



## Ten Top Tips for Sports Coaches:

### Working with Children and Young People with ADHD

ADHD is a neurological condition affecting 5% of the population. Children and young people with ADHD can be highly creative, energetic, motivated and passionate. The condition can also present challenges in attentional regulation, impulsivity and hyperactivity. If a child with ADHD is fully engaged and included, they will be an absolute asset to your team or club. **Let's explore some ideas to help make your club or team an inclusive place for children and young people with ADHD.**

#### number one:

### Learn, prepare, collaborate.

Invest time in understanding the features and presentations of ADHD and consider how this could impact in your particular sport. A good starting place is [www.adhdfoundation.org.uk](http://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk) or [www.additude.com](http://www.additude.com). However, understand that every child is unique and no two children with a diagnosis of ADHD will be the same. Meet with the parents/carers and ask how the features of ADHD presents in their child, what their strengths and passions are and explore any potential difficulties that they might perceive in their child being involved in your club or team. It is also important to involve the child so you can understand their thoughts and feelings when it comes to play and sport. Discuss with them any adjustments that can be made and keep them regularly informed. Parents/carers can be a very important source of support.

#### number two:

### Let them move.

Children with ADHD may move their bodies a lot. Motor hyperactivity is a feature of ADHD. This can be an advantage whilst playing sport of course, but what about when you are coaching, or when you want participants to stand still and listen to you or watch others? The message is, let them fidget. It doesn't mean they are not listening or are not interested. Children with ADHD move in order to focus and concentrate. If your coaching session involves time sat at a desk or in a classroom, find opportunities for children with ADHD to stand up and move around.



#### number three:

### Go public.

Raise the profile of neurodiversity and ADHD within your team or club. Ensure staff and volunteers have received training or materials to increase their knowledge of neurodiverse conditions. Include information on your website and social media platforms. Highlight the achievements of neurodiverse people in your sport and more generally. Profile the progress of other neurodiverse children that you are working with. Get involved in national initiatives, for example, the ADHD Foundation's Umbrella project. Create a public image which will draw children and their families to your club or team and encourage them to feel recognised and included from the outset.

#### **number four:**

### **Engagement is everything.**

A child or young person with ADHD will be much more successful when they are really interested and engaged in what they are doing. They can sometimes find it challenging to be involved in activities that don't immediately interest them and can lose their attention very quickly. Find out the features of your sport or coaching sessions that the child or young person with ADHD really likes and enjoys and keep doing that. Adapt these features to include variety in your sessions. Variety helps to stimulate the attentional system.



#### **number five:**

### **Start fast.**

Move children and young people into physical activity right from the start of your session. This will be more effective in building their engagement and concentration than starting a session with activities in which the child is expected to be still, for example, a long talk from the coach. When you understand the neurology of ADHD, then you will understand how vigorous movement and activity at the beginning will stimulate the transmission of neurochemicals in the brain which play a critical role in building engagement, focus and memory.

#### **number six:**

### **Don't rely on talk alone.**

Children with ADHD can sometimes struggle with their working memory. If you have important instructions, requests or information that you would like the child to remember for your next coaching session, always back up verbal instructions with the visual. Utilise text, messaging or email to the young person or their parents and carers to support your verbal requests. If you are creating visual materials or timelines, ensure that they are clearly chronological. Put information in colour coded boxes with arrows showing which action follows which and the order that you would like the child to undertake the instructions.

#### **number seven:**

### **Repeat, repeat and repeat again.**

The strongest strategy that you have to help a child with ADHD to remember key information, for example, rules, equipment, organisation etc), is to keep repeating that information. The rule is little and often. Find a range of ways to communicate the key information and repeat on a cycle. The variety will stimulate their attention and the repetition will embed the information in the brain and will improve automaticity (the speed with which we remember something).



#### **number eight:**

### **Praise, reward and consequences right now.**

It is often said that children with ADHD "live in the moment" or have two time frames - "now" and "not now." Therefore, delaying our praise, our rewards or the consequences for behaviours or actions can be less effective. Do it then and there and this will hold more meaning for the child or young person with ADHD than leaving this until the next session.

## number nine: **Expect immaturity.**

There can be a developmental delay emotionally in children and young people with ADHD. Expect this, it is completely normal. The research suggests between 2- 3 years delay. Therefore, you might see behaviours that you would regard as younger than the child's chronological age. Do not be shocked by this or feel that you need to sanction this. Respect where the child is right now. Are there opportunities for the child with ADHD to work with younger children? Some coaches are highly creative and give children and young people with ADHD responsibilities around younger children as a way of building their self-esteem and confidence.



## number ten: **Consider the environment you are coaching in.**

Children and their families will benefit tremendously from a warm, welcoming environment and one where they can connect and relate to others. Social interactions can often be an important source of stimulation. Consider how you can adapt your physical setting (for example playing music, zoning off 'quiet' areas, offering a choice of activities) and how you can introduce set routines to encourage familiarity.

## And finally... **Don't underestimate the impact of what you're doing.**

Children and young people with ADHD can have difficulties with their mental health, especially anxiety. Sports, as we all know, can be great for a child's wellbeing. If the child is finding school difficult, their involvement in your sport could be one of the few occasions in their life when they feel successful or even accomplished. Sport can help with inattention. Physical activity increases dopamine in the brain. Dopamine plays an important role in attentional regulation.

Children with ADHD can experience challenges with their executive functioning. The executive functions are important for a person's ability to plan, organise and regulate them-selves. Sports provide many opportunities for decision making, devising plans, tactics and prioritising. Impulsivity can be an asset in sport- the ability to make quick decisions in real time whilst on the move. Involvement in clubs or teams can increase social skills and the ability to cooperate effectively. You could be helping a child with ADHD in many, many ways and never forget this. **Don't underestimate the impact you can have on their lives.**

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