



# ADHD At Work Welfare Pack

## For Employers & ADHD Employees

This pack aims to facilitate open and positive dialogue between employers and ADHD employees. It includes:

- An introduction to ADHD
- Insights on the impacts of ADHD in the workplace
- A structured conversation guide for productive outcomes
- Suggestions for workplace adjustments

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## AN INTRODUCTION TO ADHD

### WHAT ADHD STANDS FOR

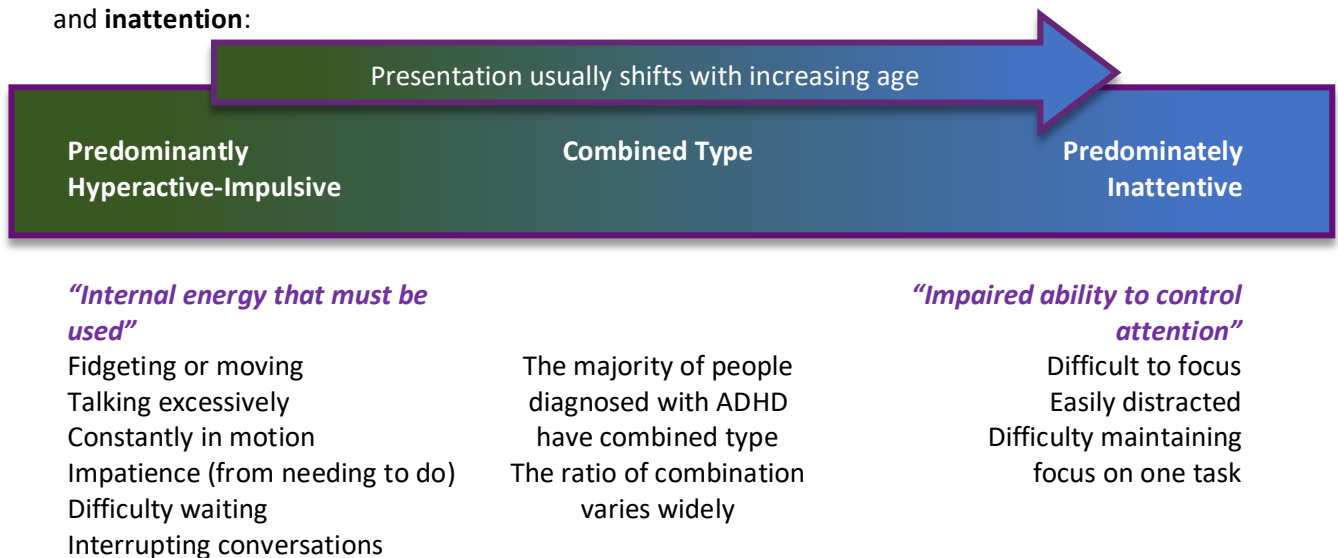
**Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)** is a relatively common lifelong mental health condition that affects an estimated 1 in 20 individuals. ADHD can be diagnosed at any stage in life and can affect anyone regardless of gender or ethnicity. It's officially defined as '*a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by inattention, or excessive activity and impulsivity*'.

It's also often described as the **worst named mental health condition**, as it:

- Contains two negatives (Deficit and Disorder) and no positives
- Emphasises hyperactivity which is not necessarily present.
- It's not a deficit of attention but a difficulty in channelling that attention: understeered, it manifests as **inattention**, and oversteered, as **hyperfocus**.

### THREE ADHD TYPES

There are three main types of ADHD characterised by differing levels of **hyperactivity/impulsivity** and **inattention**:



## INATTENTION, IMPULSIVITY AND HYPERACTIVITY:

Those often manifest as follows:

Inattention	Impulsivity	Hyperactivity
All three individually or together combine to create difficulty in task starting, task completion and keeping to time.		
Difficulty sustaining attention (looks like a short attention span)	Interrupting others in conversation	An internal drive to have constant motion; sometimes no goal except motion
Difficulty listening to others	Taking undue risks / making decisions too quickly. Without enough thought to the consequences.	Difficulty remaining in place
Easily distracted. This is significantly exacerbated when the task is boring	Trouble controlling emotions. Often feeling more intensively and then acting before considered thought intervenes.	Fidgeting excessively
Difficulty attending to detail		Difficulty engaging in quiet activities
Forgetfulness (from inattention to detail)		Loses or forgets things repeatedly & often
	Talking excessively	

## TASK STARTING AND COMPLETION

All three characteristics, individually or together, contribute to significant challenges in focusing to start a task, and then staying on task to completion and/or shifting from one task to another without bringing any to completion.

## TIMELINESS

Noting the challenge of task completion. Bringing completion to a rigidly fixed timetable or deadline can make a task significantly more challenging. A helpful way to consider timeliness as an additional task concurrent to the desired task and equally impacted by ADHD.

## HYPERFOCUS

Hyperfocus is an aspect of a lack of control of attention. Using a car metaphor - understeering is the understeering of attention resulting in the fleeting short-term attention that many associate with ADHD. Oversteering of attention is the opposite. It describes concentrating on one thing alone, often for hours, with no regard for time, and at the cost of other objectives. It can be a significant challenge for an individual with ADHD to extract themselves from hyperfocus. This can be a problem when an individual zooms in on the wrong thing or for too long. However, many with ADHD consider it is a strength when applied to completing significant important tasks.

## UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS OF ADHD IN THE WORKPLACE

Getting the best out of anyone, regardless of neurology, is about minimising their weaknesses and maximising their positives.

### MISUNDERSTANDING ADHD TRAITS

There is a risk that without an understanding of ADHD that an ADHD individual’s traits are interpreted as poor behaviour rather than an expression of their condition that requires support.

***“Neurotypical familiarity can breed contempt of ADHD traits.”***

Individuals without ADHD are often familiar with some aspects of ADHD Traits – for example having their own challenges with timeliness, procrastination or focus. The familiarity can result in a pitfall response that what the individual without ADHD does to overcome their challenges – plus perhaps a little bit – is what the ADHD person needs to do. The response often comes from a supporting mindset and trying to empathise but instead risks undermining the seriousness of the condition and can place a burden on the person with ADHD to have to further justify their challenges and the support they request.

To provide an analogy - it would be similar to someone sharing they had narcolepsy and the respondent empathising with “I sleep too” or “Sometimes I absolutely have to sleep”. The absurdity of this comparison aims to spotlight how different the lived experience of someone with ADHD is.

### EXAMPLES OF MISUNDERSTOOD TRAITS:

ADHD Trait	Common Negative Reaction	Common ADHD Reason
Not waiting to speak / butting in when in conversations.	ADHD person is rude or arrogant. They don’t care about other’s opinions.	ADHD person is interested and want to pick up on a point before their distraction means them forgetting it.
Fidgeting and moving while talking.	ADHD person is rude and lacking in control. They might be trying to hide something. Perception that the ADHD fidgeter isn’t enjoying the conversation and wants to leave.	They are fidgeting to help themselves focus on the other party. Using movement to provide an outlet for the energy and distraction to help them focus on the conversation.
Forgetfulness.	ADHD person is of low intelligence or ability. They do not care enough about the person or project.	A part of the condition. They are often more upset about it than you are.
Not paying attention / getting distracted.	The ADHDer doesn’t care about the individual they are speaking to or doesn’t care about their work.	A part of the condition. They are often more upset about it than you are.

## THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF ADHD

There are some marked advantages to employing ADHD individuals. People with ADHD often report that they are able to find solutions where others can't, that they're great in a crisis and that they can use their hyperfocus to get amazing things done. These attributes come from using the attributes of ADHD in a positive way. ADHD inattention means many ADHD individuals are highly practiced at jumping and considering ideas very quickly – making them great at evaluating multiple creative options at speed. Inattention means absorbing lots of information all the time – a requirement in a crisis. Hyperfocus enables blocking out the world for hours to get an important project done.

These positive sides to typical ADHD traits can be developed, encouraged, and used to the benefit of any workplace.

Creative	Great in a Crisis	Positive User of Hyperfocus
<p><b>Diffuse attention</b> – allowing rapid switching between aspects of the task under consideration</p> <p><b>Flexible Associative Memory</b> – recalling, linking and using more distantly-related ideas, which is associated with creativity.</p> <p><b>Impulsivity</b> – which causes people with ADHD symptoms to consider ideas which others may not have.</p>	<p>Crises generally require creativity <b>ALONGSIDE</b> absorbing large amounts of information quickly.</p> <p>ADHDers' distractibility means often absorbing large amounts of information.</p> <p>"ADHDers eat chaos for breakfast", crisis info crunching "just a normal Tuesday".</p>	<p>The ability to focus on one topic or task to the exclusion of all else can be used effectively to complete major tasks.</p>

## ROLE MODELS FOR GETTING ADHD MANAGEMENT RIGHT

The following celebrities have carved a successful path for themselves by harnessing the strengths of their ADHD. They demonstrate the potential in positively supporting someone with ADHD for the benefit of the organisation and individual:

- Michael Phelps - most successful Olympian of all time
- Simone Biles - most decorated American Gymnast of all time
- Heston Blumenthal - Chef and Culinary Inventor
- Jamie Oliver - Chef and Entrepreneur
- Ingvar Kamprad - Founder of IKEA
- David Neeleman - Founder 5 successful airlines including JetBlue & Breeze Airways
- will.i.am. - globally recognised musician & producer
- Solange Knowles – Grammy award winning singer with over half a billion streams on Spotify alone.
- Mel B - world famous singer and member of the Spice Girls.

Diversity in business is recognised as a strength to cultivate. Individuals with the Neurodiversity ADHD add value with their creativity, problem-solving, approaches, skills and talents.

## THE STRUCTURED CONVERSATION

Talking about disability is often difficult. Concerns of getting it wrong can hamper discussion; however, it is only through dialogue that the optimal outcome can be obtained.

We've provided this Structured Conversation to help create a positive, thorough, and effective conversation.

### COLLABORATIVE AND LEARNING APPROACH. SETTING EXPECTATIONS.

The conversation should aim to build a collaboration looking to find the optimal solution. Neither the person with ADHD, nor the employer, can be expected to have all the answers.

Discussions can be marred with an assumption that each side is supposed to be leading as expert – either as an expert on ADHD, on the individual workplace, or both. Understanding the interaction between individual, ADHD and workplace is complex. We therefore recommend a collaborative, learning, and iterative approach.

As new strategic adjustments are tried they should be evaluated. That process should also evolve the understanding of the underlying issues. Therefore, there will be a good chance that the first package of adjustments will not be the final package of adjustments. Taking a collaborative and learning approach to this process will provide for a better chance of success.

### AREAS OF PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING

It is often the case that one, or all parties, involved have not gone through a process like this. This process may uncover blind spots or areas that may have been hidden as a defence mechanism. In addition, it should be noted that people with ADHD have often had a lifetime of challenges, which can make for unexpected areas of sensitivity.

	Known to themselves	Not known to themselves
Known to others	<b><u>OPEN AREA</u></b> Known to themselves and others around them	<b><u>BLIND SPOT</u></b> Known by others but not by themselves
Not known to others	<b><u>HIDDEN SELF / FAÇADE / MASK</u></b> Known to the themselves but not to others	<b><u>UNKNOWN</u></b> Unknown to both them and others.

### CONFIDENTIALITY

ADHD is an invisible disability and medically protected information. That makes communicating the reason for any adjustments a personal decision. The risk of not communicating any reasons is creating cause for resentment. If the adjustments conversation is delayed this can also be delayed.

## LOCATION

The conversation should be done wherever the person with ADHD is most likely to be able to be open. Ideally ask them if they have any preferences. A private area without auditory or visual distractions is most likely to suit both parties. It is important the meeting is not interrupted by people or devices (such as phones or computers).

## PITFALLS TO BE AVOIDED

The most substantial pitfall is also the most common. Someone without ADHD can erroneously identify ADHD challenges as more universal challenges. Many people have to work to ensure they: manage their own tasks, be on time, attend to details, wait their turn to speak, be still and not fidgeting. However, that level of challenge is not in the same as the ADHD person's challenge.

This incorrect assumption can result in non-ADHD individuals thinking their individual techniques, appropriate for their personal level of challenge, are sufficient for those with ADHD. The consequences can be suggesting inappropriate solutions and/or an under investment or under commitment in the needed adjustments.

Trait	Pitfall Response	Comments
Challenges around organising.	Suggesting the use of lists or other neurotypical solution.	A list system will almost certainly have been tried. It is not substantive enough a solution.
Timeliness.	Suggesting leaving earlier.	The issue is not about travel time. It is often about not being able to track time and about getting distracted with something else and not being able to snap out of it appropriately. The proposed solution therefore doesn't help with the actual issue.
Movement or fidgeting.	Suggesting more effort on self control.	Indicates a complete lack of understanding of the need for movement.
Not paying attention / getting distracted.	An emotional response that person with ADHD doesn't care about the individual they are speaking to or doesn't care about their work.	Almost certainly as upset about it as you are and would like to concentrate appropriately if they could.



## THE STRUCTURED CONVERSATION

### PREPARATION

Completing the boxes below is helpful but not obligatory. People with ADHD may find completion particularly useful in helping ensure their main points are discussed. People with ADHD may also find it useful to have a third party (this could be a colleague, a mediator such as an ADHD Coach, a friend or a partner) talk through the form with them and write in the points with them.

WHEN READY GO THROUGH EACH SECTION AND QUESTION TOGETHER.

	ADHD Employee	Company Representative
What aspects of your ADHD do you think impact your work?		
Are there any non-ADHD issues that you would like included in this conversation?		

Sort these issues into critical impact, significant impact, and minor impact.  
Both parties consider what potential adjustments they see.

Treatment from colleagues, their understanding and empathy regarding ADHD, can be critical for success. ADHD is an invisible disability and medically protected information. That makes communicating the reason for any adjustments a personal decision. The risk of not communicating is to potentially catalyse resentment from: colleagues mis-identifying traits as behavioural choices; and colleagues feeling the adjustments given aren't fair.

	ADHD Employee	Company Representative
<p><b>Who, if anyone, do you think it would be helpful if they were informed?</b></p> <p><i>Divide the individuals into critical impacts, significant impact and minor impact.</i></p>		
<p><b>Are you happy for them to be informed? How do you think each individual or group would best be communicated with?</b></p>		

<p><b>Is there anything else either party would like to discuss?</b></p>		
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It is important to set a date to review once you've both had a chance to reflect and come back to discuss them. Regular check-ins are also recommended, as appropriate, throughout staff employment.

<p><b>How frequent should follow up meetings be?</b></p>		
<p><b>Date for next meeting</b></p>		

## IDEAS FOR WORKPLACE ADJUSTMENTS

### WHY 'IDEAS'?

This section is specifically listed as ideas to give room for individual solutions. Everyone is unique. That remains true for those with ADHD. So the best solutions might be just as unique and therefore not listed here.

### BESPOKE ADJUSTMENTS PACKAGES

ADHD is a complex condition being overlaid into an often equally complex workplace. It is likely that you will need to put in place a set of measures rather than a single one. We often see using a variety of strategic adjustments as the optimal key to success. That doesn't mean it has to be a complicated plan, or that one individual solution can't be applied to someone else. It's about flexibility and identifying what works best.

### ESSENTIAL FOR SOME, GOOD FOR EVERYONE

Some of the changes suggested are useful to all staff members. For instance, there being a quiet place to work. That is something almost everyone can use sometimes. Essential for the ADHD individual and good for everyone.

### ACCESS TO WORK GOVERNMENT SCHEME

ADHD qualifies for **over £60,000** per annum government grant in support for the costs of adjustments.

**This significant money can be used to provide support for your ADHD employee at no cost to the company.** More information is available on the government website: [gov.uk/access-to-work/](https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/) and on our site at: [adhduk.co.uk/access-to-work/](https://www.adhduk.co.uk/access-to-work/)

TABLE: IDEAS FOR ADJUSTMENTS

Issue	Potential Adjustment(s)
<p><b>Open Plan Office:</b> An ADHD person can find the noise and distraction of an open plan office impossible to effectively work in.</p>	<p>~ Provision of a quiet office with a door that can be closed.            ~ Locating in a smaller room with less people            ~ Locating away from distractions (E.g. away from corridors, high use areas, meeting tables or rooms, TV screens).            ~Working from home more.</p>
<p><b>Hot Desking:</b> An ADHD person’s entire workday can be defined by their desk position. Not knowing where they can sit, whether they can work that day, can be a source of significant anxiety. Getting the “best desks” can also be inadvertently discriminatory by over rewarding those able to come in earlier (for instance those with childcare obligations don’t have this option).</p>	<p><i>Answers are similar to open plan office but also include:</i>            ~ Reserved permanent desk.            ~ Allow desks to be booked.            ~ Reserved quiet area. This area needs to be adequate enough to always have capacity, to have the lack of disturbance enforced, and provide a way for the ADHD person to be able to make noise if needed, e.g. phone calls).</p>
<p><b>Noise (including from colleagues):</b> An ADHD person can find noise distracting to make it impossible to focus.</p>	<p>~ Relocating to somewhere quieter.            ~ Noise cancelling headphones (although some report these don’t help enough to stop the distraction).            - Using music to provide a different focal point</p>
<p><b>Arrival Timeliness</b></p>	<p>Start with a discussion to determine if timeliness is critical to the role.            If not: flexible arrival time could be considered, and flexible hours across the week (for instance a longer day compensating for some missed start times), or agree on set tasks that must be completed and allow staff to manage their time accordingly.             If timeliness critical then: discussing ways to make it less critical, including different scheduling, or a partner system.</p>
<p><b>Meeting Timeliness</b></p>	<p>~ Looking at calendar management and electronic tools.            ~ Looking at dedicated reminder systems.            ~Where timeliness is essential building detailed strategies with thought to ADHD traits.</p>

<p><b>Project Deadlines / Time blindness</b></p>	<p>~ Looking at the best number of management check-ins. More may be helpful to ensure individual is on track.</p> <p>~ Looking at software project management solutions.</p> <p>~ Looking at increasing clarity on requirements to ensure more efficiency on the work done.</p> <p>~ Looking at being able to block out significant chunks of time to provide opportunities to hyperfocus.</p> <p>~ Reducing number of less necessary meetings.</p>
<p><b>Unscheduled Disturbances from Others</b></p>	<p>~ Looking to block out time with no disturbances.</p> <p>~ Look to block out time that allows drop ins.</p> <p>~ Looking at calendar booking options to force people to book in instead of dropping in.</p> <p>Enabling and OKing the turning off of reminders and phones</p>
<p><b>Perceived stigma of needing adjustments</b></p>	<p>~ Workplace talks to increase understanding and empathy.</p> <p>~ In larger organisations anonymous surveys can indicate how many more people within the organisation have disabilities but haven't declared them for fear of discrimination.</p>
<p><b>Colleagues undermining, or not accommodating, adjustments</b></p>	<p>~ The issue of "<i>Neurotypical familiarity breeding contempt for ADHD traits</i>" can be significant. ADHD is a disability and no organisation wants to see employees partake in disability discrimination. Workplace education is likely key.</p> <p>~ HR anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies should be robust and ideally should refer to neurodiversity.</p>
<p><b>Using Positive ADHD traits.</b></p>	<p>Reviewing the role and/or the organisation to see how positive ADHD traits could be utilised.</p> <p>~ Opportunities for creative solutions.</p> <p>~ Opportunities for deep dive research using hyperfocusing.</p>
<p><b>Providing ADHD Coaching</b></p>	<p>Coaching allows employees to build their own collection of strategies for success in their workplace for the benefit of themselves and their organisation. Coaching costs are commonly funded by the Access to Work Scheme (details prior).</p>

## ADHD UK EMPLOYER SUPPORT SERVICES

ADHD UK has an ongoing programme for employer support with options for remote or in person delivery.

Our support offer includes the following:

- Speech and Q&A on ADHD for your employees. Either bespoke to your organisation or off-the-shelf.
- Management Training held focused on ADHD and the workplace. Up to 20 people per session.
- Individual one-to-one support for line managers or ADHD employees.
- Managed monthly support groups to enable larger employees to support their ADHD employees within their workplace.
- We also provide free services through pre-recorded videos, drop in advice clinics and drop in support groups.

Full details are available here: [adhduk.co.uk/employer-support/](https://adhduk.co.uk/employer-support/)

## CONTACTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

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## DISCLAIMER

This deals with the very important issue of people's jobs and careers in the workplace so we must issue a disclaimer that whilst every effort has been made with this pack it is used at your own risk.

## FEEDBACK LINK

Your feedback is essential to ensure this program is a success. Help us help others. Please give your feedback here:

[www.adhduk.co.uk/feedback/](https://www.adhduk.co.uk/feedback/)