UNIVERSITY OF
BATH

ADD/ADHD:
Implications for Study in Higher Education

Going Beyond the Label

The terms Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) can be misleading as they suggest a shortfall or a deficiency in attendance, whereas in reality "it is not that ADDers do not attend - they just attend to everything!" (Derrington, C., 2017).There is also a tendency to associate ADD/ADHD with becoming easily distracted. Again it can be useful to flip this notion and recognise that if your brain 'attends to everything', this results in having to work much harder to avoid distraction. This 'distraction' can take the form of external stimuli, where environmental factors compete for attention, or the individual's own thought processes, which can be hard to screen out.

Practical Strategies for Supporting Students with ADD/ADHD

Environmental awareness	• Whilst it is not always possible to alter environmental factors, being aware of, or attempting to reduce potential triggers that may compete for a student's attention may be useful (e.g. light, background noise). • Sometimes, physical movement or 'fiddling' can aid processing, rather than undermining focus or concentration.
Task (rather than time!) management	• A desire to 'attend to everything' can result in difficulties in making decisions because several possible answers, solutions or ways forward can always be justified! Therefore, it is useful to help the student to focus on tangible, short-term steps rather than long-term plans. This may be particularly useful in PG study where working processes and procedures can be drawn out, and goals can be implicit rather than explicit. • Agreeing on a concrete starting point with clearly identified mini-milestones can help with prioritisation and aid progress. • Frequent reminders about time-scales can help students to match tasks to the time available. • Organisational props, such as visual reminders, prioritised lists and Gant style charts can help students to break down processes and take control of the steps involved.
Managing information overload	• Within lectures, emphasising context or reminders relating to the wider point of reference can be really useful as this provides students with a framework to link and thread together different pieces of information. • Lectures which are divided into discernible 'chunks' can allow the student to compartmentalise and organise the information they are processing. • Emphasising critical pieces of information can be helpful, so these do not get lost or overlooked.
Assignment development/ feedback	• When researching and planning for assignments, students with ADD/ADHD can have a tendency to not alter their focus until they are satisfied that they cannot improve or have found every last possible piece of the jigsaw. This can lead to generating too much content which is then hard to structure and sequence. Strict parameters for research or reading can be helpful to address this. • Clear and precise feedback through the use of colour coded formulas for paragraph building (e.g. PEA- Point, Evidence, Analysis) can really help as this can provide the student with a memorable, visual aid to ensure greater control over the process of organising and sequencing their ideas and developing their academic writing style.

If in doubt call the Student Services Staff Advice Line on

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