

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) - Support card

No two people with ADHD are the same. Get to know the person to understand their motivations, how the condition affects them and what support they might need.

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects an individual's activity and/or attention control. People with ADHD have a difference in brain development and brain activity, compared to someone without ADHD.

Football pathways

There is not an ADHD specific format of football. Players with ADHD play across all formats of football including mainstream, pan disability and impairment specific football.

General characteristics

- Impulsiveness – players may act without thinking and look as though they are ignoring the rules, they may have difficulty in waiting their turn and interrupt others.
- Hyperactivity – players may need to move more often, especially in situations where quiet and calm are expected - they may fidget and often have difficulty in playing or engaging in leisure activities quietly or competitively.
- Inattentiveness – players may have a short attention span, be easily distracted, or may look as though they are ignoring you when being spoken to directly.
- Some players may feel intense emotional pain linked to rejection or disapproval from others. This can be triggered when things don't go their way in sports activities.
- Players may find certain skills challenging including planning, organisation, emotional regulation and how memory is used in decision making and problem solving.
- Often these characteristics can work in both a positive or negative way depending on the context. For example, with young players in football, many traits of ADHD can enable players to excel on the pitch, but those same traits can be an impairment in off pitch learning environments.
- Be aware that not all players with ADHD will have a formal diagnosis. The information in this support card will be helpful when coaching any very active, impulsive and distractible player – whether they have a formal diagnosis of ADHD or not.

Coaching considerations

- Have a dedicated space for arrival activities to get players active as soon as they arrive at the session.
- Where possible, give players with ADHD individualised attention – most players with ADHD respond well to individual encouragement.
- Be patient and positive – use praise and positive motivation.
- Give clear instructions – use players to help demonstrate and check understanding.
- Mix up the tasks to avoid boredom – keep the players active.
- Check with parents, carers and the player about what works best for them and what they enjoy.
- Manage excitement and anxiety – allow for a time out if needed to let the player refocus their attention.
- Use a variety of strategies to manage behaviour and emotions such as 'first and then' and flash cards to make instructions clear.
- Set out expectations for the group and outline short sanctions if needed – a yellow and red card system can work well alongside a safe space where players can go to regulate their emotions.



Don't forget the golden nugget – Make sure your environment is always a safe and welcoming place to be!

How do I use STEP to adapt my session to include players with ADHD?



Space – Keep the playing area familiar by using existing pitch markings. Don't use too many cones that may confuse players.



Task – Change up games and activities to reduce boredom.



Equipment – Use a whiteboard to show the activity. Consider providing sensory toys (such as fidget spinners) in a safe space to help players regulate emotions if they become angry, upset or distressed.



Players – Small sided games such as 2v2, 3v3 or 4v4 are a great way to keep players moving and engaged.

Step top tip:

Remember: STEP is a tool to help you coach, NOT a list of things you have to do. In order to use STEP effectively, it's essential you get to know your players so you can use the right modification at the right time to aid their development.

Additional resources

- England Football Website: Disability Section
- Disability Football Introduction Course
- ADHD Foundation website
- UK Coaching: Coaching People with ADHD Guidance
- A Coach's Guide to ADHD