

Recognising ADHD

By Sara Barila

Thousands of Australian girls with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), could be going overlooked in schools because they don't disrupt class like their male counterparts.

Currently, boys with ADHD or ADD (the terms are often used interchangeably) outnumber girls six to one, but education consultant Dr Ian Lillico believes the true figures lay closer to three to one. ADHD is one of the most common childhood disorders, typified by problems with inattention, distractibility, hyperactivity and impulsiveness. Unfortunately, Dr Lillico predicts three in four girls who have ADHD go undiagnosed - and untreated - because they don't display the hyperactivity component.

Most experts now view ADD and ADHD as part of a group of behaviour problems where children have more difficulty concentrating on what they are doing than other children of their age.

Dr Julia Rucklidge's 2008 study suggests that females with ADHD are more likely

the back'. Dr Lillico advises teachers to pay close attention to girls who are poor readers and often ostracised.

Students with ADHD are more likely to be injured, to abuse drugs and display anti-social behaviour than other students. They may also be more inclined to struggle with anxiety and depression. Early diagnosis is essential because it gives children the opportunity for early treatment; helping students with ADHD to concentrate and learn.

ADHD In The Classroom

Children with ADHD are often unable to sit still and pay attention in class. They can experience peer rejection and display a range of disruptive behaviours. Since academic and social difficulties can affect their future, it is best that diagnosis and treatment are initiated as early as possible.

Many children with ADHD also have learning difficulties. ADHD is not a learning disability, but often interferes with a student's ability to concentrate on learning.

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than males to struggle with inattention, low self-esteem, a deficit in IQ, substance abuse and depression and anxiety.

Supporting Dr Lillico's prediction, Rucklidge confirms that males are more likely to be hyperactive and impulsive, and have a higher rate of school suspensions. Whilst boys display hyperactivity very early in school, a girl who has ADHD or ADD is more likely to be 'the quiet kid sitting at

This is often another obstacle in diagnosing ADHD, as it can be difficult to differentiate between the similar symptoms of learning disabilities and ADHD.

A child may have ADHD if he or she is having difficulties both at school and at home and displays more than six of the behaviours listed below (keeping in mind that for younger children these are part of regular behaviour).

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Inattention

The child often:

- overlooks details or makes careless mistakes
- has trouble with organisation
- often loses things needed for tasks, activities or school
- has difficulty staying on-task
- does not seem to listen when spoken to directly
- often will not finish tasks at both school and at home
- is easily distracted and forgetful
- avoids tasks that require a lot of thinking and concentration (as they find them tiring).

Hyperactivity/Impulsivity

The child often:

- fidgets, or cannot sit still
- leaves their seat in the classroom when they should be seated
- runs or climbs excessively
- has trouble playing quietly
- is constantly 'on the go'
- talks non-stop



- blurts out answers before the questions have been completed
- has difficulty awaiting their turn
- butts into conversations or games.

and

- the behaviour pattern is different from most other children of about the same age
- the behaviours happen in more than one place (e.g. home and school)
- the behaviour has lasted for more than 6 months
- the behaviour pattern started before age 7

- the child does not have other major health or development problems, and
- the behaviour is causing the child problems with school, work, friends and daily living.

Classroom Tips

The key to effectively educating children with ADHD is ensuring that they are learning in an environment in which their needs are recognised. Some suggestions for parents include:

- Requesting that the child sit at the front of the class, so that if their attention wanders the teacher can

keep them on track.

- Stressing the importance of eye contact when giving the child directions.
- Asking the teacher if they can ensure task instructions are written on the board, or on paper, which the child can place on their desk.

Despite at least 40 years of research worldwide, there is no clear explanation for what causes ADHD. The media's portrayal of the stereotypical hyperactive child with ADHD could contribute to parents with children of the more inattentive subtype (which are more likely to be girls) being disinclined to consider that their child may have ADHD. ■