



Moving up:
Starting secondary school

A guide for parents of children with ADHD

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www.livingwithadhd.co.uk



Moving up ... is this for me?

This booklet is for the parents of 10-11 year-olds with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

There's also a special Youngsters' Insert in the back pocket of this booklet, designed and written for your child.

The aim of this booklet is to help you to give your child the best possible start at the new school. It is based on the experience and writings of ADHD experts such as child psychiatrists and specialist teachers. It's written in plain English so that as many parents as possible can benefit from the experts' knowledge.

Most children in the UK move up to secondary school at age 11, but some areas have different school systems and children move up at different ages. In these cases, the booklet will probably still be useful, but you may need to adapt some of the ideas to take account of the different age of the child.

Inside you will find:

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Being 11

The changing face of ADHD

Each child is different, and you are the expert on your child. But you may find it helpful to understand the bigger picture of how, in general, ADHD changes as children grow up.

Most children with ADHD don't just grow out of it, and 70-80% continue to have ADHD symptoms as teenagers.

As children become teenagers, ADHD symptoms may change in subtle ways. Some things may improve:

- They may be less restless, sitting still for longer and dashing about less
- They may be less likely to do things like running into the road or pushing into a queue

But other problems tend to remain, for example:

- Interrupting, speaking out of turn, having temper tantrums, poor concentration, forgetfulness, poor organisation etc.

Changing family relationships

All teenagers naturally want to become more independent from their parents. They want to spend less time with their family and more with their group of friends. This is not always easy for parents.

When the child has ADHD, it's even harder. Allowing a level-headed 11-year-old without ADHD to go into town alone on the bus is one thing, but for an 11 year-old with ADHD, things might be very different.

When you've spent years being careful and protective of your fearless, non-stop youngster, it's very difficult to allow them a measure of independence so that, yes, they can make their own mistakes.



Having the freedom to make your own mistakes is part of growing up and youngsters with ADHD are no exception.



Future risks

As the parent of an 11-year-old with ADHD, there is no shortage of things to worry about. There is a formidable checklist of well-known problems that children with untreated ADHD are more likely to develop than others of the same age, including:

- Getting into trouble at school and with the police
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Anxiety and depression

Treating your child's ADHD effectively may help avoid these problems.



Nathan

In primary school, Nathan was always known as a bit of handful, and his Headteacher described him as “quirky”, but with one teacher in one classroom he was able to cope. He struggled in English but he was good at maths and science.

However, once he transferred to secondary school, problems began. He was always in trouble, not handing in his homework, calling out in class, and always losing his books and equipment. There were confrontations with teachers and frequent visits to the Headteacher’s office.

He never finished assignments, and his handwriting was sometimes unreadable, but he could certainly talk. In a Year 7 report a teacher said that Nathan is like a computer without the printer attached.

Nathan was placed onto School Action and an Individual Education Plan was drawn up (see page 15), but at this point school life for Nathan got even worse as some children started to tease and bully him. One child who was calling him a “thickie” was bitten on the ear by a frustrated Nathan, who was then suspended from school.

The school’s Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO, see page 9) referred Nathan to an educational psychologist, who referred him to a paediatrician who diagnosed ADHD.

Nathan started attending counselling sessions to help build his self-esteem and was provided with a learning support assistant who accompanied him to classes. Although his work improved, he continued to be a target for some children and after lashing out on a couple of occasions he was suspended again and his parents were warned that his school place was in danger.

At this point, though both parents had been reluctant, Nathan started a trial on medication whilst continuing his counselling sessions. This seemed to improve his ability to learn in classes without the need of his learning support assistant, especially in maths, science and IT. The bullying lessened, and when it did happen he appeared to be able to control his frustrations.

He joined the school music club as he played guitar and he and three school friends formed a band called NOYZ and played at school concerts. Nathan even seemed to do better in English and in Year 8 his teacher reported astonishing progress in his written work... a printer has been attached to the computer at last.

Nathan went on to study at Further Education college, gain qualifications in business and Leisure/Tourism and is now working as a travel agent.

The secondary school

Increased opportunities

A bigger school may seem daunting at first, but moving up to a bigger school also means a massive increase in opportunities for your child.

A typical secondary school will have science labs, workshops with tools for woodwork and metalwork, an art room, a drama studio, a music room with instruments and computers, facilities for teaching cooking, a library, a sports hall and gym, tennis courts, a big playing field and all-weather pitches, and lots of computers.

The school may also organise educational trips in this country and abroad, so that your child can experience activities such as rock climbing, canoeing, or living with a French family for a week or two.

Most of the teachers will be specialists in their subject. They will have spent at least three years at university studying it, and they will want to pass on their passion for their subject to the children they teach.

So, if your child has a special interest or talent, there's a good chance that they will be able to discover it and develop it here.

Increased demands

The secondary school offers increased opportunities, but makes increased demands at the same time.

- Between five to eight different lessons each day, with different teachers in different places. Your child will have to follow a timetable and get themselves to the right place at the right time
 - Some lessons will need special equipment such as games kit or ingredients for cookery. Your child will be expected to bring the right materials to the right lesson
 - There will be more homework than at primary school, and probably a homework timetable
 - The teachers will probably not know individual children as well as in primary school. Each teacher may teach up to 200–300 youngsters, so it could be a few days before they know even their name. Your child will have a form teacher or tutor, but they may not actually teach them and may only see them once or twice a day for a few minutes
 - At first your child won't know all the teachers or the number of students in their own year group, let alone all the other year groups
-

Specialist help

Every secondary school should have a SENCO, or Special Educational Needs Coordinator. A SENCO is a teacher with special training whose job is to provide extra help and support for those children with special educational needs. In bigger secondary schools there may be several special needs teachers with a senior SENCO in charge.

SENCOs teach individuals or small groups, advise other teachers and parents, and liaise with outside specialists such as educational psychologists.

It's likely that your child will be one of several at the school with ADHD, and the primary school should pass on all that they know about your child to the SENCO.

For you as the parent of a child with ADHD, the SENCO is a key person, and should be an invaluable source of help. The SENCO should know about ADHD, understand your problems, and may well have worked with ADHD youngsters before.

In addition your child may also work at some stage with a Learning Mentor whose job it will be to help your child deal with the increased demands of academic and socialisation issues within the secondary school environment.

All this can be challenging for children with and without ADHD. Teachers in primary and secondary schools know this, and do their best to lessen the difficulties and help the new students through the first few days. We'll be suggesting some ways to smooth the transition in later sections of this booklet.



Choosing a secondary school

This is a big decision, and one that all parents find difficult, regardless of ADHD.

Some suggestions:



- Don't just go by the exam results.

The "best" local school is the one with the best exam results, and the highest position in the school league tables. But this school may or may not be the best one for your child. A high place in the schools' league table is no use to you or your child if they are unhappy at the school and don't get the support and help that they need.



- Choose an ADHD-friendly school.

This means a school with a caring atmosphere, a good system for supporting youngsters who are having problems ("pastoral care" is the educational jargon) and some experience of youngsters with ADHD.



- Talk to the SENCO.

Schools have open days, but parents of children with ADHD should make a separate appointment to see the SENCO. This will help you to judge how ADHD-friendly the school is.



- Contact your local ADHD support group.

They may be able to put you in touch with the parents of youngsters with ADHD who are already at local secondary schools.



Questions to ask...

- Do you have experience of other children with ADHD in the school?
- How does the school help children with ADHD?
- How does the school help all children settle into the new school?
- How do teachers communicate with parents?
- Who would I contact to pass on information about my child?
- How does the school help children who need to take medication?
- How would teachers know if the child had not taken medication and what would they do about it?



Preparing for secondary school

Visits and practice runs

Once the new school is known, you and your child can focus on practical steps to make the move easier and less stressful:

- If the journey to school on public transport is a worry, think about doing some practice runs - perhaps going with your child once or twice, then sending them off with a friend or two
- If your child is worried about finding his way around the new school, contact the school and ask to be shown round with your child. There will be a teacher whose job it is to liaise with primary schools, and they should be happy to help
- If getting organised is a problem, get hold of a Year 7 timetable for the new school for the current school year and, in the last weeks of the summer holiday, have some practice runs at getting the right things ready on the right day

Communicating with the primary school

In theory, primary schools and secondary schools should work together closely and share information about children who are moving up.

In the case of ADHD, it's a good idea for parents to contact the SENCO in any case (a) to introduce themselves and the child and (b) to make sure that the SENCO knows all about your child.

Some teachers may talk about making a "fresh start" at a new school, i.e. not trying to find out from the primary school about the new intake of youngsters. In the case of children with ADHD and other long-term problems, this is not usually helpful.



Personal organisation

Possible problems

Getting lost in the new school, forgetting to write down the homework, forgetting your PE kit — these things happen to most 11 year-olds. Children with ADHD will usually have difficulties keeping focussed, following directions and with personal organisation; they, therefore, may experience greater difficulties in the transition to secondary school life.

Possible problems include:

- Getting lost and arriving late for lessons
- Getting distracted between lessons, and arriving for lessons in a restless and excitable state
- Forgetting to note down homework, forgetting to do it, and forgetting to take it back to school and hand it in
- Not having the right books and equipment

Solutions

Good communication between you, your child and the school is important. If your child has not settled down into the routine of the new school after a few weeks, and you are worried:

- Contact the school — the form teacher, the SENCO, or the head of year 7
- Explain your concerns and ask the school to establish the extent of the problem. This will involve the form teacher, SENCO or head of year getting information from all your child's teachers
- Ask to meet the teacher or teachers dealing with this. The purpose of the meeting should be to make plans to help your child become better organised

This plan might include action points for you, your child and their teachers, for example:

Your child

- Remembering to ask about homework if they're not sure
- Checking their school bag each evening
- Reporting to a certain teacher if they are in difficulties

You

- Helping to prepare the school bag for the next day
- Keeping a copy of the lesson and homework timetables in a prominent place at home

Their teachers

- Checking that your child has noted down homework tasks
- Having a short weekly session with your child to talk over any difficulties

Medication

If you are concerned about your child's medication as they move to secondary school, do discuss it with your doctor.

Possible problems

If your child normally takes medication for ADHD during the school day, the move to a new school could mean that they may avoid or forget to take their tablets at lunchtime.

There are possible reasons:

- The new routine
- Class teachers are unlikely to remind them
- Pressure from friends to do other things at lunchtime
- Lack of time



Learning

ADHD-related problems

The tougher demands of the secondary school may cause difficulties for the 11 year-old with ADHD, even if they were coping reasonably well in primary school.

Typical problems include:

- Work unfinished, or finished in a rush
- Poor handwriting, especially at the end of longer pieces of work
- Failure to listen to instructions
- Failure to note down homework

If you are worried about your child's school work, the approach is the same as for problems of personal organisation:

- Contact the school — the form teacher, the SENCO, or the head of year 7
- Explain your concerns and ask the school to establish the nature of the problem. This will involve the form teacher, SENCO or head of year getting information from all your child's teachers

One approach that you may decide on together is an Individual Education Plan, or IEP. The SENCO will help to draw this up. An IEP is simply an agreed, written list of targets that each teacher applies to each lesson with your child.

Examples of targets might be:

- Choose carefully where to sit and who to sit by
- Put your hand up to answer questions and wait your turn to speak
- Show your homework diary or school planner to the teacher at the end of each lesson

Other learning difficulties

Unfortunately, children with ADHD sometimes also experience other learning difficulties in addition to the familiar symptoms of ADHD. For example they may have difficulties with handwriting, spelling and be poor readers in comparison to other children of the same age and intelligence.

It's important to identify any other learning difficulties, because specialists such as educational psychologists or speech and language therapists can often help, depending on the exact nature of the problem. The school SENCO is usually the best route for this but your doctor or clinic may also be able to help.

Complications of ADHD

As a parent it may be worth bearing in mind that sometimes behaviour and learning difficulties in children with ADHD may be caused by deeper psychological problems such as anxiety or depression. If you suspect this, you should alert your doctor or clinic.

Homework

Possible problems

Children starting secondary school may not be used to regular homework, and many of them struggle to cope with it at first. Children with ADHD may take more time and have more difficulty in getting into the homework routine.

Problems might include:

- Not noting down the homework
- Not being able to read what's been noted down earlier
- Not being able to settle down at home in the late afternoon and evening
- Not being able to concentrate for long enough to complete the homework

Solutions

- Consider different ways of completing the assignments; for example, use a computer to type up school work rather than handwriting. Ask whether the child could dictate assignments into a Dictaphone or if a parent or older sibling could act as a scribe.
- Set up a routine for all the children in the family based on the principle "homework first, play/leisure second". The school should have guidelines for the amount of time to be spent on each subject for homework. This will help you to set up a sensible routine.
- Communicate with the school. If your child spends more than the recommended time on a piece of homework and still doesn't finish it, let the school know by making a note in the school planner or write a separate letter. The problem may be an over-enthusiastic or inexperienced teacher setting the homework, and nothing to do with ADHD.
- Try after-school sessions. Find out about any after-school homework sessions organised at the school. Your child (and you!) may find it easier to cope with homework when there are teachers and other students around. It is a fairly established principle that on average it takes a child with ADHD 3 times as long to complete a task at home as in school.

Consult your doctor to ensure that your child is receiving the treatment that best addresses their needs.





Behaviour

Possible problems

Inappropriate behaviour can be a common issue in children with ADHD, and the move to secondary school can sometimes make matters worse.

There are a number of risks:

- There may be more unsupervised and unstructured time which may result in children with ADHD making inappropriate choices
- There is contact with older students, some of whom may have an influence on behaviour

Clearly it's important to try to tackle behaviour problems before they get really serious. Persistent behaviour problems can lead to temporary or permanent exclusion from school.

It is important to separate the behaviour from the child and to focus on helping the child with ADHD to make more appropriate choices in terms of their learning and behaviour responsibilities



Solutions

As soon as behaviour problems begin to appear:

- Contact the school — the form teacher, the SENCO, or the head of year 7
- Explain your concerns and ask the school to establish the nature of the problem. This will involve the form teacher, SENCO or head of year getting information from all your child's teachers
- Ask for a meeting with the form teacher, SENCO or head of year to discuss how you can work together with your child to improve his or her behaviour

Children with ADHD at risk of exclusion may be asked to enter into a Pastoral Support Programme or PSP. The purpose of a PSP is to improve the youngster's behaviour and avoid exclusion

A PSP:

- is the responsibility of a nominated teacher at the school
- is set up in consultation with you, the parents
- should follow Government guidelines
- involves the local authority (i.e. the City or County Council)

A PSP enables you and the school to tap into all the resources of the local authority that can help to improve the child's behaviour — Social Services, Educational Psychology, Youth Services, Housing Services etc. The details of the PSP and the agencies that are involved will vary from individual to individual and school to school, but the key point is that this is a government-supported mechanism for helping schools to avoid exclusions.

References section

Special Educational Needs

Schools follow a step-by-step approach to helping children with special educational needs. This step-by-step approach is laid down by the government in a Code of Practice. At each successive step, more outside help is brought in. A key principle in the Code of Practice is that parents and carers must be involved at every stage.

School Action

This is the first stage, where a child gets extra help within the school. This could be different ways of teaching, for example, or some extra one-to-one teaching. At this stage, the school may write down how this extra help is being given, in the form of an Individual Education Plan (IEP). The school does not have to write an IEP, but it has to tell you if the child is getting extra help with School Action.

The IEP should say:

- what special help is being given
- how often your child will receive the help
- who will provide the help
- what the targets for your child are
- how and when your child's progress will be checked
- what help you can give your child at home





School Action Plus

If your child does not make enough progress with School Action, the teacher or the SENCO should then talk to you about asking for advice from other people outside the school. They might want to ask for help from, for example, a specialist teacher, an educational psychologist, a speech and language therapist or other health professionals.

Statutory Assessments

If the school thinks that it can't meet the child's special educational needs through School Action or School Action Plus, it can ask the local authority (the city or county council) to make a statutory assessment. This is a detailed investigation to find out exactly what your child's special educational needs are and what special help your child needs. The school must consult you before asking for a statutory assessment.

You can also ask the local authority for a statutory assessment, if you think the school can't meet the child's needs. But you should talk to the school about your concerns first.

In the statutory assessment, the local authority collects information about the child from teachers, the SENCO, other specialists such as educational psychologists, health professionals, and of course you, the parent or carer. The assessment process can take up to 16 weeks.

If you reach this stage, you may well feel that, as an ordinary parent dealing with professionals and specialists, you need help. Most local authorities have a Parent Partnership Service to provide this kind of help. Voluntary ADHD organisations may also be able to help.

Statements

If the local authority decides, on the basis of the assessment, that your child needs extra help that the school cannot provide, it will write a formal Statement of Special Educational Needs. This sets out what the child's special educational needs are, and what extra help the child should receive. The statement will also set out short-term and long-term targets. The local authority has to consult you, and will send a draft statement for you to comment on.

Resources section

Voluntary organisations

ADDISS - Attention Deficit Information Services
PO Box 340
Edgware
Middlesex HA8 9HL

Tel: 020 8906 9068

Web: www.addiss.co.uk

Email: info@addiss.co.uk

CHADD - Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
www.chadd.org

Websites

www.livingwithadhd.co.uk

A comprehensive website provided by the pharmaceutical company Janssen Ltd.