ask another coach to assist – for example by asking the child with ADHD questions regarding a drill or routine whilst it's being demonstrated.

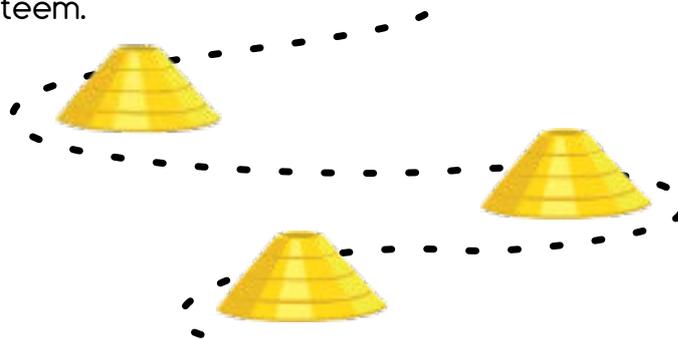


2. Be patient and positive

Use as much praise and positive motivation as possible. Extra praise is never too much for kids who receive a lot of negative feedback all day long.

Try and maintain good humour at all times, to keep it fun for everyone. Using intimidation tactics and pressure won't help with ADHD. Never humiliate a child.

If possible, give a child with ADHD a special job or responsibility. This will keep them busy and build their confidence and self-esteem.



3. Give clear instructions

Use a calm, clear voice and eye contact

Give short instructions. Break instructions down into bite sized chunks. Long lists of instructions may not be remembered.

Involve children in demonstrations if they are confident enough – this keeps them engaged and helps them understand the drill.

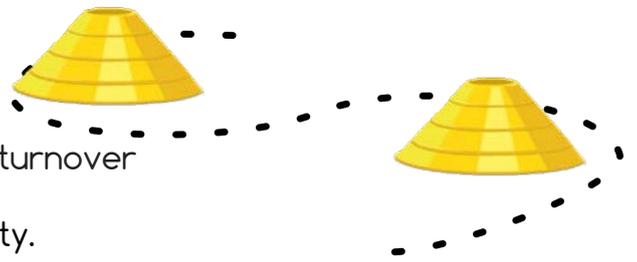
Get kids to repeat back instructions to check understanding – or use visual prompts like signs and diagrams to reinforce information if possible.

Offer a quiet word if a child is struggling to understand or remember instructions rather than showing them up in front of the whole group. Let children know that it's OK to approach coaches for help.

It may be good to know that just because an ADHD kid is not standing still whilst receiving instruction, that doesn't mean they are not listening or taking in what's being said. Many ADHD kids need to move to process information and they may listen better when busy with their hands or feet.



4. Mix it up and prevent boredom



Keep kids engaged using short drills with a quick turnover

If kids are getting bored, move on to a new activity.

Move players around so that everyone has an opportunity to be in active positions.

Keep children occupied even if they are waiting for their turn or on the bench - assisting scorekeepers, keeping equipment in order - anything that will keep them active.

5. Open communication channels and keep them open

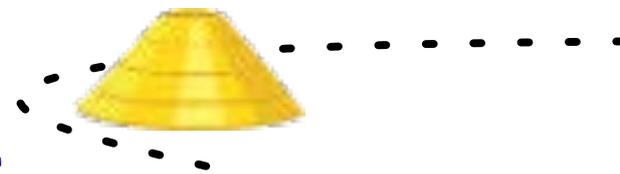
Meet with the child's parent / carer and keep an open line of communication to talk about successes and any issues which come up. Parents are the number one experts about their child and will be able to answer questions you may have. Find out what's likely to help and what may trigger difficult behaviour. There's a form to complete at the back of this booklet to record the discussion.

Ask the child for feedback on how they are finding the sessions and what would help them – they may or may not be able to tell you, but by asking regularly you can build their confidence to tell you how they are doing.

Educate other coaches about additional needs and how best to manage them.

If it's appropriate, consider buddying the child up with an understanding team mate who can support them during the sessions to follow instructions.

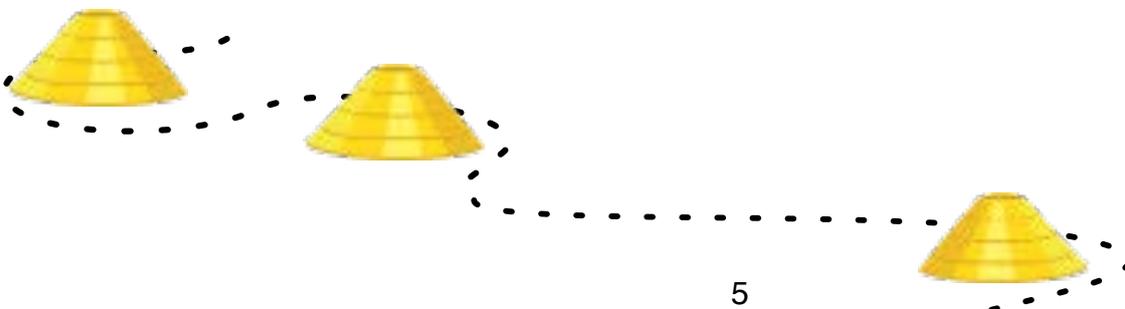
At the same time, be sure to respect the child's confidentiality by not sharing the diagnosis with other children, parents or people not directly involved in the situation. Younger children with ADHD may not know much about the diagnosis themselves – you need to be sensitive to this.



6. Be prepared for matches and events

Explain to kids up front, in simple language, what you are expecting from them.

If appropriate, quietly tell the opposition coach and referee about additional support needs in the team and the strategies you have in place.



7. Manage excitement and anxiety to avoid arguments

Kids with ADHD can easily get caught up in the action of the game and forget about strategy and teamwork.

Remind players with ADHD that winning or losing is a team responsibility, not an individual failure or success. Support them to manage their emotions around losing and disappointment by focusing on the positives and thinking about how they can regroup.

Children with ADHD may be emotionally and socially young for their age and take it hard when things go wrong. Being aware of this will help coaches to help children to stay focused.

Watch for triggers and, if necessary, bring children off to relax and refocus (with a quick drink) and put them back on at the first opportunity.

Involve the child in self monitoring by agreeing a way for them to tell you that he or she is getting upset or is in danger of losing their cool. If they know how to “raise a red flag” it may avoid them acting out on the pitch.

Don't get into arguments with the child – you can quickly find yourself in a standoff which is never good. Either praise, withhold a point or give a brief sanction if needed.

8. Keep it simple and structured

Start each session with a familiar and calm routine.

Have a small number of clear, fair rules and explain the reasons for these. Give examples of what they mean.

9. Use warnings and short sanctions if really necessary

Ignore small incidents where you can. Giving attention and encouragement to those in the group who are on task may help the young person to refocus.

If necessary, give a clear warning if behaviour falls outside the rules. Warning cards or colours (red, amber) can be helpful – use the same language every time. Try saying “I am giving you a warning now for.....”. This may seem obvious to most but it can cut through the “noise” surrounding ADHD kids.

Use small and immediate sanctions if needed – such as a short time out. It's a good idea to check these out with the young person and their parent/carer in advance. It may work well to get them to run a lap or do star jumps instead of asking them to stand still at the side – this is unrealistic for some ADHD kids.



Me and my ADHD

My name is _____



Things that I like and that will really help me during coaching sessions are:



Things that I might find difficult or unhelpful during coaching sessions are:



Things that I'd really like to work on during sessions are:



If I'm upset or angry, things which might help me to cool down are:

(Tick✓)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Breathing | <input type="checkbox"/> Time out |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Counting down | <input type="checkbox"/> Relaxing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Going for a walk | <input type="checkbox"/> Doing some exercises |

What else?

Anything else the coach should know or look out for
(e.g. anything to do with medication, diet, other additional support needs)

Parent / carer name _____

Parent / carer mobile number _____

Coach name _____

Coach number or email _____

How will we review how things are going (how often, when and where)

Date completed _____

If possible make a copy of this form for parent / carer to keep

About this guide and further information

This guide was produced by ADHD Parent Support West Glasgow, working in collaboration with the coaches at Drumchapel United FC. With many thanks to the parents and coaches who tested out the draft editions.

The Scottish ADHD Coalition website at www.scottishadhdcoalition.org has more information about ADHD in Scotland and links to the reference sources used in this guide.