FREE GUIDE

Your first week after your child's ADHD diagnosis

A guide for parents: what it means, what to ask, and how to start at home.



Start with one section a day.

Andrea Antal
ADHD and Executive Function Coach · andreaantal.com

A note from Andrea



Dear parent,

If you're holding this guide, your child has probably just been diagnosed with ADHD. Maybe you've sensed for a long time that some things were harder for them, or maybe this came as a surprise. Either way, reading this is already a big step for your child.

I'm raising a son with ADHD, and I was diagnosed myself at 45, so I know this as a parent and as an adult with ADHD. So many parents are exactly where you are right now, with the same questions and a whole mix of feelings. You're in good company.

One of the most useful things I've learned is how to help while giving my son room to grow: offering the support he needs, while he learns to do more for himself.

A diagnosis gives you a new way to understand your child. Once you see how their brain works, you can start asking "What would help?", and that question changes a lot at home and at school.

I wrote this guide because I wish I'd had something like it: clear information, practical things to try at home, and the reassurance that you can take this one step at a time.

Read it a page at a time, in any order. Come back to it whenever you're ready.

Your child is lucky to have someone looking this closely.

Cheering you on,

Andrea

How to use this guide

This guide is for the first week or so after your child's ADHD diagnosis. It's in eleven short sections:

1. How you might be feeling
2. What ADHD means for your child
3. The skills behind getting things done
4. What often comes alongside ADHD
5. Getting ready for your next appointment
6. Your first week, day by day
7. Three changes to try at home
8. Calmer mornings, homework, and bedtimes
9. When feelings run high
10. Talking to your child, your family, and the school
11. Looking after yourself

At the end you'll find a "How I work best" page to fill in with your child, a list of ADHD words explained, where to go next, and the sources for every fact in this guide.

Read it in any order. If you only have ten minutes, read section 6, "Your first week, day by day", and start there.

This guide is general information from a coach. It works alongside advice from your child's doctor. For anything about your child's health or treatment, talk to the specialist who diagnosed them.

1 How you might be feeling

Parents feel all kinds of things after a diagnosis, often several at once, and often different things on different days.

Relief.
There's a reason, and it has a name.

Worry.
About school, friendships, the teenage years, the future.

Guilt.
For the times you shouted, punished, or pushed. For not seeing it sooner.

Grief.
For the easier path you'd imagined, or for how hard things have been for your child.

Recognition.
ADHD runs in families. Many parents read about their child and recognise themselves.

Doubt.
"Maybe they'll grow out of it." "Maybe it's just their age." "Maybe the school is exaggerating."

All of this is normal. **Your child's ADHD comes from how their brain develops,** and you can make a real difference to how they get on with it.

If you and your partner feel differently

It's common for parents to react differently. One may feel relieved, the other worried or unconvinced. That's normal. Give each other time, and try to agree on one or two things to try together, even if you don't yet agree on everything else.

Try this: three things that make sense now

Write down three things about your child that make more sense now. For example:

- "Why the same instruction never seems to stick."
- "Why homework takes three hours when it should take thirty minutes."
- "Why small changes of plan lead to big meltdowns."

2 What ADHD means for your child

What the diagnosis means

ADHD stands for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The name is a little misleading. Children with ADHD can pay attention, sometimes intensely, especially to things they enjoy. What ADHD affects is how the brain **directs and manages** attention, energy, and actions.

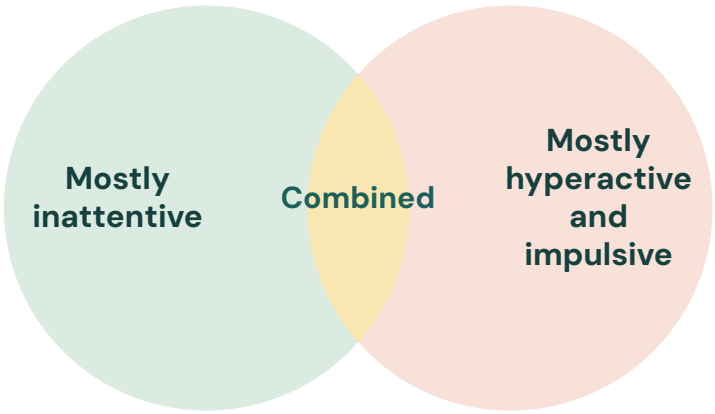
A specialist diagnoses ADHD when these difficulties:

- have been there for a long time, usually since early childhood
- show up in more than one place, for example at home and at school
- happen often enough to get in the way of everyday life, learning, or friendships

So a diagnosis tells you something specific: the things your child finds hard have a recognised explanation, and there are well-known ways to help.

The three presentations

Doctors describe ADHD in three ways, depending on which signs are strongest:



Presentation	What it can look like in children
Mostly inattentive	Daydreaming, losing things, not finishing work, forgetting instructions, seeming not to listen. Often missed, especially in girls
Mostly hyperactive-impulsive	Finding it hard to sit still, talking a lot, interrupting, acting before thinking, finding it hard to wait
Combined	A mix of both. This is the most common

Your child's report should say which presentation they have. If it's missing, ask.

How it might explain what you've seen

Many parents find that a diagnosis helps them see their child's behaviour differently. For example:

- **Instructions.** Your child may seem to ignore you, when in fact the instruction was lost before they could act on it. ADHD affects working memory, the brain's way of holding information while you use it.
- **Getting started.** Your child may sit in front of homework for a long time without starting, even when they want to do well. Starting is one of the hardest parts for many children with ADHD.

- **Time.** Your child may have little sense of "ten minutes left" or how long things take. That's why mornings and transitions can be so hard.
- **Feelings.** Small things may lead to big reactions, and it may take your child a long time to calm down. Many children with ADHD feel things quickly and strongly.
- **Organisation.** Lost sweaters, forgotten PE clothes, and crumpled letters at the bottom of the bag are very common. Organising things is a skill that develops more slowly with ADHD.

Your child may show some of these, all of them, or very few. ADHD looks different in every child.

Can't more often than won't

One of the most useful shifts for parents is this: when your child doesn't do something, it's more often "can't, right now" than "won't". They may know exactly what to do and still not manage it, because starting, remembering, or stopping is hard for their brain. You can still keep clear expectations. Your child just needs more help to meet them, and for longer than other children their age.

Questions parents often ask

? "Did I cause this?"

ADHD comes from differences in how the brain develops. The exact cause is still being researched, and genes play an important part, and ADHD often runs in families. It's part of how your child was born. The support you give at home makes a real difference to how your child gets on.

? "Why wasn't it noticed sooner?"

The inattentive kind of ADHD is less noticeable, so it's often missed, especially in girls. Some children manage well in the early years and only struggle when school asks more of them, for example when they move to a new class, a new school, or secondary school.

? "Could I have ADHD too?"

Possibly. Because ADHD runs in families, many parents recognise themselves as they learn about their child. If that's you, the adult guide on andreaantal.com is a good place to start.

? "Will my child grow out of it?"

Some children's symptoms ease as they grow up, but for many, ADHD continues into adulthood in some form. What changes most is how much it gets in the way. Children who understand how they work, and who get the right support, often do very well.

? "Will my child need medication?"

That's a decision for you and your child's doctor. Support can include parent training, help at school, therapy, and medication. Parent training in behaviour management is recommended for parents of children under 12. Your child's doctor can explain the options and what would suit your child.

? "Is it linked to intelligence?"

No. Children with ADHD have the same range of intelligence as other children. ADHD affects how they manage their learning, which can make school harder than their ability would suggest.

? "Why can they focus on video games but not homework?"

Fast, interesting activities with instant rewards are much easier for an ADHD brain. Slow tasks that need to be started and kept going without a reward are the hard part. Their focus on games shows that their attention works. It just needs the right conditions.

? "Can my child have other conditions too?"

Yes. ADHD often comes with other conditions, such as learning difficulties, anxiety, sleep problems, or difficulties with language or coordination. Section 4 explains what to look out for and who to see.

Things worth knowing early

Your child's feelings matter as much as their behaviour.
Many children with ADHD hear far more corrections than praise, and it can affect how they see themselves. Protecting their confidence is one of the most important things you can do.

Friendships can be harder.
Waiting, sharing, and reading other people's reactions take the same skills ADHD makes harder. It's worth asking your child and their teacher how things are going at break and lunch.

Sleep often needs attention.
Many children with ADHD find it hard to switch off at night, and tiredness makes everything else harder.

Brothers and sisters are affected too.
They may notice that their sibling gets more help or different rules. A little one-to-one time for them helps.

Everyone who looks after your child can help.
Grandparents, helpers, teachers, and coaches can all use the same simple approaches. Section 10 has ideas.

You need support as well.
Parenting a child with ADHD takes a lot of energy. Section 11 is about looking after yourself.

Myths and what's true

What people say	What's true
"It's bad parenting."	Research points to genes playing a large role. Support at home makes daily life easier.
"They just need more discipline."	Clear rules help. Children with ADHD also need help to build the skills that make following the rules possible.
"They can focus on video games, so they can't have ADHD."	Interesting, fast-moving activities are easier for an ADHD brain. Focus on things that aren't interesting is the hard part.
"They'll grow out of it."	Some children's symptoms ease, but many continue into adulthood.
"Only boys have it."	Girls are diagnosed less often, partly because the inattentive kind is harder to spot.

There are strengths too

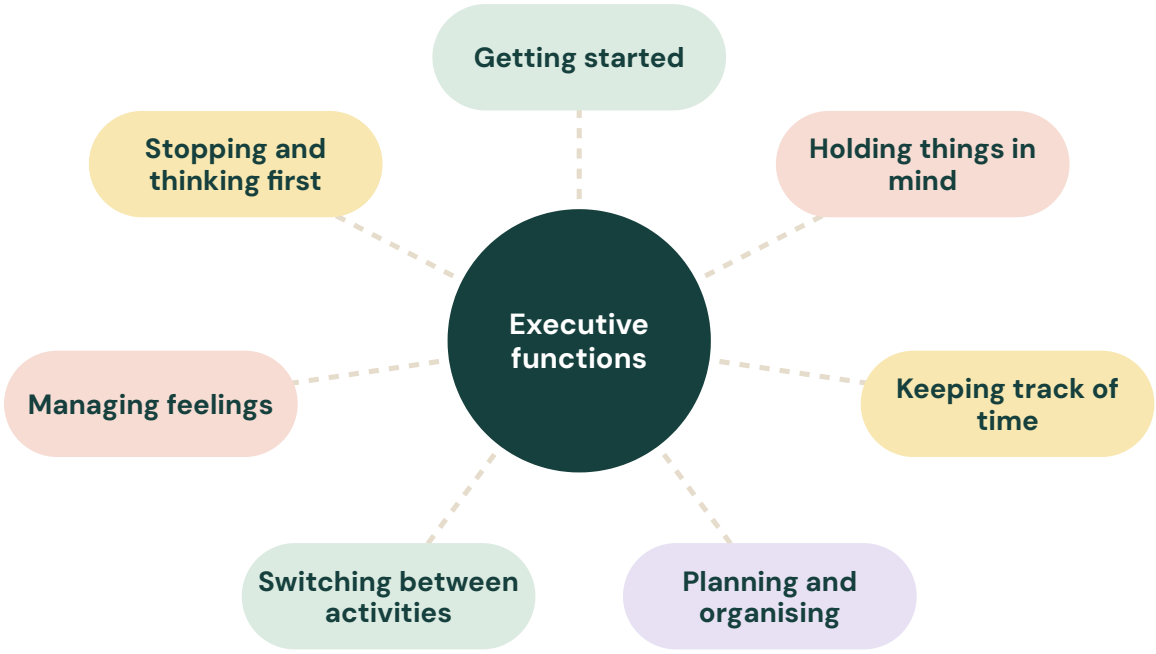
Many children with ADHD are curious, creative, energetic, funny, and kind. They often notice things others miss. Making sure your child hears about their strengths, as well as what they find hard, matters more than you might think.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

ADHD symptoms usually start in childhood and often continue through the teen years. ADHD often runs in families. Children with ADHD are more likely to also have learning difficulties, sleep problems, anxiety, or depression. Parent training in behaviour management is an effective treatment for children with ADHD, and experts recommend it for parents of children under 12. Sources: NIMH, ADHD; NHS, ADHD; CDC, Parent training in behaviour management for ADHD.

3 The skills behind getting things done

Executive functions are the skills the brain uses to manage everything else. Knowing which ones are hardest for your child helps you know where to help.



Tick the ones that sound most like your child.

Skill	When it's hard, it can look like…	What often helps
☐ **Getting started**	Sitting in front of homework for an hour without starting. Needing many reminders.	Make the first step tiny. Sit nearby while they start.
☐ **Holding things in mind**	Forgetting what you asked halfway up the stairs. Losing track of instructions at school.	One instruction at a time. Write or draw it.
☐ **Keeping track of time**	No sense of "ten minutes left". Always late for the bus.	Visual timers. Warnings before changes.
☐ **Planning and organising**	Lost sweaters, forgotten PE clothes, and a bag full of crumpled letters.	A checklist by the door. One place for school things.
☐ **Switching between activities**	Meltdowns when it's time to stop playing. Struggling with changes of plan.	A five-minute warning. A clear "what's next".
☐ **Managing feelings**	Big reactions to everyday moments. Tears or anger that come fast.	Staying calm yourself. Fewer words in the moment. Talk later.
☐ **Stopping and thinking first**	Grabbing, interrupting, blurting out answers, doing something risky without thinking.	Clear, simple rules. Practise the pause together.

Start small. Pick one or two that cause the most trouble at home. That's where the three changes in section 7 come in.

4 What often comes alongside ADHD

ADHD often comes with other conditions or difficulties. It's worth knowing what to look out for, so you can ask about them. A doctor or psychologist is the right person to assess these. **Who to see:**

If you notice…	Who to talk to
Difficulty with reading, spelling, writing, or numbers	The school, and an educational psychologist
Difficulty understanding, speaking, or following what's said	A speech and language therapist. An audiologist can check hearing
Clumsiness, handwriting difficulties, or strong reactions to noise, clothes, or textures	An occupational therapist
Worry, fears, or low mood that last	Your child's doctor, a child psychologist, or a child psychiatrist
Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, most nights	Your child's paediatrician
Repeated movements or sounds that are hard to control (tics)	Your child's paediatrician, who may refer you to a paediatric neurologist
Finding friendships and social situations very hard, or very fixed routines and interests	Ask the specialist who diagnosed your child whether an autism assessment would be useful

If your child is in danger, or you're worried they might harm themselves, call 999 or go to your nearest emergency department.

5 Getting ready for your next appointment

Appointments go quickly, and it's easy to forget what you meant to ask. Fill in this section before you go, and take it with you.

Questions about the diagnosis

1. What did the assessment show? Which presentation does my child have?
2. Can I have a copy of the written report?
3. Did you look at anything else that could explain what we're seeing, or that often comes alongside ADHD, such as anxiety, learning difficulties, language, or sleep?

Questions about options

4. What are the options for treatment and support for my child, and which would you suggest, and why?
5. Is parent training available, and where? How do I find a programme in the UAE?
6. Would therapy, occupational therapy, or other support help?

Questions if medication is one of the options

7. What should we expect, and how long before we know if it's working?
8. What should we watch for and tell you about?
9. Who do I contact if I have questions between appointments?

Questions about school and insurance

10. Which parts of the report should I share with the school, and who at school should see it?
11. Would a letter for the school help, and can you write one?
12. What does our insurance cover for follow-up appointments and therapy?

My own questions

What to take with you

☐ This page, with your questions

☐ Recent school reports or emails from teachers

☐ Notes on how things have been at home (see below)

☐ Your partner or another adult, if you'd like a second pair of ears

My notes since the last appointment

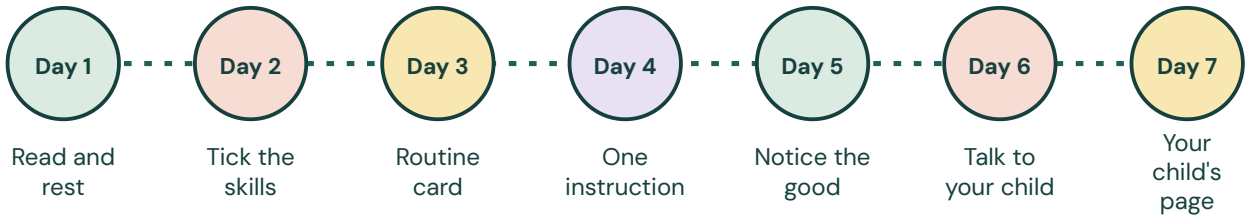
A few real examples are more useful to a doctor than general descriptions.

Date	What happened	Where (home, school, elsewhere)

Keep the report somewhere safe, and keep a digital copy. You'll need it for school support plans, exam arrangements, and future appointments.

6 Your first week, day by day

Take what helps, on whichever days suit you. It's a gentle plan for a week that might feel like a lot.



Day	What to do	Time it takes
Day 1	Read sections 1 and 2 of this guide. Let the news sink in. Give yourself time before changing anything.	15 minutes
Day 2	Tick the skills that sound like your child (section 3).	10 minutes
Day 3	Make a routine card for the hardest part of the day (change 1).	15 minutes

Day	What to do	Time it takes
Day 4	Practise one instruction at a time, all day (change 2).	Fits into your day
Day 5	Notice what goes well, three times (change 3).	Fits into your day
Day 6	If you're ready, talk to your child about their diagnosis (section 10).	10 minutes
Day 7	Fill in the "How I work best" page together. Look back at the week.	20 minutes

At the end of the week, ask yourself:

- What helped, even a little?

- What felt harder?

- What do we want to keep doing next week?

If you missed days, that's useful information about what works in your family.

7 Three changes to try at home

Start with three changes. Each takes about ten minutes to set up.

1

Make the routine visible

2

One instruction at a time

3

Notice what goes well

Change 1: Make the routine visible

> **Why:** Holding a list of steps in mind is hard with ADHD. "Get ready for school" is actually ten steps, and it's easy to get lost at step three.

Try this: Pick the hardest part of the day, often the morning or bedtime. Write the steps on a card or a sheet, in order, with pictures for younger children. Stick it where it happens: by the door, on the bathroom mirror. When your child gets stuck, point to the card instead of repeating yourself.

Make it work:

- Make the card together. Children are more likely to use something they helped to make.
- Keep it to five or six steps. More than that, and it becomes another thing to remember.
- Let your child tick off each step, or move a peg along.

If you need to adjust it: check where the card is. Move it to where your child will see it at the moment they need it.

Change 2: One instruction at a time

> **Why:** Long instructions get lost. By the time you reach "and don't forget your water bottle", the first part has gone.

Try this: Go to your child, get their attention, and give one instruction. Ask them to say it back. When it's done, give the next one.

Make it work:

- Get close. Instructions shouted from another room are the easiest to miss.
- Say what to do. "Shoes on, please" works better than "Stop playing".
- Keep your voice calm and your words few.

What to say instead

Instead of…	Try…
"Hurry up!"	"Shoes next."
"How many times do I have to tell you?"	"Bag. By the door. Thank you."
"Stop being so silly."	"Feet on the floor, please."
"Why can't you just remember?"	"Let's check the card."
"Go and get ready for bed."	"Pyjamas on. Then come and find me."

Change 3: Notice what goes well

Why: Children with ADHD often hear far more corrections than praise. Over time, that wears down their confidence and their relationship with you.

Try this: Three times a day, notice something your child did well and say exactly what it was. "You started your homework without me asking. That was great." Specific praise tells them what to do again.

Make it work:

- Praise effort as well as results: "You kept going even when it was hard."
- Count the ordinary: putting a cup in the sink, getting in the car first time.
- Say it straight away. Praise at bedtime for something that happened at breakfast is harder to connect.

If you need to adjust it: if three times a day feels hard, start with once. If your child seems uncomfortable with praise, keep it short and matter-of-fact.

If a change needs adjusting

Change one thing about it and try again for a few days. If it still feels wrong, let it go. That tells you something useful about how your child works, and it goes on their "How I work best" page.

8 Calmer mornings, homework, and bedtimes

These are the three times of day most parents tell me are hardest. A few ideas for each:

Mornings

- Do as much as possible the night before: bag packed, uniform out, lunch ready.
- Use the routine card (change 1), and a clock your child can see.
- Build in ten spare minutes. Mornings with ADHD rarely go exactly to plan.

Homework

- Agree a regular time and place, with everything they need already there.
- Make the first step tiny: "Write your name and the date."
- Sit nearby doing something else. Many children start more easily with an adult in the room.
- Short bursts with breaks work better than one long session.

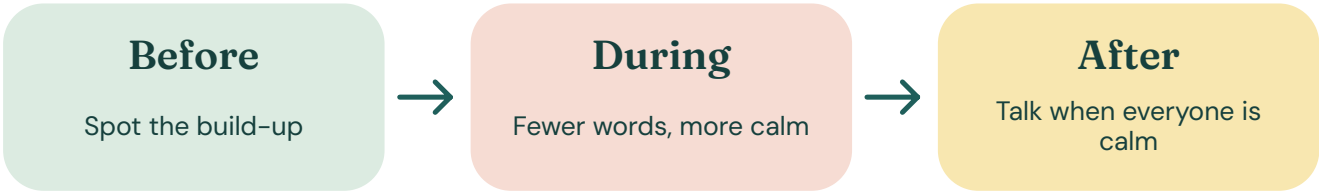
- If homework is a battle most nights, talk to the teacher. They would rather know.

Bedtimes

- Keep the same routine and order every night, on a card if it helps.
- Screens off a while before bed, and a calm activity instead.
- A worry notebook by the bed, for thoughts that won't switch off.
- If your child can't fall asleep most nights, talk to their paediatrician.

9 When feelings run high

Many children with ADHD feel things quickly and strongly. A changed plan, a lost game or "not now" can lead to tears, shouting, or slammed doors. The brakes just take longer to work.



Before: spot the build-up

Most big feelings have early signs: a louder voice, fidgeting, going silent, "It's not fair!" Once you know your child's signs, you can step in earlier, when calming down is still possible.

During: fewer words, more calm

In the middle of a meltdown, your child can't take in reasons or consequences. Keep your voice low and your words few: "I'm here. You're safe. We'll sort it out when you're calm." Make sure everyone is safe, and wait.

After: talk when everyone is calm

Later, talk about what happened, without blame. What did it feel like? What could help next time? Make a plan together and write it down.

Look after your own calm too

It's hard to stay steady when your child isn't. Take a breath. Step away for a moment if it's safe to. Remember that this is a skill they're still learning, and so, often, are we.

10 Talking to your child, your family, and the school

Your child

Most children are relieved to hear there's a reason for what they find hard. Keep it simple and hopeful, and match it to their age.

Under 7:

> "Your brain is super busy. It's great at [noticing things / having ideas / being kind], and sometimes it finds sitting still or remembering things hard. That's OK. We'll help you."

7 to 11:

> "Your brain works in a different way, and it has a name: ADHD. It's great at [a strength you've seen], and it finds some things harder, like [one example]. Lots of people have it. We're going to work out together what helps."

12 and older:

> "The assessment showed you have ADHD. It explains some of the things you've found hard, like [example]. It's about how your brain manages things like starting, remembering, and time. Lots of successful adults have it. What questions do you have?"

Cover it bit by bit, over several conversations. Let them ask questions, now or later. Teenagers especially may want to read about it themselves, or decide who else knows.

Brothers and sisters

Siblings may notice that their brother or sister gets more help, or different rules. Keep it simple: "Everyone in our family gets what they need. Right now, [name] needs a bit more help with [example]." Make sure siblings get their own time with you too.

Family and helpers

Grandparents, carers, and helpers see your child often, so it helps if everyone does things the same way. You decide how much to share. Some families share the diagnosis. Some just share what helps: "One instruction at a time works best."

If you have a helper or nanny, show them the routine cards and the "What to say instead" table. Consistency across adults makes a big difference.

Some relatives may say "he'll grow out of it" or that it's a parenting problem. In some families and cultures, diagnoses are rarely talked about. People can come round in their own time. If you'd like something to share, the ADHD explained page on andreaantal.com has the facts, with sources.

School

The school can only help with what it knows. When you're ready, ask for a meeting with your child's teacher or the school's inclusion team.

Take with you:

☐ The report, or the parts you've decided to share

☐ Two or three short examples of what you see at home

☐ What already helps

Support schools often offer (this varies by school and emirate):

- Sitting near the front, away from distractions
- Instructions in writing as well as spoken
- Big tasks broken into steps, with check-ins
- Movement breaks
- Extra time or a separate room for tests, where your child qualifies
- A named adult your child can go to

A first email to the teacher:

> Dear [Teacher's name],
>
> I wanted to let you know that [child's name] has recently been diagnosed with ADHD. At home, we've found that [one thing that helps] makes a real difference. I'd welcome a short meeting to talk about what might help in class. I'm free on [two or three times].
>
> Thank you, [Your name]

The School support in the UAE guide on andreaantal.com explains who's who, how to prepare for a meeting, and what to ask for.

11 Looking after yourself

Parenting a child with ADHD takes a lot of energy, patience, and planning. It's easier to help your child when you've kept some energy for yourself.

- **One change at a time.** Small steps add up.
- **Share the load.** Agree with your partner or another adult who does what, especially for mornings and homework.
- **Talk to other parents.** Ask your child's school whether there's a parent group. Many parents are where you are.
- **Notice what you're doing for your child that they could start doing themselves.** Helping is good. Doing everything for them can make it harder for them to learn.
- **If you recognised yourself in this guide,** you're in good company. Many parents are diagnosed after their child. The Help for you section on andreaantal.com is a good place to start.
- **If you're exhausted, low, or not coping,** talk to your own doctor. Looking after yourself is part of looking after your child.

Your child's "How I work best" page

This is one page about your child: what helps them, what gets in their way, and what to do when things go wrong. Make it together, in your child's words, and keep it short. Your child can share it with a teacher, a grandparent, or a club coach, if they want to.

How to fill it in

- Ask your child the questions. Write down their answers in their words.
- Use what you've both noticed this week.
- Add your own ideas only if they agree.
- For younger children, draw instead of writing.
- It's a first draft. Change it as you both learn more.

For example

- **What helps me:** Sitting near the front, away from the window.
- **What gets in my way:** When lots of people talk at once.
- **When things go wrong:** I go to the reading corner for five minutes.

The template is on the next page. You can also download a version you can type into at andreaantal.com.

How I work best

Name _____ Date _____

What helps me

What gets in my way

When things go wrong, I...

We'll look at this again on: _____

From "Your first week after an ADHD diagnosis" · andreaantal.com

ADHD words, explained

Executive functions: the brain's management skills: starting, planning, remembering, keeping track of time, switching tasks, and managing feelings.

Hyperfocus: becoming so absorbed in something interesting that everything else disappears.

Inclusion team: the staff at school who support children with additional needs. Names vary by school.

Parent training: programmes that teach parents practical skills, such as clear instructions, praise, and consistent consequences. Recommended for parents of children under 12 with ADHD.

Support plan: a written plan of the support your child gets at school. Schools use different names, such as IEP.

Time blindness: finding it hard to sense time passing, or to judge how long things will take.

Working memory: the brain's whiteboard for holding information while you use it.

Where to go next

On andreaantal.com, all free

- **ADHD explained:** the basics, with sources
- **Help for your child:** articles and printables for school, routines, feelings, behaviour, and friendships
- **School support in the UAE:** who's who, school meetings, support plans, and the move to secondary
- **Find the right help:** who does what in the UAE, how to check a licence, and free listings

ADHD Curious My free weekly newsletter: practical tools, real stories, and ADHD news from the UAE, every Sunday. You'll get it after this guide, and you can unsubscribe at any time.

Workshops One-hour sessions for parents, online or in Dubai. Register your interest on the website and you'll be the first to hear dates.

One-to-one coaching for parents Leave your details on the website and you'll be the first to hear when coaching opens.

When to get more help Talk to your child's doctor if things feel harder after the diagnosis rather than easier, if your child's low mood or worry lasts more than a couple of weeks, or if you're struggling to cope. In an emergency, call 999 or go to your nearest emergency department.

Sources: NIMH, ADHD: the basics (nimh.nih.gov) · CDC, Parent training in behaviour management for ADHD (cdc.gov/adhd) · NHS, ADHD in children and young people (nhs.uk) · Last checked: 25 November 2026

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Andrea Antal

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