



ADHD: 10 Point Observation List

1. Eye contact

Avoidance of eye contact is usually associated with Autism, but it can sometimes be seen with ADHD – children or young people may look as if they are ignoring you, but some may find making eye contact really difficult; often suggesting it is painful or distracting for them.

2. Fidgeting

Being unable to stand or sit still without fiddling with something while you are talking with them does not mean that a child or young person is not paying attention to what you are saying to them. It may be that fidgeting with something helps them to focus; if unsure ask them to repeat back what you have just said to them to confirm that they have heard and have understood what you said.

3. Wandering

Individuals with ADHD often have an aching physical need to move around and can be very uncomfortable if made to sit still for periods of time that would be acceptable for other pupils.

Wandering off in order to avoid work can be seen as an aspect of ADHD. It may be that the child or young person doesn't know what to do or hasn't heard or processed what you want from them. Rather than asking for help or simply failing at a task, they may choose to wander about and not complete the action or task suggesting that. "If I don't do it then I can't get it wrong".

Sometimes children or young people with ADHD prefer to be told off than to get their work wrong and be perceived as 'stupid'.

4. Inappropriate Outbursts

Children and young people with ADHD sometimes have difficulty understanding what is and isn't appropriate in a given situation, for example, burping loudly in class or making other 'uncontrollable' noises.

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They can see these things as being funny and socially acceptable and can be poor judges of timing and context too, not realising that something that was funny in the playground is not so funny in assembly! They can make remarks inappropriate to the situation. They say what they see; partly due to their impulsivity, but they can also have difficulty reading social cues in a similar way to children or young people with Autism.

5. Consequences

Children or young people with ADHD often make no connection between an action and its consequences. If you correct a child or young person, they may be very sorry for what they have done but apparently without thinking they may do the very same thing again. Learning from their mistakes is not easy for them and this will need to be supported with children and young people with ADHD.

6. Daydreaming

Daydreaming is a characteristic of ADHD; not fully paying attention to a task or being easily distracted can cause problems for children or young people with ADHD. It is not that they are choosing 'not' to pay attention. It may seem to you that they are just choosing to daydream, it is more likely that their mind will drift towards something of more interest or relevance to them.

Individuals with ADHD find it difficult to differentiate between different inputs; everything seems to come in at the same level and they can't focus in on a specific one – their parent's instructions, for example. The sounds and sights of their surroundings can overwhelm and distract them from the thing they are trying to focus on. This prevents them from concentrating when they need to.

7. Low self-esteem

This can cause real problems for children and young people with ADHD. They can often feel that they fail at tasks or activities that others can do. They may believe that they can't successfully complete tasks before they even try. Many children or young people with ADHD fear failure; they fear they will get tasks wrong, that they are not good at tasks or activities (based on past experiences) and so they often give up trying.

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They may scribble out school work or scrunch up what they have done and destroy it, causing frustration, anger and confrontation whilst reinforcing negative self-belief and low self-esteem.

8. Being the 'class clown' or 'the distractor'

As with most children and young people, those with ADHD want to be liked. They try to make others laugh and this can often cause distraction or disruption (possibility due to work avoidance) in the classroom and at home. Link this up with their impulsivity, and limited awareness of what is and is not appropriate, it can quickly become a way to avoid completing a particular task or activity they find difficult. Some individual children can develop a kind of class sabotage: "if I can't do it, the class won't be able to do it either".

9. Waiting turns

Children and young people with ADHD often find waiting or taking turns difficult. This can be due to the difficulty they have in managing their impulses. We all have similar impulses, the difference with ADHD is that they don't always process the reason for not acting on a destructive impulse until it's too late and the damage is done. Managing their own time or judging the time it takes to complete a task or activity can also be hard for them. They understand time and can learn to tell the time but judging time is problematic and this can result in real difficulties.

10. Rule-breaking

Children and young people with ADHD will test out rules and structure because they need to know that they are there. They are not always being defiant! They need strong boundaries and they need to know how far they can go. They find judging boundaries difficult as they have poor social observation skills. If we link this to their difficulties in making the connection between action and consequences, and their impulsivity, we can see how it can sometimes lead to them being seen as rule-breakers, with risky behaviours. This tendency to test boundaries can also lead to challenging or anti-social behaviours.