

# **Brief facts on ADHD**

in children and young people

Regional assessment clinic



# Contents

This information is intended for guardians of a child or teenager who has undergone a neuropsychiatric assessment at the Regional assessment clinic and has received a diagnosis of ADHD.

This brochure describes in brief:

- What is ADHD
- ADHD diagnosis
- Causes of ADHD

## What is ADHD

All children are different and develop at different paces. As they grow older, their surroundings place increasingly high demands on children to be able to manage their behaviour, take more responsibility and become more independent.

This could mean controlling their concentration, motivating themselves, managing their feelings, following instructions, planning and taking long-term actions, and regulating their energy to keep it at an appropriate level.

With ADHD, the brain's ability to regulate and control its functioning develops at a slower pace.

Guardians may have become concerned about a child's behaviour and development deviating from other children the same age. It may have also been concerning that efforts to regulate the child's behaviour through prompts and reprimands did not lead to improvements.

## **ADHD diagnosis**

### **ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder**

is a disability affecting brain development. Having an ADHD diagnosis entails significant and lasting challenges related to control of concentration and regulating motivation. Many people with ADHD also struggle to regulate their activity level and to curb impulses.

Stringent diagnosis criteria must be met in order for children to be diagnosed with ADHD. ADHD is more than strong personality traits. To meet the criteria for ADHD, the child must have significant challenges relative to other children their age; the problems need to have been present for a long time; and the challenges must recur in many different environments.

## **Different types of ADHD**

Different symptoms might be stronger in some children, and ADHD can therefore be divided into three different types.

- Combined type ADHD is most common and involves difficulties for the child with attention and concentration, as well as hyperactivity and impulsivity.
- Inattentive type ADHD, also called ADD, means the child primarily struggles with attention and concentration. In this case, they may be more likely to struggle with inactivity and passivity.
- Predominantly hyperactive/impulsive ADHD means the child struggles mainly with hyperactivity and impulsivity.

## **How can you tell if someone has ADHD?**

All people with ADHD are unique individuals, which means that ADHD symptoms present differently. The child's environment affects the extent of the impact the symptoms have on their daily life. Along with the brain's continuous development, the child's challenges and symptoms may change as they grow up.

The primary symptoms of relevance with ADHD are usually split into two categories:

- Inattention
- Hyperactivity/impulsivity
- Difficulty with concentration and attention:
- Your child makes careless mistakes in school
- Struggles to focus for extended periods, for example, it is hard to watch films, read a book, or listen to others read aloud.
- Your child struggles to read and follow instructions
- Your child struggles with organisation and planning
- Your child avoids doing tasks that are boring or annoying
- Your child is easily distracted

- Your child struggles to manage time or finish tasks on time
  - Your child frequently forgets and loses things
  - Your child has many thoughts and ideas, but struggles to organise them

Difficulty with hyperactivity and impulsivity:

- Your child finds it hard to sit still
- Your child often seems impatient and restless
- Your child struggles to do things calmly and quietly
- Your child talks a lot, even if it disrupts others
- Your child does or says things without thinking
- Your child interrupts often
- Your child struggles to wait in a queue
- Your child struggles to regulate their emotions, for example they may often get angry and have outbursts, or have powerful anxiety and engage in self-harm

## **Other common difficulties**

It is common for the child to have other simultaneous struggles. Some common concurrent challenges include dyslexia, learning difficulties, oppositional defiant disorder, trouble sleeping and autism.

Functioning differently from other children their age can negatively affect confidence. Some children and young people with ADHD feel like they are different and may experience anxiety and depression.

It is important that the child is treated with respect and understanding of the challenges they face. The child's challenges do not mean they are not trying, nor are these problems related to upbringing. Children with ADHD are doing the best they can, just like all other kids. It is very important that the people around the child have a good understanding and make adjustments that support the child in daily life.

## Causes of ADHD

ADHD affects how the brain works and has biological causes. Several different factors can play a role, for example, similar difficulties in a close relative. Research has shown that people with ADHD have reduced activity in areas of the brain that control attention, regulate activity level and inhibit impulses. The impacted functions are sometimes called executive functions and are needed to carry out goal-oriented behaviours. In other words, this involves organisation and planning, being able to remember information in order to complete a task (working memory), adjusting and managing emotional reactions, and being able to stop impulses and adapt to the current situation.

ADHD is a common diagnosis and the National Board of Health and Welfare estimates that approximately 5-7 percent of all children have an established diagnosis. How symptoms present differ at the individual and group level, for example between girls and boys.

ADHD is not a disease and has nothing to do with intelligence. Rather, it is about functioning differently than what is sometimes expected of one in daily life. ADHD does not only entail challenges, but can also be described in terms of strengths. People with ADHD often have many strengths that help them tackle their challenges.

## **In conclusion – as you begin**

Your child has now undergone a neuropsychiatric assessment and has received an ADHD diagnosis. The purpose of the assessment is to understand your child's unique strengths and what will be difficult in daily life, in order to best understand, help and engage with them.

Receiving a diagnosis can be overwhelming, completely obvious, and everything in between. Most children and young people learn over the years what helps them and find good strategies.

For tips and advice on how you can continue to work on this, please see the leaflet "Self-care, support and treatment".