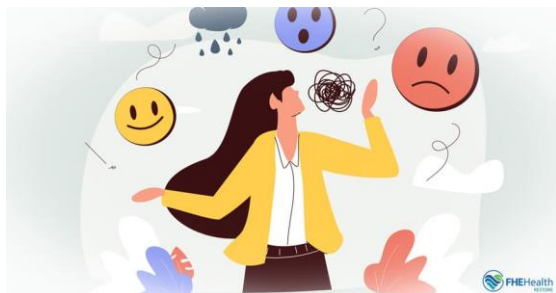


SEMH SPOTLIGHT: Supporting Students with ADHD and Mental Health Needs in the Classroom

This spotlight handout accompanies the Warwickshire Educational Psychology Service short webinar on Supporting Students with ADHD and Mental Health Needs in the Classroom. The webinar can be accessed through the website:

<https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/educational-psychology-service-eps/useful-educational-psychology-resources>

Key areas of need for children and young people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and mental health difficulties:

<p>What is ADHD?</p> <p>“A <u>persistent</u> pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that <u>interferes</u> with functioning or development”</p> <p>(American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013, p. 59).</p> <p>Three Subtypes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Combined. 2. Inattentive (more difficult to recognise). 3. Hyperactive-impulsive. 	<p>ADHD is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition that begins in childhood and affects brain structure and function. It is identified through behavioural traits such as inattention, impulsivity, hyperactivity, and emotional regulation difficulties. The most common type is combined ADHD, accounting for 75–80% of cases.</p> <p>Diagnosing ADHD can be complex, as traits may overlap with typical development or trauma responses, and in Warwickshire, diagnosis is not made before age six.</p>
<p>ADHD and Mental Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research shows that people with ADHD might be more likely to develop a mental health condition, like anxiety or depression. • Anxiety and depression can also have similar symptoms to ADHD <p>(Young Minds)</p>	<p>People with ADHD are more likely to experience mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, addiction, and emotional regulation difficulties, with increased risks of suicide and reduced life expectancy. A holistic approach is essential, and while ADHD can feel overwhelming, it also brings strengths like passion and energy—reminding us that every brain works differently.</p>
<p>Emotional Regulation</p> 	<p>Children and young people with ADHD often struggle with their emotional regulation, showing emotional impulsivity and difficulty recognising emotions in themselves and others. They may become dysregulated more easily and for longer periods, sometimes responding with harmful or disruptive behaviours. Triggers can include learning tasks, environmental factors, or peer interactions.</p>

Key strategies to support children and young people with ADHD and mental health difficulties in school:

Supporting Emotional Regulation



Two evidence-based approaches help to support the emotional regulation of children and young people with ADHD – namely Emotion Coaching and PACE.

Emotion Coaching involves recognizing and empathising with a child's feelings, validating their emotions, setting limits on behaviour, and problem-solving together once they are calm.

The PACE approach emphasises a playful tone, acceptance, curiosity, and empathy.

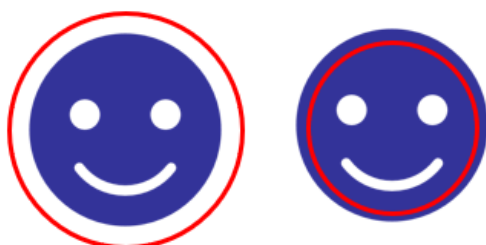
Supporting Emotional Regulation



Reacting in the moment can hinder a child's ability to access logical or language parts of the brain, especially when they "flip their lid".

A proactive approach is needed to keep the lower brain regions in check. This includes a daily routine of sensory soothing activities, reducing sensory distractions, and promoting self-awareness to help children understand and manage their emotions. Additionally, creating a regulation space for use before heightened dysregulation, such as during transitions from home to school or from lunch, can also be beneficial.

Supporting Emotional Regulation



Connection before correction

Social connections help us to feel safe and manage our emotional regulation. If a child doesn't feel safe, their stress systems may activate, leading to challenging behaviours. Schools often address these behaviours with external regulations, but this doesn't teach self-regulation. Self-regulation develops through connection with adults, helping children feel safe and calm before discussing limits and future actions.

Reframing the behaviour



What is the function of their behaviour? Often it will serve one or more of the following functions:

- Communication: Are they trying to communicate something or send us a message?
- Initiate social interaction: Is the young person trying to initiate a social response from his peers?
- Stimulation: Does the young person find the behaviour exciting or enjoy it?
- Escape or avoidance: Does the behaviour result in the young person getting away from something or somebody?
- Obtain things: What does the young person get from the presenting behaviour?

Strategies to reduce learner anxiety



- Recognise that challenging behaviour may stem from anxiety. Validate the child's feelings, offer reassurance, and support them in starting tasks when ready.
- Set clear boundaries and avoid lengthy debates about behaviour.
- Frame instructions positively and offer manageable alternatives to help them engage.
- Use tools to support focus during whole-class activities.
- Begin with specific praise, use neutral language for criticism, and be mindful of how they receive praise.
- Balance high and low demand tasks, avoid anxiety-inducing activities.

This supporting document provides signposting to national organisations and charities who can support children and young people with ADHD and mental health difficulties.

- ADHD Foundation <https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/about-us/>
- Youth Access <https://www.youthaccess.org.uk/>
- Young Minds [ADHD and Mental Health | Get support | YoungMinds](#)
- ADHD UK [ADHD UK - Homepage - ADHD UK](#)
- ADHD and You [What is ADHD? - Young Person | ADHD and You](#)
- The National Attention Deficit Disorder Information and Support Service [ADDISS](#)
- The UK ADHD Partnership <http://www.addiss.co.uk/>

Please note that information is subject to change and the author cannot take responsibility for any advice obtained from third parties. Information collated July 2025.