

## Behaviour Therapy for Preschoolers with ADHD

### Treatment for Preschool ADHD

Guidelines on ADHD for preschools developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) state that behaviour therapy should be the first line of treatment for children four and five years of age. However, the guidelines go on to state that if behavioural therapy is not accessible, has not worked, or if symptoms are severe enough that the child or family are at risk of harm, medication can and should be considered.

### What is Behaviour Therapy?

Behaviour therapy is often misinterpreted to mean that the child receives therapy to help them alter their behaviour, but behaviour therapy for children with ADHD actually entails teaching the parents and other adults who interact with the child specialized ADHD behavioural management techniques. Therapies such as play therapy have not proven effective for children with ADHD. When informed about parent training some parents incorrectly infer that they are being told that their parenting is substandard. They should be reassured that children with ADHD have issues because of their ADHD and not due to ineffective parenting. These children require specialized, more intensive parenting than other children due to their impairments.

### Parenting

The changes in parenting must start with a shift in understanding the child's behaviour. It begins with the realization that children with ADHD are not choosing to be difficult; it is their impairment or disability that makes it difficult for them to follow rules, sit quietly, think before acting and generally do the things that adults want them to do. After this shift in understanding a fundamental change should occur in how the parent is interacting with the child. As adults who interact with children with ADHD it is up to us to alter their environment and provide the appropriate support they require to succeed.



### School

The preschool age and environment are the perfect time and place to recognize ADHD impairments and begin to understand and support these children. Not allowing the child with ADHD to remain at preschool is a disservice to the child as well as the staff who should take the opportunity to learn about ADHD as they will undoubtedly have more children with ADHD cross their path in the future.

## Behaviour Management

Behavioural therapy is the most effective if done as uniformly as possible between home and school. The implementation of behavioural support and strategies can occur even before an ADHD diagnosis, since these techniques are beneficial for all children. The key to ADHD behaviour management is consistency and immediacy through clear, calm positive communication. Children with ADHD are often subjected to an abundance of scolding, nagging and general negative interaction with adults and even other children. This takes a huge toll on their self-image and wellbeing.

Since ADHD is a very individual disorder which presents in a variety of ways, across a range of severities and commonly with coexisting disorders, finding the exact right behavioural plan may take some time. The help of an expert in the field of ADHD may even be required to get the process on the right track. However, here are some basic principles on ADHD behavioural techniques that often work in the home and school setting.

### Behavioural Management Techniques for Home and School

- ✓ Set up a limited number of rules focusing on a few hard and fast concepts such as we do not hurt people, we stay safe.
- ✓ Structure the environment and set up consistent routines; consistency helps the formation of habits decreasing the load on executive functioning skills.
- ✓ Pay attention to the child when they are doing what you want them to do and ignore nuisance behaviours or minimize your interactions around them.
- ✓ Use positive consequences like praise, or small rewards like: additional time doing an activity they love, a sticker or star, or points toward a larger reward when the child is doing what you want them to do.
- ✓ Be immediate and very specific when giving positive feedback on appropriate behaviour so they know exactly what they did right.
- ✓ Give brief, simple instructions, without too many steps informing them of what you want them to do and not what you don't want them to do.
- ✓ Have them report back to you when they have completed the first step or two so you can praise and then share the next step or two in the sequence.
- ✓ Provide visual prompts like picture charts as reminders.
- ✓ Decrease distractions.
- ✓ Be proactive: anticipate times and places when their self-regulation will be challenged and set up accommodations and strategies to help them cope.
- ✓ Use parent/teacher social coaching to help the child acquire and practice social skills.

### Sources used for Behaviour Therapy for Preschoolers with ADHD

- <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/pages/AAP-Expands-Ages-for-Diagnosis-and-Treatment-of-ADHD-in-Children.aspx>
- <https://childmind.org/article/preschoolers-and-adhd/>
- <http://www.chadd.org/Understanding-ADHD/For-Parents-Caregivers/Preschoolers-and-ADHD/Behavioral-Therapy-for-Young-Children.aspx>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/features/adhd-awareness/index.html>