

# ABOUT AUTISM AND ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD)



Both autism and ADHD are neurodevelopmental disorders, which means they both affect the central nervous system, which is responsible for movement, language, memory and social skills. The brain's executive functioning (responsible for decision making), impulse control, time management, focus and organisation skills are also affected by both autism and ADHD.

Each learner with autism and ADHD is a unique individual and adjustments to their educational program and learning environment should be tailored to their needs. When you understand the impact of autism and ADHD on the individual learner, you'll be better able to adjust to their needs.



**Government  
of South Australia**

Department for Education

## Autism and ADHD

Autism refers to a broad range of conditions that affect how a person thinks, feels, interacts with others and experiences their environment. There are 3 different types of ADHD: inattentive, hyperactive and impulsive, or a combination of the 2.

## Differences between autism and ADHD

- A learner with autism might have high levels of focus on their favourite topics but might not be able to engage in subjects that interest them less, whereas a learner with ADHD may not be able to pay attention to any subject.
- A learner with autism might have difficulty expressing their emotions and thoughts. A learner with ADHD might talk continually, want to have the last word and interrupt others.
- A learner with autism might insist on routines or ritualised patterns, whereas a learner with ADHD might lose interest in activities without variety.

## Impact of autism and ADHD on learning

In a learning environment, a learner with autism and ADHD can experience:

- difficulty focusing on one activity or task and can be easily distracted even when they are engaged in the activity
- difficulty with communication, socialisation, self-help, life skills and independence
- increased emotional and behavioural concerns such as anger, tantrums, argumentative and defiant behaviour
- increased risk of developing additional conditions such as anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, disruptive behaviour and tic disorders.

## Strengths of learners with autism and ADHD

The strengths of learners with autism and ADHD can be:

- attention to detail and observational skills
- spontaneity and a willingness to try new things
- unique thought processes that support innovative solutions which are both creative and inventive
- expertise in particular areas of interest
- being hyper focused
- integrity, tenacity and acceptance of difference.

# AUTISM AND ADHD ADJUSTMENTS



## EXAMPLES OF ADJUSTMENTS



### Tasks and organisation

- Limit the length of time a learner is expected to stay on task, taking the learner's needs and abilities into consideration.
- Provide lists, timetables, timescales or reminders to support the learner's organisation.
- Create visual reminders of what equipment is needed for each lesson or activity and keep 1 copy in their bag and 1 at home.



### Homework

- Provide a printed copy of homework instructions or email a copy to both the learner and the parent or carer.
- Coordinate homework commitments across the timetable to ensure the learner is not overwhelmed on any particular day.
- Prioritise homework tasks by deciding what will benefit the learner and leave out less essential work.



### Special interests

- Incorporate the learner's special interests into learning and build the curriculum around those special interests.
- Build positive and trusting relationships and connect with learners over their special interests.



### Environmental adjustments

- Seat the learner close to you but away from the windows or doors and with a clear path to the exit.
- Ensure that the whiteboard is well lit with minimal distractions.
- Create a well organised, uncluttered learning space with easily accessible resources.



### Transitions

- Provide opportunities to rehearse transitions in preparation for what's coming.
- Provide a countdown warning before transitions, for example 'Sam, 5 minutes of literacy, then maths'.