



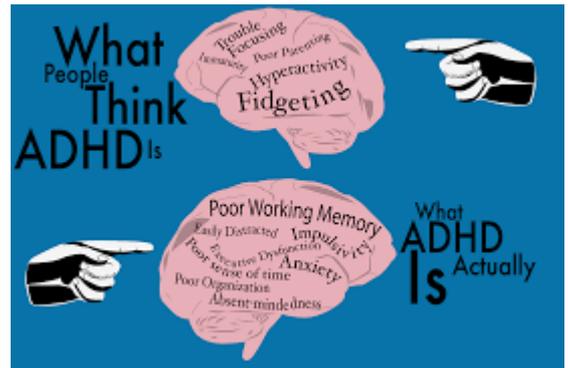
## Understanding ADHD: A Guide for Parents

ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) is one of the most common neurodevelopmental conditions in childhood, but it is also one of the most misunderstood. Many parents still believe ADHD is only about focus or concentration, but research and experience show that it is much more complex. This guide is meant to help parents understand ADHD better, recognise signs earlier, and support their children with confidence and compassion.

### 1. What ADHD Really Is

ADHD is a brain-based developmental condition that affects how children manage attention, activity levels, and impulse control. It is not caused by bad parenting, too much screen time, or a lack of discipline.

Children with ADHD often want to do well, but their brains work differently. With the right support, they can thrive.



### 2. The Different Types of ADHD

There are three recognised presentations of ADHD:

Inattentive Type	Hyperactive/Impulsive Type	Combined Type
<p>Children may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Struggle to concentrate</li> <li>• Lose things easily</li> <li>• Forget instructions</li> <li>• Daydream or appear “in their own world”</li> </ul> <p>This type is often missed in girls and quiet boys.</p>	<p>Children may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move constantly</li> <li>• Be very energetic</li> <li>• Act without thinking</li> <li>• Interrupt often</li> <li>• Struggle to wait their turn</li> </ul>	<p>A mixture of inattentive and hyperactive/impulsive symptoms.</p>

### 3. Why ADHD Often Looks Different in Girls

ADHD in girls can be much harder to identify. Many girls “mask” their symptoms by working extra hard to fit in, avoid trouble, or please adults. Instead of acting out, girls often internalise their struggles. They become anxious,



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overthink small mistakes, or push themselves towards perfectionism. These quiet forms of distress are easy to overlook, and as a result, many girls receive support much later. Sometimes only in high school or adulthood.

Parents often notice more subtle signs: a daughter who is always tired from trying to keep up, a girl who is disorganised but hides it well, or a child who becomes emotional in private but appears calm at school. Masking is not dishonesty, it is survival. Girls learn early that being “good” avoids judgment, so they suppress their difficulties until they are exhausted.

Supporting girls with ADHD starts with noticing what is beneath the surface. Creating safe spaces where they feel comfortable sharing their challenges is essential. Instead of asking, “Was today good?” a more helpful question might be, “Was today hard for your brain?” Organisation tools such as colour-coded folders, visual schedules, and checklists help reduce overwhelm. Girls also benefit from reassurance that mistakes are normal and perfection is not required. Encouraging open conversations, validating emotions, and celebrating strengths can help girls feel understood without needing to hide their struggles.

Gender Differences	
Boys:	Girls:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The onset of symptoms often occurs before puberty</li><li>• More likely to be diagnosed in childhood</li><li>• More externalised behaviour</li><li>• Impatience often presents as aggression or hostility</li><li>• Higher rates of comorbid conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, and substance use disorder</li><li>• Shame less common</li><li>• Can present as having a lack of empathy</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The onset of notable symptoms often occurs during or after puberty</li><li>• Less likely to be diagnosed in childhood</li><li>• More internalised behaviours</li><li>• Impatience often presents as complaining</li><li>• Higher rates of comorbid anxiety and depressive disorders</li><li>• Shyness and shame are common</li><li>• More empathetic</li><li>• Hormonal fluctuations can affect symptoms</li><li>• Self-esteem issues are common</li></ul>

#### 4. “Why Is There So Much ADHD These Days?”

This is one of the most common questions from parents.

ADHD has not suddenly increased. Rather:

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- Awareness has improved, so more children are identified early.
- Stigma is decreasing, so parents are asking for help sooner.
- We understand ADHD better, especially the quieter forms.
- Many adults who grew up in an era with little mental-health knowledge are now recognising unresolved symptoms in themselves, and therefore noticing them in their children too.

In other words, the condition isn't new. Our understanding is.

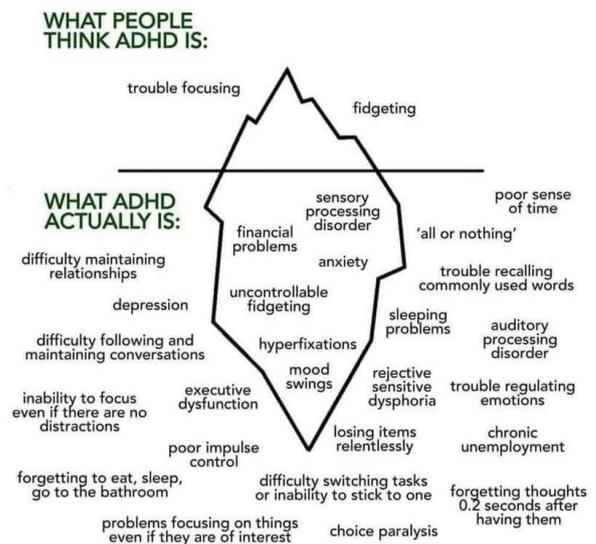
### 5. ADHD Rarely Comes Alone

ADHD is often diagnosed first, but it is seldom the only challenge. Many children also experience:

- Learning disorders (reading, writing, maths difficulties)
- Anxiety
- Emotional regulation challenges
- Sensory processing differences
- Behavioural difficulties
- Sleep problems
- Executive functioning challenges (see below)

## THE ADHD ICEBERG

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This is why a multidisciplinary approach is so important.

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## 6. Executive Functioning: The Brain's "Management System"

Executive functions help children plan, organise, start tasks, stay focused, and manage emotions. Children with ADHD often struggle with:

- Time management
- Getting started with tasks
- Finishing work
- Organising schoolwork
- Controlling impulses
- Regulating emotions

These are brain-based challenges, not laziness.

## 7. Why Some Parents Struggle to Accept an ADHD Diagnosis

Many adults today grew up at a time when:

- ADHD was poorly understood
- Mental health was rarely discussed
- Girls were rarely assessed
- Children were judged on behaviour, not needs

As a result, some parents may have internalised their own struggles, which spill over to their children. Very often, adults recognise their own undiagnosed symptoms only once they learn more about ADHD in their children. This can bring up guilt, fear, or confusion, all understandable emotions.

## 8. ADHD Is Not Caused by Bad Parenting

A diagnosis does not mean the parent did anything wrong.

ADHD is highly heritable, meaning it runs strongly in families. Parenting does not cause ADHD, but the right parenting tools can make a world of difference.



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### 9. How ADHD Affects Everyday Life

Children with ADHD may struggle with:

- School performance
- Emotional control
- Friendships
- Listening and following routines
- Morning and homework time
- Sleep
- Confidence and self-esteem



Understanding *why* these challenges happen is the first step in supporting them effectively.

### 10. Why Early Identification Matters

When ADHD is recognised early, children benefit from:

- Targeted support in the classroom
- Emotional and behavioural support
- Understanding from parents and teachers
- Reduced frustration and conflict
- Better long-term academic and social outcomes

Early support prevents children from being labelled “naughty”, “lazy”, or “difficult”.

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### 11. What Support Looks Like

Support may include:

- Behavioural strategies
- Classroom accommodations
- Emotional support or counselling
- Occupational therapy
- Parent guidance
- In some cases, medication (especially when recommended by a paediatrician or psychiatrist)

Every child is unique. Support should be individualised.

### 12. ADHD and Masking

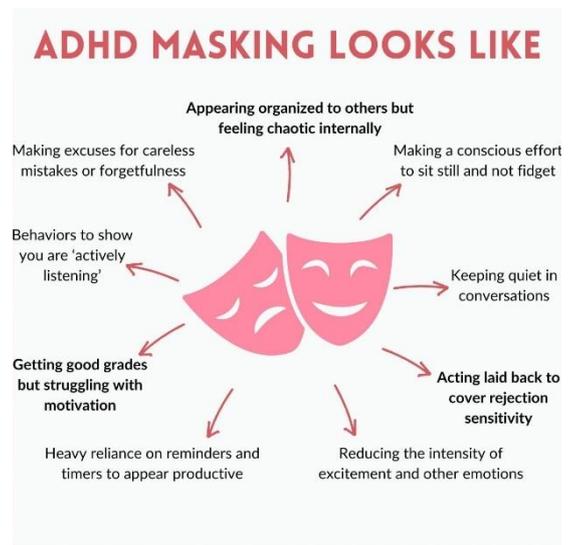
Masking is when a child hides their struggles by copying others or working extra hard to seem “okay”. Masking is common in girls and anxious children. It is exhausting and often leads to burnout or emotional outbursts at home.

### 13. You Are Not Alone

ADHD affects the whole family, but with understanding, support, and the right tools, children with ADHD can flourish. Many are creative, curious, energetic, intuitive, innovative, and resilient.

Parents who understand ADHD give their children a lifelong gift: acceptance.

For more information on ADHD, visit our website at [www.gb4adhd.co.za](http://www.gb4adhd.co.za), or follow us on Instagram at @gb4adhd and Facebook at Goldilocks and The Bear Foundation.



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