ADHD and Young Children

ADHD sits under the umbrella of neurodevelopmental conditions. Other conditions within this group include the likes of Autism, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and more. ADHD can often be difficult to identify in the Early Years as some of the traits compare to typical stages of child development. This article has been written to give you further in recognising the traits of ADHD and how they might present in our youngest group of children.

What is ADHD?

ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and affects 1 in 5 people in the UK. The typical age of diagnosis for ADHD is 7 years, however we can spot the signs earlier and this can be beneficial for providing the support needed in the Early Years.

What are the traits of ADHD?

There are 3 traits of ADHD including Hyperactivity, Inattention and Impulsivity. A child does not have to have all 3 traits to receive a diagnosis. It's important to note that children in the early years, due to typical stages of child development, will demonstrate similar traits to that of ADHD however, If a child has ADHD the traits will be observed to a greater extent than their peers. You may find that the child demonstrates the traits more frequently and to a greater degree than other children their age.

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What do the traits look like in young children?

Hyperactivity

- Lots of energy
- May experience sleep difficulties
- Talkative/Vocal
- May find it difficult to sit still

Impulsivity

- Behaving before thinking.
- Short play sequences.
- Reduced risk awareness.
- Likes to climb.

Inattention

- Struggles to follow verbal instructions.
- Forgetting things previously learnt.
- Adults may often repeat child's name

What should I do if I think my child has ADHD?

If your child is at Nursery, a childminder or in school, speak to them first. The role of the early year's professional looking after your child, is to make regular observations in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework/Development matters. These observations help them to monitor the child's development right the way through their time at Nursery/Childminders/School.

If your child does not attend a setting, you may wish to speak to your health visitor. The Health Visiting team provide developmental checks whilst your child is 5 years and under. Their role is to observe the child's development and to provide you with advice and guidance.

If you and the professionals are in agreement, a referral is likely to be made to a paediatrician in your local area. The role of the Paediatrician is to make observations of the child along with gathering evidence for potential diagnosis. This may take some time as it's important to see how the child progresses through their first seven years.

For more information or to learn more about ADHD, please visit the Neurodiversity Early Years Team webpage: www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/early-years-services/

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