

Teacher Questions

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1. Teacher Questions - How do I know if the student is naughty or has ADHD

These were sort of the types of things that tend to come to us in learning support. So it's not necessarily the questions that I've been asking, but they're the questions that get asked of me or perhaps of parents. And I think there is a stigma around ADHD that ADHD equates naughty or ADHD equates opposition. You know, it's oppositional and it's absolutely fidgeting and, you know, all of that. But so when I put those together, that's where I was sort of coming from. But one question we do get from teachers is, well, how do I know if they're being naughty or whether it's ADHD? And I know that that's a really hard unpack.

But I guess, can you explain how it would present just for generally? I think it's quite helpful for teachers to say, to know really what it looks like rather than, oh, this is just someone who's arguing with me. We're being oppositional. Yeah. So you're right. I mean, they frequently go together and so people often blur. Yeah. You know, and yeah. So it can be difficult and it can be difficult for us sometimes to tease those things out. But I think, you know, any kid with behavioural difficulties, and we would tend to figure them as three potentially separate groups, the oppositional, defiant, kind of argumentative, stubborn.

Irritable, you know, angry easily kind of group. Or conduct disorder, which is sort of breaking rules and being a truant and running away from home and stealing and committing arson and other things. But anybody with those two things, I think we should look quite carefully about whether there's an ADHD component. And it's really just thinking about, you know, the core symptoms. So, you know, what is people's attention span like and are they distractible? And can they persist with tasks that require sustained effort? Because often kids are very good at concentrating on the PlayStation. Yeah. And it doesn't count for us.

It's really if they've got something that's a little boring or a little bit challenging, how is it then? It's like a key differentiator. And it's just whether they've got those other associated features. So. You know, being very forgetful or losing things a lot or having real problems with organisation, being very daydreamy, you know, some of those quieter, less obvious things. You know, people forget about that

group of symptoms. They're thinking attention span, attention span, but not remembering the other bits. And if they've got, I mean, you need for diagnosis, you need six out of nine of those symptoms plus impairment.

You know, if they have six out of nine. And then there are those scales that we use, the SNAP ADHD rating scales. And people are uncertain. They could just fill out one of those scales and say, look, how does it stack up? Is it something that's worth looking at or not?

2. Teacher Questions – Starting a conversation with a student or parent

How might a teacher start to begin a conversation perhaps with a parent or with a child around if they've noticed certain things or if there's a pattern occurring across classes and a pattern perhaps of maybe six of your nine or eight of nine or nine of nine, how can a teacher begin that conversation with a parent or how is that a good way to engage a conversation around that without suggesting this is what I think it is because that's not the teacher's job? No, that's right. Yeah, it's a difficult one, isn't it? And it's harder at high school because you've got multiple teachers and every teacher will have their own opinion about whether it's an issue or whether it's not.

But I think if people have a view from a number of concerned teachers that that's a possibility. Luckily you have regular parent-teacher catch-ups and I think just asking parents how they think the person's doing in respect to those kind of characteristics. So whatever their starting point is and then just wondering about your observations that these things could potentially be an issue. Has that come up before? So lots of little parents will know already about it but I think parents that... have less knowledge of potential conditions that, you know, it's often news to them. And when teachers point it out to parents sometimes parents have less buy-in.

So we give a referral from school to school so they're through the roof, you know, most impressive kid I've seen for three years, etc. And then you meet with the parents and they're kind of easy-osey. You know, that can happen and that can make it really challenging for us too. Yeah. Your parent sees it quite differently. I think sort of asking first up and seeing where they're at and then just, you know, giving them some decent information is the way to go and giving them a bit of time to think about it.

3. Teacher Questions – Executive function and ADHD

Just as we're talking, something that gets bandied about quite a bit is we talk a lot about executive function and what that is. Can you talk a little bit about what that is and how that is connected to ADHD? Yeah, so executive functions are kind of like the manager of the brain. They kind of direct attention and they kind of organise things and they plan things and they do things in a mindful kind of way. They kind of monitor how well you're doing at things and then give you feedback, if you're lucky, about how you're doing. So it's that sort of managerial group of tasks. And kids with ADHD, because the prefrontal cortex is involved with both a lot of executive functions, most of them originate kind of in that area and circuitry with other areas of the brain, and ADHD, the prefrontal cortex, is significantly involved with performance. People with ADHD as well. So there's considerable overlap. And most people with ADHD will have some executive function issues because they're part of the criteria, the forgetfulness, the organisation, the memory sort of things. So, yeah, it's just a struggle and there's considerable overlap.

4. Teacher Questions – Helping students to regulate

Often something that is talked about quite a lot at schools is, you know, around well-being and helping students to regulate and we're often told, you know, co-regulate with them and help support them to regulate so they can be more engaged in the classroom, but it's actually quite hard to know what that is and what that needs to look like and how to do that appropriately without having your whole class meditating for the whole period. What are some strategies with a student who has ADHD? How can we help them just to feel more sort of safe, secure and okay with being in that room? Yeah, so, yeah co-regulation, I mean, it's hard for parents and I've got, you know, parent of two kids or three kids that we're in, so for teachers I think it is really challenging.

You've got lots of kids in the class all with disparate needs and things, so I think it's, you know, a high expectation. But I think, you know, there are some core strategies that are useful for people with ADHD. So having them, you know, at the front of the class without annoying peers beside them, within your line of sight without other distractions and things is a helpful start. And I think sort of having a reasonably clear idea about what are the guidelines for the classroom, so it's explicit at the outset what your expectations are, albeit flexibility with that, depending on who you have in your class.

I think kids with ADHD, they often visibly show signs of being less regulated, and I think it's having a safe way of communicating that. So some kids are 0-10, no time flat, and they're extremely challenging, but most people will have a few signs of starting fidgety or they'll be moving around in their seat. And I think it's kind of intervening at those points, asking how they're doing, checking in with them, and possibly looking for a break, taking some time out. It's harder at high school. You can't get people to give a message to the principal as easily, but I think movement breaks are really useful, or sometimes just breaking it up with getting a drink of water, just

taking a little bit of time out, and it's finding things that aren't too stigmatising for the student, but are practical for the teacher to be able to implement.

And then some people do find things like fidget toys or whatever. Useful in terms of helping them regulate, I think it's kind of discussing with parents and the teenager what are the strategies that will be most helpful to you if things start to escalate. I think for those 0-100 kids it's extremely challenging, you know, it's just really difficult because there often aren't any warning signs and it's bang. Fortunately that's a bit less common at high school than it is earlier on, but you know, I think it's having a safe place identified basically, you know, if someone's starting to go, so they know where they're going to go, you've practised it in advance.

Maybe there's a safe person, you're probably it, over here on the level of support. Yeah, often with your 9s. Yeah, go and see Sarah, that kind of mayday thing, and then reviewing how is it going and what could you have done at an earlier stage to intervene so that we didn't go through the whole episode. Yeah. Yeah. Thinking carefully a little bit about that, because by, you know, year 9-10, teenagers do have a bit of an idea about what works and what doesn't work for them.

5. Teacher Questions - Hyper focusing

Something else that students often talk about is their ability to hyper-focus, that they can hyper-focus if they're really passionate about something. What is hyper-focus? I haven't seen a definition, but I think it's where people with ADHD issues find something that they're usually interested or passionate about that they can do for a long period of time. And it's often gaming, and I wouldn't count that. It's just a highly novel thing that's designed to hold your attention for long periods of time and be very rewarding. But some people, if they're interested in a topic, will become very invested in it.

And I think it's good to look for those things and use them where you can. So with more self-directed learning and things, I think that's a bit easier. Perhaps it used to be, but I think having some flexibility with your curriculum. So help them harness that passion so that they can focus more intently. And would that help assist them with managing their time better as well, if they're intently... Possibly not. Like sometimes people do focus for incredibly long periods of time and they have trouble shifting their attention into a new task. That happens. Or go too big. Yeah, completely over the top.

But that's probably... That's probably not a bad thing if they're productive and learning things and using language and developing literacy. So it's about harnessing that passion and that ability to hyper-focus, but still have some of those structures there to help manage that along the way in the classroom. Yeah, a little bit of scaffolding. Yeah. Awesome.

6. Teacher Questions - Listening to music

Oh yeah actually something we do have students who find listening to music or having earbuds in can be quite helpful for them. I guess it helps block out sounds and manages the sensory overload but yeah what is it about sound and ADHD? Yeah so there's a whole lot of stuff at the moment about brown noise helping ADHD. I haven't seen any evidence based around that but predictable noises are probably going to be stimulating than unpredictable noises and so you have to listen to something that's familiar to them and kind of liked and maybe providing a little bit of stimulation that may help block out you know extraneous sounds that happens suddenly or unpredictably. So you know I think it's yeah I think it's worth thinking about as a strategy but again as a teacher it might be challenging you've got someone with headphones on all the time so developing some ground rules I think around when it's used and how frequently and what sort of occasions you know probably needs to be thought about.

7. Teacher Questions - Co-regulation

I was actually going to ask you a bit about co-regulation. I think at high schools, teachers don't really understand what that is and how important that is. I went to a seminar around trauma-informed education and we talked a lot about that. But for people who are not in that learning support or counselling space, co-regulation is something quite, I think it's quite new language for teachers. Yeah, the idea that nervous systems communicate at a level. Yeah, could you talk a little bit about that? How we can support a student with ADHD and what co-regulation might look like in a classroom? Yeah, so with a parent, it's kind of being attuned to a child and starting to name feeling states and emotions so that there's a language for discussing that and kind of recognising.

When children are either under-aroused, becoming very bored, or when they're becoming very over-aroused. And it's a difficult thing, but it's basically the scaffolding that an adult would provide to help kids get back into a good zone of regulation. And different people have different capacities for that. Some people are very empathic and very attuned and other people have real trouble spotting those sorts of things. So different teachers will have different challenges, I think, in their regard. And as I said before, I think it's hard for a teacher who's got a lot of kids in the classroom to be sensitively attuned.

But that's basically what you're aiming for, to be attuned and then responding as appropriate and helping people either increase their arousal or decrease their arousal. Yeah, whatever, whatever that takes. Yeah.

8. Teacher Questions - ADHD and female students

Something that often here comes up is that idea of that female student who's quite quiet and focused who says yeah I've got ADHD and the teacher might say well I just don't think that is true and then the student becomes a lot more anxious, can be quite upset and is still struggling along. With that different type of presentation how can teachers support that quiet, what would appear to be a focused student manage their ADHD in the classroom? So you talked before about writing ideas down and not necessarily having a planner but going over when the deadlines are. What other sorts of things could a teacher do?

Yeah so you know I think the written thing is key in kind of anticipating difficult situations and having a little bit of a plan for that. People with an attentive ADHD often they've got a tolerance for their attention span and it's kind of getting to know what that might be and gearing up learning tasks so that it kind of fits with that. So you know for some people that still have got their attention spans 15 minutes and expecting them to concentrate for a whole hour is probably unrealistic and so they might do an activity that you want them to do for the first 15 minutes and helping them get into that activity can be helpful and then kind of giving them a pretty clear time frame that after that they can have some less onerous time to do something they may wish to do.

So like negotiated timelines and making sure that they're actually realistic within the period as well as wider would be really helpful rather than open deadlines are not going to help that student out is it? No and scaffolding it up you know because I think that's the thing I think that it's going to be a really good thing. Yeah. of reminders. Teachers often give an assignment for a week down the track and kids with ADHD will often put it off, or kids without ADHD will often put it off. Sunday night. I used to myself. So you know helping them break down the task maybe into smaller little bits but that's all extremely good for teachers which which you know can be difficult as well.