

ADHD and OT

“If your child is a good studier, they will get good grades. If they are a good thinker, they’ll be able to solve a lot of problems. If they have an imagination – they will be able to change the world.”

– Dr. Lara Honos-Webb



What is ADHD?

ADHD or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is a condition that can impact people’s ability to focus, their organisation and time management skills.

The main symptoms of ADHD are:

- Issues with concentration and focus. Maintaining attention on an activity for long periods of time, if they’re not interested in it, or it’s not a priority for them, can be hard. When people with ADHD are doing activities they are interested in, it can be hard to see an attention deficit at all!
- Less likely to connect planning or organising themselves with future rewards, or consequences in mind.
- Poor working memory. Working memory enables us to temporarily hold information in our mind, to know what we just did, and what we’re about to do, so we can understand things in a sequence. Therefore, people with ADHD can appear to be more impulsive, thinking and acting in the moment.
- Kids with ADHD often know what has to happen but might struggle to know how to get it done because of difficulties with initiation, planning, management, organisation and regulation.

Some of the benefits of thinking in this way are:

- They are often in an unfocussed state, allowing them to be imaginative and come up with different possibilities and innovative solutions.
- ADHD kids also tend to be more creative than most.
- They often have strong interpersonal intuition – the ability to read others and instinctively understand what they are feeling and thinking.

DISTRACTIBILITY IS CURIOSITY! IMPULSIVITY IS CREATIVITY! HYPERACTIVITY IS ENERGY!

The three types of ADHD are:

- Hyperactive/impulsive: fidgeting, restlessness, impatient, blurting thoughts.
- Inattentive/Distractable: forgetfulness, distractibility, difficulty in listening and following a conversation.
- Combined: This is the most common type of ADHD, and is characterised by symptoms of the two types listed above.

The ADHD Brain:

We know that our brain operates using 2 functional neural networks. The Task Positive Network (TPN) and the Default Mode Network (DMN).

Through functional MRI we now know the areas of the brain that light up when we are doing different types of tasks. When we are focussing on a task, we are in our TPN. This could be writing a letter, digging a hole, or cooking toast. ***We are focussed.***

When we are in our DMN, we are daydreaming, thinking about what happened at recess, or what we might have for dinner. We use this part of our brain for making connections between concepts or understanding a riddle.

In a neurotypical brain, the TPN and the DMN are like a switch, when one is **on**, the other is **off**. In a neurodiverse brain, when we are in our TPN, the DMN is also lighting up trying to pull us over - like a game of 'tug of war'.

A person with ADHD has a brain that allows information to come in, all at once.

When a person with ADHD is focused on one thing, their brain is always listening or paying attention to everything else that's going on, rather than filtering it out. In comparison to others, a person with ADHD is more likely to shift their attention to something else that they find more interesting, even if they're in the middle of doing something.

There are lots of things that you can do to support the nervous system of your child with ADHD:

- **Connection:** The most powerful and long-lasting strategy is developing a strong connection with your child so that they feel safe and nurtured in your presence.
- **Create a Daily Schedule:** to enable clear expectations and predict what is happening in their day. This will support their working memory to know what comes next.
- **30 minutes of exercise per day:** so that the child is increasing their heart rate consistently for a 30-minute period daily.
- **Sleep:** Sleep influences our ability to exercise impulse control. Creating healthy sleep habits is essential to supporting a healthy nervous system.
- **Balance:** Increasing our vestibular processing through balance exercises can have a positive effect on our emotional regulation and impulse control.
- **Nutrition:** Some families find that reducing stimulants, processed food and foods with preservatives can affect their child's ADHD symptoms.
- **Chunking information:** to break up tasks into manageable steps.
- **Explain things with a "why":** to give them a practical example of how they can apply what they are learning to the real world.
- **Positive self-talk:** "*I can do it*" vs "*I can't, I'm bad, I'm going to get into trouble*"
- **Nurture and engage with them in their interests:** Give them the opportunity to be able to follow their interests.
- **Use screens at your own risk!**

BOREDOM TO THE ADHD BRAIN IS LIKE KRYPTONITE FOR SUPERMAN

Some things your OT might work with you and your child on to understand and/or incorporate into your daily lives might include:

- Sensory processing (particularly vision, hearing and balance).
- Executive functioning and impulse control.
- Working with your strengths, and how to do this together.
- Using your body through movement and balance.
- Creating routines.
- Creating healthy sleep habits.
- Working with your teachers to implement supportive strategies in the classroom.

