

COMPLEX PRESENTATIONS

Lesley Soffe – Advanced ADHD Nurse Practitioner

Rachael Geddes – Autism Practitioner RNLD , MEd Autism

NEURODEVELOPMENTAL ASSESSMENT SERVICE (NDAS)

Neurodevelopmental difficulties can affect children and young people's development. They may experience difficulties across different areas including:

- Independence Skills
- Motor skills
- Communication / Social Interaction
- Play/Flexibility - Sensory/Regulation
- Academic and Learning
- Attention, Memory, Organisation and Planning Skills
- Emotional Wellbeing / Mental Health
- Attachment and Relationships



DIAGNOSIS

WHEN THE IMPACT AND EXTENT OF THE DIFFICULTIES ARE SIGNIFICANT IT MAY BE PART OF AN UNDERLYING DISORDER. EXAMPLES OF NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS (IN HIGHLAND 24% COME OUT WITH NO DIAGNOSIS)

Attention Deficit
Hyperactivity
Disorder

Autistic
Spectrum
Condition

Developmental
Coordination
Disorder

Foetal Alcohol
Spectrum
Disorder

Sensory
Processing
Disorder

Developmental
Language
disorder

GENETICS

Autism and ADHD are both highly heritable conditions and have lots of crossover of features

It is common to see features of ADHD in Autistic children and to see Autistic traits in an ADHD child

Only 30-50% of autistic children get a formal diagnosis of ADHD

Around 25% of children in Highland with ADHD have an additional diagnosis of Autism

HOWEVER ITS
NOT ALWAYS
CLEAR CUT AS
THEY MAY ALSO
HAVE
EXPERIENCED

Trauma (can have a significant impact if at key developmental stages)

Insecure attachments

Significant bereavements

Global Development delay / learning difficulties such as Dyslexia / Learning Disability

2020 - 2022 Covid-19 Crisis

Lack of social interaction / social communication

No access to early play with peer group

Mental health difficulties / anxiety issues

LEARNING DISABILITY

IQ LESS THAN 70

Around 40% of autistic children also have a learning disability , this can range for mild to severe

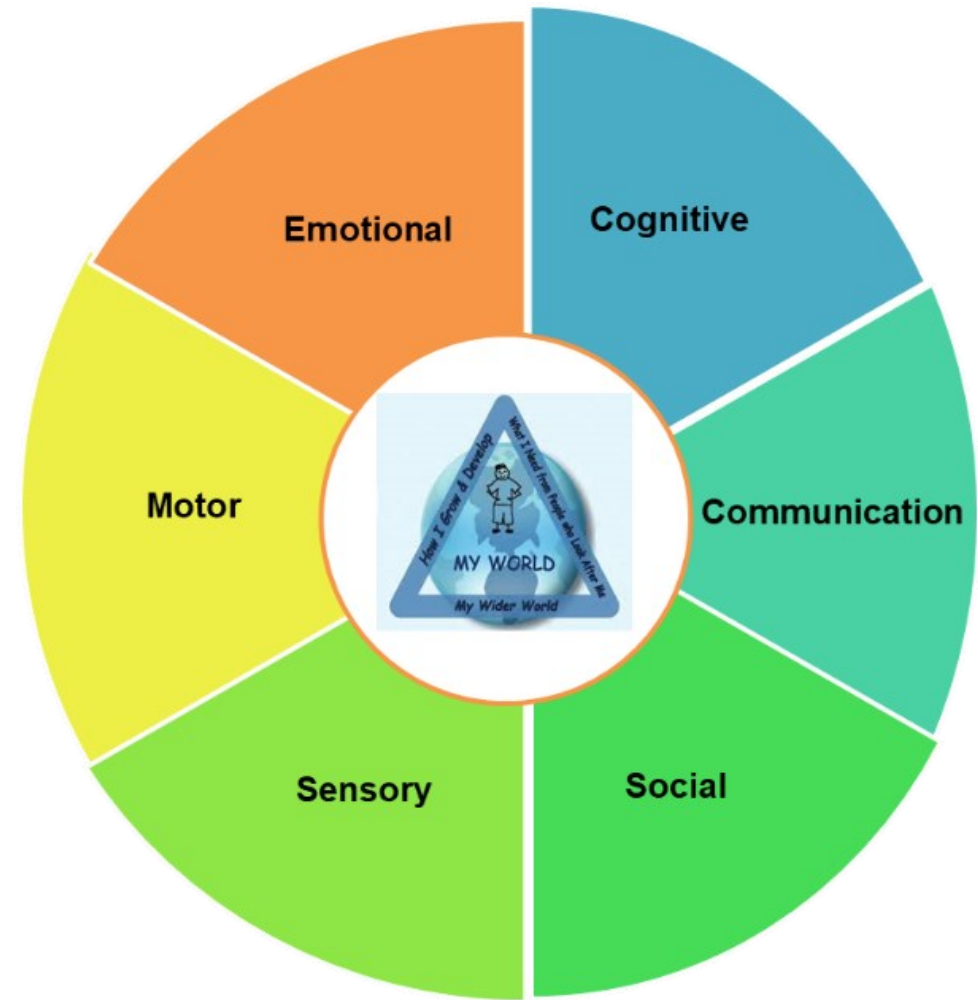
Around 25% of ADHD children also have a learning disability, ranging from mild to severe

LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

The majority of Autistic and/or ADHD children have an average IQ but their learning can be impacted by their inability to concentrate/ focus/ relate to others/ becoming easily overwhelmed / anxiety/ sensory overload etc

This can also include Dyslexia and Developmental Co-ordination Disorder

NO MATTER HOW
COMPLEX THE CHILDS
DIFFICULTIES WE AS THE
ADULTS AROUND THEM
NEED TO ASSESS AND
BREAK DOWN WHAT THE
DIFFICULTIES ARE IN
RELATION TO 6 AREAS
OF DEVELOPMENT



COMMUNICATION

Presentation

- Not following instructions/rules
- Off task behaviour
- Slow to get started / not asking for help
- Disrupting others / not engaging
- Become distressed
- Opting out / withdrawing
- Homework not getting done
- Gesturing / pointing rather than verbalising

Profile

- Difficulties understanding what is expected
- Difficulties expressing themselves

Plan

Words Up – Key Messages

- Face to face (get down to their level)
 - Play and talk together
 - Pause and wait
 - Copy and add words
 - Be careful with questions
- Use Visuals wherever possible
- Reduce your language
 - Think of the language you are using. Be aware of idioms, metaphors etc. and sarcasm
 - Be aware of non verbal use of language
 - Give processing time
 - Think of background noises/ volume level in your home i.e. Tv , Radio, washing machine
 - Think of where your child is sitting in relation to you , i.e. don't talk to the back of their head

COGNITIVE

Presentation

- Struggling to do their Homework
- Not being able to pack the right kit in school bag
- Difficulty with multi-step activities
- Impulsive behaviours
- Rushing tasks
- Off task behaviour
- Difficulty filtering out background information
- Slow getting changed/organised for activities
- Forgetting to charge their chromebook

Profile

Your child could have difficulties with:

- Organisation
- Problem solving
- Flexibility of thought and behaviour
- Controlling inappropriate impulses- tapping and banging
- Attention control (attaining, sustaining, switching)

Plan

- Structure
- Visual supports
- Visual or written checklist for routine activities
- Visual or auditory cues for change
- Warning of change
- Running commentary of problem solving to support understanding
- Use of problem solving scripts
- Use of Chromebook

MOTOR

Presentation

- Clumsy or awkward
- Challenges with focusing
- Struggle with self-care (can't do buttons/laces/struggles when getting dressed)
- Difficulty organising belongings
- Uses too much or too little pressure
- Motor activities take more effort and fatigues easily
- Bumps into things/ falls over

Profile

- Find stabilising items such as pencil challenging as joints move more easily than other (hypermobility)
- Slower at motor activity (difficulty starting)
- Child needs time thinking about how to do a skill - it looks more effortful as the motor skill is not yet automatic
- Difficulties with sequence of motor skills.

Plan

- **Assess Seating and Posture – Dining table**
- Assess and monitor seating / table height and change if required
- Putting a box (turned over) under a child's feet can be helpful
- Sturdy shoes can be helpful for some children
- Don't ask the child to sit on the floor without support
- **Assess Seating and Posture – Dining table**
- Assess and monitor seating / table height and change if required
- Putting a box (turned over) under a child's feet can be helpful
- Sturdy shoes can be helpful for some children
- Don't ask the child to sit on the floor without support

SENSORY

Presentation

- Strong responses – for example panic in response to sound such as a smoke alarm
- Sitting on top of another person
- Not being able to filter out background noise
- Fidgeting – swings on chair
- Chews things/can't eat some textures of food
- Challenges with starting/ending/transitions
- Struggle with tolerating some clothing
- Over / under reacts to pain
- Masking discomfort (you may not see this)

Profile

- Experiences of sensory differences are highly individual
- A hypo-responsive child may fall down and have a clear injury but not express pain or distress
- A hyper-responsive child may hear the sound of a pencil moving in the same way many of us feel in response to fingers scratching down a blackboard.

Plan

- Consider all areas of your home from a sensory perspective. Walk round when it is quiet and see what you can experience.
- Encourage your child to share information about how they feel in relation to different sensations. Pictures might be helpful
- Ensure visuals are given where necessary
- Involve your child in putting these up and taking them down. This is beneficial, particularly for children who find change challenging
- Offer regular movement

SOCIAL

Presentation

- Social isolation or withdrawal
- Peer conflict
- Distressed during unstructured times
- Directing play of others
- Difficulty with group/cooperative activities
- Playing with younger children or seeking out adults
- Refusal to enter busy environments such as a party

Profile

- Language and communication skills
- Understanding of social rules & ability to use them in correct context
- Ability to take the perspective of another
- Regulation of your own behaviours/impulses
- Inferring the intentions of others
- Flexibility to adapt to context
- Emotional literacy/regulation
- Motivation to interact with others
- Joint attention
- Anxiety around social eating

Plan

- Offer approval and acceptance
- Model attuned interactions
- Encourage peer support and cooperation.
- Target skills through structured 1:1 with parent or 1-2 with siblings
- Rehearse social situations – e.g. social stories
- Make social rules explicit and reinforce regularly
- Provide structured activities at times they will find difficult such as a family party
- Cultivate positive emotions
- Avoid labelling

EMOTIONAL

Presentation

- Extreme emotional responses
- Lack of emotional response
- Lack of emotions language
- Insensitivity to feelings/needs of others
- Distressed behaviour
- Withdrawal

Profile

- Lack of social understanding family and friends
- Unspoken social or work task requirements – lack of confidence
- Difficulty following the instruction
- Unexpected change or lack of predictability
- Difficulty staying focused on task
- Overwhelming sensory experiences
- Impact of poor diet or sleep disturbance

Plan

- Trusted adults – attuned to the needs of the child
- Consistent approach from adults
- Modelling emotions language
- Reducing stressors by managing the environment and communication
- Use of self regulation scripts
- Social Stories/ Comic Strip Conversations
- Consider diet and sleep