What is ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a disorder of the nervous system. Symptoms include difficulty staying focused and paying attention, difficulty controlling behavior, and hyperactivity (over-activity).

While some of these behaviours are normative, in children with ADHD these behaviours are more severe, occur more often, and are displayed over extended periods of time and in diverse settings (Daley & Birchwood, 2010).

The severity of these behaviours can contribute to social, emotional and academic problems.

ADHD in Canada & Alberta

In North America, 4-12% of school-aged children show clinical levels of inattentive, impulsive and hyperactive behaviours (Brown, Freeman & Perin 2003).

This means that one to three children in every Canadian classroom is affected by ADHD.

Across Canada, ADHD is recognized as a disorder in classrooms. Children who are identified with ADHD through private or school-initiated assessments have the right to appropriate educational accommodations and/or modifications if required, including access to provincial funding.

In Alberta, identification of special learning needs due to ADHD is usually reported using Alberta Education’s special education coding criteria. Any child who is identified is required to have an Individualized Program Plan.

Given the heterogeneous nature of children with ADHD, with symptoms ranging from mild to moderate, children with ADHD may be integrated into mainstream classrooms or placed in a special education classroom.

Sources: Alberta Education, 2006; Centre for ADHD Awareness Canada.

Risk Factors for ADHD

Some biological and genetic predispositions are common among children with ADHD, but these are not well understood.
Symptoms of ADHD in Children

Children who have symptoms of inattention may:
- Be easily distracted, forget things, and frequently switch from one activity to another.
- Become bored with an activity quickly.
- Have difficulty processing information.
- Struggle to follow instructions.
- Not seem to listen when spoken to.
- Have trouble completing activities, often losing things (e.g., pencils, toys, assignments) needed to complete tasks or activities.

Children who have symptoms of impulsivity may:
- Be very impatient.
- Blurt out inappropriate comments and act without regard for consequences.
- Have difficulty controlling emotions.
- Have difficulty waiting for their turns in games.
- Often interrupt conversations or others' activities.

Children who have symptoms of hyperactivity may:
- Have trouble sitting still or doing quiet activities.
- Fidget and squirm in their seats and be constantly in motion.
- Talk nonstop.
- Have difficulty controlling their emotions and following classroom instructions or directions.
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Conduct Disorder
- ODD is characterized by stubbornness, temper tantrums, oppositional behaviours and rule breaking.
- CD is characterized by excessive aggression and hostility.

Co-Occurring Disorders

Learning Disabilities
- About 30-50% of children with ADHD experience a learning disability, the most common are associated with reading and writing (e.g., dyslexia).

Mood and Anxiety Disorders
- Children with mood or anxiety disorders (e.g., depression) may be socially isolated, sad for long periods of time, or overly worried or fearful.
- More likely to co-occur for children with inattentive ADHD and girls.
CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

Teaching Children with ADHD
Research has identified several potentially effective classroom strategies for improving learning outcomes among children with ADHD.

Children with ADHD benefit from classrooms that are highly organized and have predictable routines.

Instructional Strategies
Use short, specific and direct instructions.

➤ Schedule more active activities for the afternoon.
➤ Develop routines for transitions between activities.
➤ Use visuals when possible to help keep children organized and on-task.
➤ Create note-taking outlines to help children organize the information during lessons.
➤ Teach children to underline and track written words when reading instructions.

Physical Strategies
Organize the physical environment to reduce distractions.

➤ Try not to place the child near distracting stimuli, such as windows, doors, or high traffic areas.
➤ Seat the child in an area where the teacher is most often.


FOR MORE INFORMATION

Alberta Education Resource on ADHD
http://education.alberta.ca

National Association of School Psychologists
http://www.nasponline.org/resources

National Institute of Mental Health
http://www.nimh.nih.gov