

## **Parents & Carers Resource (Assessment)**

### **Overview of ADHD Assessment Process**

When someone undergoes an assessment for ADHD, the assessors are looking for information that can help them to determine whether the person meets the criteria for a diagnosis. There are 3 possible diagnostic outcomes if the criteria are met

- ADHD Inattentive type
- ADHD – Hyperactive/Impulsive Type
- Combine type.

In order to get a diagnosis of Inattentive type the person (or their parent/carer) needs to be able to demonstrate that they experience six or more of a set of characteristics, that the characteristics have a significant impact on daily life and that they are inconsistent with the person's developmental level. The characteristics are:

- a. Often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, at work or during other activities
- b. Often has difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play activities
- c. Often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly
- d. Often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish school work, chores, duties in the workplace
- e. Often has difficulty organising tasks and activities
- f. Avoids dislikes or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort
- g. Often loses things necessary for tasks or activities
- h. Is often easily distracted by external stimuli
- i. Is often forgetful in daily activities

In order to get a diagnosis of Hyperactive/Impulsive type the person (or their parent/carer) needs to demonstrate that they experience six or more of another set of characteristics, that the characteristics have a significant impact on daily life and that they are inconsistent with the person's developmental level. These characteristics are:

- a. Often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat
- b. Often leaves seat in classroom or in other situations in which remaining seated is expected
- c. Often runs about or climbs excessively in situations in which it is inappropriate (in adolescents or adults, may be limited to subjective feelings of restlessness)
- d. Often has difficulty playing or engaging in leisure activities quietly
- e. Is often "on the go" or often acts as if "driven by a motor"
- f. Often talks excessively.
- g. Often blurts out answers before questions have been completed
- h. Often has difficulty awaiting turn
- i. Often interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g., butts into conversations or games)

For a diagnosis of combined type ADHD there needs to be enough characteristics of both Inattentive and Hyperactive/Impulsivity.

The diagnosis is also based on evidence that the characteristics have been present for more than 6 months and can be seen across at least two different environments (eg. home and school or home and work) and they are interfering or reducing the persons quality of life.

To effectively undertake the assessment, the clinician needs to gather a lot of information, including information about the person's childhood. They will be looking for examples of behaviours that fit the characteristics described above.

As part of the assessment, you might be sent a questionnaire to fill in about your child/family member. This contains lots of questions about them, which you should try to answer with as much detail as possible, using clear examples. One thing that you should be aware of is that most of these questions will concentrate on the person's difficulties or problems, and it can be upsetting to focus on the negative aspects of your loved one's behaviour. Unfortunately, the diagnostic criteria for ADHD is based on the person's determining that the characteristics are impacting on a person and reducing their quality of life to an extent a diagnosis and possibly medication can help.

*(if the person being assessed is a child, additional information might be required from other situations the child is normally in. This might mean the child being observed in school, but if the child is not in school, then it might mean them being observed during social activities or respite. The reason for looking at how the child behaves in different environments is that part of the basis of the ADHD diagnosis is that the person has to show difficulties in multiple environments (not just at home, or not just at school). If they are struggling in just one environment, there could be a different reason for their behaviour.)*

The assessor will not be able to make a diagnosis based on these questions alone, they will also have to meet with the person. However, the answers to these questions will give them a very good basis to undertake the rest of the assessment process.

The next part of the process is conducted face-to-face and could mean more than one meeting with more than one professional. The full assessment may take up to 2 hours, but complex assessments may take longer than this. It will consist of them asking lots of questions, which will be like the ones in the questionnaire. This might feel like you are having to repeat yourself, but this might be important for the clinician to get as much information as possible.

Once the assessment process has been completed, the information gathered during it is considered by the assessors and maybe by a wider team of people, to determine whether the

person has reached the criteria for a diagnosis. It is important to remember that many people present with these characteristics so it is essential to prepare that the outcome of the assessment may not be formal diagnosis. The outcome typically be fed back either in person, online or via telephone. Sometimes you may be advised of the outcome by letter. A report detailing the assessment process and outcome will be provided.

If a diagnosis is made, there may be follow-up appointments for health checks, to determine if medication is appropriate and if so which type of medication (stimulant or non-stimulant) to prescribe. The health checks will help to identify any underlining health conditions which may be negatively impacted by medication and to minimise potential side effects.

If medication is provided the person will be monitored so the dosage can be measured and adjusted, so that it has the most benefit. This may require a few appointments in the first year and annually usually thereafter.