

Chapter Four

Thinking behind the behaviour and aiding concentration

This book started by citing some people's preconceptions about ADHD, namely seeing challenging behaviour before seeing the child.

In this chapter we look at what might be behind the behaviour and introduce some ideas and strategies that may help. Again, we suggest that you adapt the ideas and think about how they could be used for the individual children in your care. No one size fits all!

We can only recognise what is happening if we are listening to the child through observation. Are notes being taken about when it is hard for the child to concentrate during the day or if the child seems to need more movement the nearer it gets to lunchtime. Does the child exhibit more stress when in closed environments or when near to loud sound?

Some of the behaviour we may see can be triggered by external factors. If the child happens to have sensory issues in addition to ADHD then colours such as bright red or yellow may be stimulating and all of a sudden in a particular area of the classroom they become far more hyperactive. If so, these areas may not be good for sustained concentration.

Are some days better than others - if so why? What is the difference?

The traits of ADHD can be affected by how the child is feeling:

- tired
- hungry or thirsty
- hot/cold
- different food types (too much sugar for example)
- too much screen time
- different environments
- smells

The list is endless - but we can only 'hear' what is happening if we are prepared to listen.

Who might know more about the child than you do? Parents can bring insights and understanding that can impact on how you respond.

Think out of the box and consider how you can best support the child by recognising what is happening. It is easy for us to go to the other child's defence and get cross with the child who has ADHD. Remember some of this behaviour is not a choice, due to impulse control and lack of executive functioning it just happens. The child with ADHD may not know that they are in the wrong.

Be aware of calming activities that the child enjoys to take them away from difficult situations that may escalate. A very simple tool is to carry a small pot of bubbles in a pocket, children often forget their troubles if jumping to pop a bubble. Keep a rolled up chiffon scarf in your pocket, play catch the scarf (pastel colours are calming).

Some children may not recognise that their actions are causing concern and may need a visual reminder to illustrate what they should be doing.

Think about how you could use the idea of the Tell Me Tell Me game on page 27/28. Try creating a Show Me Show Me game. Create a series of cards to illustrate positive behaviour and place the cards face down.

Without knowing what card you are picking up, show it to a group of children and ask them to act out the illustration. Guess what they are doing.

Examples of images and associated actions

Image	Action
Yes	nodding head
Give	pretending to pass something to another child
Quiet	finger held over lips
Well done	thumbs up
Touch gently	child touches own arm very gently
Hands down	child stands, with hands down, palms facing into body
Listen	child places hand to ear

The Play Doctors have created a set of 3 Show Me Positive Actions visual communication fans using ©Widgit Symbols printed under licence. Or you can make your own set of cards using clip art or get the children to draw their own cards which can be laminated and kept as a set to play with.



Once the game has been played several times, the cards or fan petals can be used as a visual reminder to the children during the day. As discussed throughout this book, children who have ADHD tend to be visual learners and this tool responds to this learning style.

When we begin to think behind the behaviour and understand what may cause an issue or be a trigger we need to share that information with others.

If children have an educational health care plan they will have a one page profile completed. This should provide the essential information about a child and include details on behaviour plans in place.

However, if we are taking a person centred approach we need to perhaps dig a little deeper and observe the child to try to understand what is happening.

Observation involves seeing what is happening and hearing the child's voice through the interpretation of what we see. It is not always easy to understand what is behind the behaviour and we need to look beyond the obvious.

Rupert is 9 years old. He was diagnosed with ADHD at 7, and subsequently has had 3 different teaching assistants. He attends main stream school and enjoys physical activity, being with friends (although he tends to be a little too physical), he does not enjoy anything that involves sitting still, listening or something that requires sustained concentration.

The school have spent time adapting work to respond to his visual and kinaesthetic learning style. Activities have been created that involves moving around even if it is just collecting a particular colour pencil from each desk.

Even though this has been put into place Rupert still finds it hard to attend school. He has information processing difficulties, thinks too quickly and does not 'hear' what has been said. He will often be found 'floating' around the classroom with no particular intention, picking up and moving whatever is around including classmates equipment.

This is not intentional, but appears so to others. In fact Rupert uses this abstract behaviour to free his mind by fiddling, and the actions help him to make sense of the lesson, a question, a sum or information he needs to process.

The behaviour however, is seen as poor, challenging, non-compliant and Rupert finds himself in trouble every day. He has low self esteem and confidence as he has begun to believe he cannot achieve anything, without being told off, or an adult intervenes.

From the teachers and other children's perspective Rupert is being unruly and disruptive and intentionally uncooperative. This results in reprimands which in turn results in Rupert getting cross, followed by detentions, being kept in and consequently poor behaviour as Rupert displays negative emotions.

By unpicking what is happening and thinking a little deeper the initial response to Rupert's behaviour needs to change. If we recognise that he requires 'thinking space' to process information where his body is occupied and his mind is freer to think, what tools could be used?

He has an incessant need to move, to fiddle. Can this type of behaviour be accommodated in class? It certainly is not easy, especially when other children will want to know why they cannot get up and walk about.

But, if the behaviour is not accommodated we have seen what happens.

The school decided to create a communication passport for Rupert. After a conversation with Mum and by asking what strategies Mum uses to help calm Rupert down it was discovered that he enjoys stroking the dog. If he loses concentration and the dog sits by his side, the continual stroking motion helps relax him and eventually after a couple of minutes he will 'return' to task.

After debate, where the school discussed the appropriateness of allowing a dog into class it was decided to provide Rupert with a 'thinking mat'.

This was a simple small weighted blanket that sat on Rupert's lap. The cover of the blanket was made from a realistic fur fabric. This made a difference to Rupert's behaviour. He was able to have the small mat when he needed it and the weight seemed to 'anchor' him to the chair.

The rest of the children were well aware of Rupert's behaviour and easily accepted his 'thinking mat' and did not tease him, or ask for one themselves when they saw that it helped him to concentrate.

Thinking 'out of the box' allows us to consider the world from the child's perspective, find out more about them from other sources and work within the child's own zone, rather than fighting against it.

Of course Rupert will grow and will need to learn how to self manage his behaviour to fit in to society and bring him to his best potential. But the school had to choose, forcing him to conform and fighting his natural inclinations and needs resulting in poor behaviour or, being flexible, listening to parents and adapting their approach which meant extra work and spending a little money.

The changes made, not only helped Rupert but in turn calmed down the classroom and allowed the other 29 students peace in which to learn.

This is a challenging story - one with a positive outcome. But how do we get to know more about the child. Communication Passports are a really good way to share information and use as a tool to ask questions.

Use the template on the following page to copy or adapt. This allows you to consider different areas of the child's life.



The Play Doctors Communication Passport Template

Things I like/
Things I don't like

What makes me stressed?

Personal learning
preferences

Ways I communicate
through behaviour

Ways to help me
concentrate

What I need help with

What I am good at

Who helps me

Ways I calm down

Any sensory sensitivity

Other things that would help to take a person centred approach

What other headings could you have?

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Make your own communication passports or use this simple self completion fan to share essential information quickly and easily.

Take a look at the observation template on the next few pages. Is there anything there that is not covered within your existing observations?

The Play Doctors Behavioural Observation Record

Please read the notes at the end of the document

1. Observation Record

Record taken by:

Date of observation:

Day of the week:

Time of day:

2. Description of behaviour observed

3. The setting in which the behaviour occurs

4. Is there anything in the environment that may cause the child sensory issues? Is there anything different in the environment from normal?

5. When does the behaviour occur? What time of day, note if the behaviour observed happens consistently at the same time. Could it be related to being hungry, being thirsty, needing the toilet?

6. Who is involved? Does the behaviour always occur with the same people being involved. It is consistent? If so, think carefully 'out of the box' about the individuals concerned - could a behavioural reaction be related to their smell (perfume/shampoo/breath), proximity, clothes, even what they are wearing on their feet.

7. What are the consequences of the behaviour? Is the behaviour being rewarded unintentionally. Is the behaviour designed so that the child gets sent out of class which is what they want to happen?

8. Is there an underlying condition, impairment or external issue affecting behaviour? What do you know about the child or young person? Are you aware of an underlying condition that may relate to the behaviour such as autism, communication difficulties, short term memory difficulties or anxiety. Is there something that needs recording that gives you other clues such as an external issue perhaps bullying, family breakup, new baby?

9. Are you aware of any messages being given through the behaviour?

Notes:

Be open minded when observing children's behaviour often the communication behind the behaviour is hidden and we focus on the behaviour itself. Don't be in a position where you are having to deal with an incident, instead take a helicopter viewpoint and stand above the situation to observe ALL that is happening and try to see the situation through the child's eyes.

Think about who is involved

- what are they wearing
- what do they smell like
- how are they behaving?
- how are they communicating (often with far too much language, which stresses the child even more)
- have they responded to the child using their own learning style

Think about the environment

- is there anything out of the normal, or any changes that have been made
- does the behaviour only happen in certain places within the environment (corners, corridors, playground spaces)
- Is there avoidance by the child of particular spaces and places

Think about the time

- is the behaviour always happening at the same time of the day, is it associated to something for instance poor behaviour just prior to break, designed so that the child stays in which is exactly what they want as the playground is a scary place?
- is the behaviour just prior to dinner and the child is hungry/thirsty
- has the child had time to go to the toilet or do they feel uncomfortable

BE AWARE OF THE WHOLE SITUATION