



“Guide to ADHD Support”

Communication & Social Skills Development with Speech & Language Therapy

Most children with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) have difficulties communicating but therapy can be of significant benefit. The Irish Association of Speech & Language Therapists (IASLT) has produced a “**Speech and Language Therapy Guide to ADHD Support**”. Speech and language therapists work with children and young people with ADHD on areas of communication and have produced this guide so parents can also help their child with ADHD develop their communication skills and build friendships.

Children with ADHD:

- Are easily distracted
- Are restless and overactive
- Are inattentive and find it hard to focus
- Are impulsive; doing before thinking

Three main areas of communication that can be affected are:-

Comprehension

Expression

Social Skills

The child’s ability to understand or comprehend language

This is a child’s ability to understand, including listening skills, following instructions and understanding words and sentences.

Children with ADHD often struggle to listen, find it hard to follow instructions at home and at school, get distracted when someone is talking to them and lose focus.

Speech and Language Therapy Advice:

- Less is more! Generally, when you’re talking to a young person with ADHD it’s best not to talk too much, stick to the point and be brief – that way it’s easier for them to stay focussed.
- Try to be face-to-face when you expect your child to listen.

- Limit the distractions in the environment when you're talking – turn off the TV/ radio/ computer etc.
- Give your child a prompt before you start an instruction. For example, say 'listen!' or use his name and wait for him to look at you, at the beginning. This way you have his attention before you give the instruction.
- If you have to give a longer instruction, try breaking it up in to shorter parts to help your child follow it through (e.g. "pick up your socks and jeans, [pause], bring them in to the bathroom, [pause], and put them in the pile with the other dark clothes."). ..then check back that he got it! Sometimes it's easier to remember the whole instruction by repeating in your head over and over while you complete it – encourage your child to do this.

The child's ability to express themselves

ADHD often affects a child's ability to get their message across well, make meaningful sentences and express feelings appropriately. Children who have ADHD often seem to rush when they're talking, and need some help to make sure they're making good sense.

Also, behavioural difficulties are often associated with ADHD – children with ADHD often act out their frustrations and need help to express their feeling in appropriate ways, using words not actions.

Speech and Language Therapy Advice:

- Speak to your child slowly and in a fairly quiet, calm voice – often, we match the person we're speaking to in the way we speak. Careful, though! You may need to be more animated at times, just to keep his attention!
- If you lose the thread of what your child is saying, pause him and ask him to clarify, while at the same time reassuring him that you were listening by letting him know some of what you did understand. For example, "ok, wait a second, so I heard that you were in the park and you wanted to play something, (pause) but tell me who was there and what did you want to play?" This not only gives your child the message that what he says is important, it also shows him how to ask for clarification, a very important skill.
- Be a good example in terms of expressing your feelings well. Use lots of feeling words and 'I' statements e.g. "thanks for helping with the garden in granny's today – I am so proud of you!" Also, acknowledge your child's feelings and label them if you can, for example, 'I know this maths is hard and you're feeling frustrated, but you need to speak nicely to me. We'll do three more, then we'll finish".

The child's social skills

These are the skills needed to get along well with others including conversation skills (e.g. not interrupting, staying on topic, etc), body language (e.g. eye contact, facial expression etc.) and social problem solving skills.

ADHD means that a child may be distractible, impulsive and inattentive in conversations and in play. So, a child with ADHD often interrupts, talks all the time, has problems taking turns, can be loud and take over in social situations.

Non-verbal skills can also be affected, for example a child who is easily distracted often doesn't make eye contact and this makes others feel he's not interested. Children with ADHD often find it really hard to figure out better solutions to problems and find it hard to see the consequences of their behaviour.

Speech and Language Therapy Advice:

- Encourage your child to face the person he's talking to and to look them in the eye – explain that when he doesn't the other person might think he's not interested and the conversation won't go well.
- If your child has difficulty taking turns in conversation (e.g. hogging the turns, talking about his own interests too much, interrupting, dominating), there are a number of strategies you can use depending on his age, including signalling turns using your hand or a tap on the table, using an egg timer, using verbal prompts (e.g. "your turn!"), or charts to reinforce good turn-taking in conversations.
- Many children with ADHD fidget and this can be very distracting socially. Encourage your child to notice his own fidgeting and provide him with an alternative, like a special fidget toy – this can be something simple like a small rubber ball or an elastic band that he can still fidget with, but isn't so distracting.
- Social problem solving is a key skill for any child to learn, especially one with ADHD. There are four basic building blocks
 - (1) Identify the problem
 - (2) Think of other solutions
 - (3) Think of the consequences for each solution
 - (4) Plan for future situations.

When your child has experienced a difficult situation, (for example if he has been aggressive with another child who teased him), use these building blocks to think about the situation together to try to prevent it happening again.

What to do if concerned about ADHD – The IASLT advises that If you are concerned that your child has ADHD, please contact your GP for a referral to your local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

If you are concerned that your child has communication difficulties consult your local Speech and Language Therapist/ local health office.

Useful websites: www.iaslt.ie

www.iasltp.com (private practitioners)