

ADHD RESOURCE HUB

ADHD, Family Life & Parenting

A guide to understanding ADHD within the family, what parents can do to help, how to advocate at school, and where to find financial and academic support in Ontario.

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- Why ADHD isn't caused by parenting
 - Genetics, heritability, and family risk
 - Five things parents can do to help
 - Advocating for your child at school
 - Financial supports, grants, and academic coaching

ADHD Isn't Anything You Did, or Didn't Do

ADHD isn't the result of poor parenting, too much sugar, or a lack of exercise, no more than being near-sighted is. It's no longer considered a behavioural disorder, but is now understood as a neurobiological, developmental condition, or cognitive difference.

ADHD is lifelong, present in its many forms in childhood, through to adulthood. Symptoms ebb and flow, depending on how the person has managed to cope, the strength of the support network around them, and the extent of any additional mental health challenges.

Undiagnosed ADHD affects all aspects of family life, and your experience as a parent.

If You've Noticed Challenges Like These

Trouble paying attention, forgetfulness, poor organizational skills, impulsivity, and emotional outbursts or extreme sensitivity are common in family life touched by ADHD.

Attention and follow-through

If you have ADHD, you may zone out during conversations, which can make your family feel ignored and devalued. You may also miss important details or mindlessly agree to something you don't remember later, which can be frustrating to your loved ones. Even when someone with ADHD is paying attention, they may later forget what was promised or discussed.

Reliability and household load

When it's someone's birthday, or the thing you said you'd pick up, your family may start to feel like you don't care, or that you're unreliable. This can lead to difficulty finishing tasks, as well as general household chaos. Partners may feel like they're always cleaning up after the person with ADHD, and shouldering a disproportionate amount of the family duties.

Impulsivity and emotional regulation

If you have ADHD, you may blurt things out without thinking, which can cause hurt feelings. This impulsivity can also lead to irresponsible or reckless behaviour, for example making a big purchase that isn't in the budget, leading to fights over finances. Many people with ADHD have trouble moderating their emotions. Parents and kids alike may lose their temper easily, have trouble discussing issues calmly, or come across as quite defensive. You may feel like you have to walk on eggshells to avoid blowups.

Left unaddressed, this carries real risk

Learning difficulties and dropping out of school prematurely; substance use problems, additional mental health conditions, more ER visits, accidents, and injuries; conflicts with law enforcement, and even early death.

How Did This Happen? Genetics and Heritability

Although we don't know exactly what causes ADHD, we know that it tends to run in families. ADHD is highly heritable, with estimates ranging from 74 to 88 percent, making it one of the most heritable mental health conditions. These estimates are based on family, twin, and adoption studies.

In terms of genetics, data from twin, adoption, and molecular genetic studies show ADHD to be highly heritable, as heritable as height, and mutations in genes affecting dopaminergic regulation have been consistently associated with ADHD. Studies over the past decade have also documented high levels of other mental health conditions within families, including mood and anxiety disorders, as well as learning disabilities and executive function deficits.

Heritability at a glance

~30% chance of a child developing ADHD if one parent has it

50%+ chance if both parents have ADHD

3:1 boys are diagnosed at this rate to girls, though ADHD is equally present in both

It's uncommon for only one family member to have it

It may also mean none of the children in a family inherit it, or all of them do. Children with familial genetic risk for ADHD may show greater sensitivity to both positive and negative environmental influences. An enriched, nurturing home environment can enhance cognitive functioning and reduce ADHD symptoms in these children.

Parenting Style Matters

Parenting styles and home environments can both decrease and increase risks. For example, inconsistent parenting exacerbates ADHD symptoms in genetically susceptible children, while supportive parenting can mitigate these effects.

5 Things Parents Can Do to Help

- 1 **Accept that your child has an ADHD brain.** Accepting and being honest with ourselves is a big part of moving forward.
- 2 **Participate in evidence-based treatments** for managing the challenging symptoms of ADHD, such as medication, cognitive behavioural therapy, ADHD coaching, and parent behaviour training. The earlier the better.
- 3 **Identify individual aptitudes,** finding high aptitude or talent in a particular ability, such as specific sports, art, music, invention, or entrepreneurship.
- 4 **Get access to special resources** that promote that talent or high aptitude, such as a club, gym, special technical school, or a highly recognized coach or mentor who can further develop it.

- 5 **Build family support:** loved ones who accept the person's ADHD, encourage and support them in constructive pursuits, work with them on managing symptoms, and help open doors to special resources.

Advocating for Your Child at School

Knowing how to advocate for your child at school, or for yourself in post-secondary or in the workplace, is critical. [ADHD is a protected disability in Ontario](#), and it's important to know yours and your child's rights. Our team is well equipped to give you the resources you need to inform your child's teacher, principal, and IEP accommodations and protections throughout your family's learning lifetime.

Family behaviour therapy and parent training assesses and plans for your family's or your individual child's needs, tailoring a plan that allows the adults to implement positive and supportive strategies to address challenges with impulsivity, paying attention or distractibility, follow-through, hyperactivity, intense emotional responses or self-regulation, and organizational and time management skills.

What Kind of Assessment Does Your Child Need?

A Psychoeducational Assessment

School psychoeducational assessments can describe attention or learning issues, but they can't formally diagnose ADHD. This type of assessment provides more information about how your child's brain learns, and can be foundational for educational support, though it is not necessary for a diagnosis. It helps to understand how ADHD may affect learning and school performance.

Because it's often used for IEPs or extra school support, it's recommended for anyone still in school, from elementary through post-secondary and graduate school.

An ADHD Assessment

There are separate and specific tests for ADHD. This can be done by a neuropsychologist, an experienced mental health Nurse Practitioner, or an experienced family physician. It can confirm whether you meet the criteria for ADHD or another mental health condition based on symptoms and impact.

A Psychological Assessment

Conducted by a Psychologist, or a supervised psychological associate. It may or may not assess for ADHD, so it may not include a diagnosis; reports will simply describe findings and refer for follow-up.

"It is important for parents to understand how to advocate for their children's needs in school. Special accommodations within the school system can be implemented and maintained as children with ADHD transition from primary school through to a post-secondary institution."

Heidi Bernhardt RN, founder of CADDAC

Financial Supports

ADHD and the Disability Tax Credit

ADHD does qualify as a disability across Canada, provided that the impairment is severe enough. Many cases of ADHD are mild or moderate in nature, and with multi-modal treatment, the majority of those affected can live happy and fulfilling lives.

It's important to know that a diagnosis of ADHD is not the sole qualifier for the Disability Tax Credit. The severity of the condition and its effects on daily life are the major deciding factors. Whether or not your ADHD qualifies as disabling will depend on how it affects your life, and the advice of medical professionals.

Getting started

Find the [T2201 Disability Tax Credit Form](#) on the Government of Canada website.

Additional resources

- [Child Disability Tax Credit Guide](#)
- [A Parents' Guide to ADHD and the Disability Tax Credit](#)
- [Disability Tax Credit Calculator](#)
- [DCCI Scholarship for Canadian Students with Disabilities](#)

These links provide free resources from an external private company, Disability Credit Canada Inc. DALD cannot endorse or guarantee the support you may receive there.

Grants and Bursaries

DCCI Scholarship

For students in a full-time health care, criminal justice, or community and social services program.

GrantMe Programs

Ten scholarships for students with disabilities in Canada.

Scholarship Partners Canada

The Mattinson Scholarship, for full-time studies toward a first undergraduate degree.

Canada ADHD Scholarship

The Shire Canada ADHD Scholarship supports those pursuing higher education.

OSAP Grant: heading to college or university in Ontario?

Look into the [Ontario Bursary for Students with Disabilities \(BSWD\)](#), which covers ADHD. You may be eligible for funding to help pay for postsecondary studies. The costs of a psychoeducational assessment, upfront or by reimbursement, or other disability assessments by reimbursement, may also be considered.

ADHD Academic Coaching, Eligible for BSWD Funding

Our ADHD academic coaching services are structured to support postsecondary students with documented ADHD who are accessing the [Ontario Bursary for Students with Disabilities through OSAP](#).

Services focus on disability-related functional barriers that affect academic participation, including:

- ✓ Executive functioning challenges
- ✓ Task initiation and completion
- ✓ Time management and planning
- ✓ Academic organization systems
- ✓ Sustaining attention and reducing overwhelm
- ✓ Translating accommodation plans into daily academic practice

Students may include our services in their BSWD application with a formal cost estimate. We provide detailed documentation, receipts, and time logs to support reimbursement requirements. Students are responsible for confirming eligibility and approval with their institution's Accessibility Services Office prior to booking.

Learn All You Can About ADHD

Everyone learns differently, and there are many ways to keep building your understanding:

- [The ADHD Resource Hub](#)
- [The Dig A Little Deeper ADHD Podcast](#)
- [Books for ADHD Parents](#) and [Books for Adults with ADHD](#)
- YouTube playlists for [ADHD Parents](#), [ADHD Women](#), and [ADHD Kids](#)
- [ADHD blog articles from our team](#)

Resource Article Recommendations for Parents

Thought-provoking reading on family and ADHD, organized by topic. Search the article titles below to find them from trusted sources such as ADDitude Magazine, CADDRA, and peer-reviewed journals.

Family and parenting

- [ADHD medication improves parenting skills](#)
- [Race and ADHD: how people of color get left behind](#)
- [Dear fathers: don't let a condition your son didn't ask for define your relationship with him](#)
- [The unique effects of maternal ADHD symptoms and emotion dysregulation on parenting behavior](#)
- [Parenting ADHD truths: you are the problem, not your child](#)
- [Never punish a child for bad behaviour outside their control](#)
- [Five pieces of ADHD advice every parent should hear](#)

ADHD and substance use

- [Substance use disorders and ADHD: five key facts and additional resources](#)
- [The impact of pharmacotherapy of childhood-onset psychiatric disorders on the development of substance use disorders](#)
- [ADHD medication and substance-related problems](#) (Rather, medication was associated with lower concurrent risk of substance-related events)
- [ADHD and recreational marijuana: what's the attraction](#)
- [CADDRA's position statement on the use of cannabis in ADHD](#)

ADHD and friendship

- [Reasons why it's tough to keep friends when you have ADHD](#)
- [Will my child ever have a best friend?](#)
- [The challenges faced by teens with ADHD](#)
- [Bullying more common among children with ADHD](#)
- [Behavioral treatment for the social-emotional difficulties of preadolescent and adolescent girls with ADHD](#)

ADHD and Teen Life: What Else Should You Know?

- [ADHD as a risk factor for infection with Covid-19](#)
- [Hair pulling, skin picking, and nail biting: body-focused repetitive behaviours](#)
- [Considerations in the care of athletes with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder](#)
- [The surprising link between traumatic brain injury and ADHD](#)
- [ADHD and lying: fight, flight, freeze, or fib](#)
- [Teens with ADHD and lying: why it's common and how to respond](#)
- [ADHD may be more common among elite athletes](#)
- [The link between concussions and attention deficit disorder](#)

Canadian ADHD Patient Advocacy Associations

- [Centre for ADHD Awareness, Canada \(CADDAC\)](#), for patients and families
- [What You Need to Know About Early Childhood ADHD](#), from CADDAC
- [What Teens and Adolescents Need to Know About ADHD](#), from CADDAC
- [ADHD and Post-Secondary Students](#): accommodations, templates, and more

Supportive Advice for Teachers and Other Educators

[Neurodivergent-affirming practices for teachers and classrooms](#) are available through our blog, along with a free downloadable [toolkit for Transitioning to Post-Secondary Education for Students with ADHD](#), from CADDAC.



NEXT STEPS

Ready to Talk to Someone?

Dig A Little Deeper offers ADHD assessment, family behaviour therapy, parent training, and academic coaching across our Ontario locations, alongside a wide network of therapists and coaches.

ADDRESS

6 Queen St. N. Suite 203, Bolton, ON L7E 1C8

PHONE

(905) 584-8963

EMAIL

admin@digalittledeeper.ca

ONLINE

digalittledeeper.ca

In crisis, or worried about safety? Call or text 9-8-8 for the Suicide Crisis Helpline, available across Canada, 24 hours a day.

This resource is for general education and is not a substitute for a comprehensive assessment or individualized advice from a qualified clinician, financial advisor, or your child's school. Source content adapted from the ADHD Resource Hub at digalittledeeper.ca. Copyright Dig A Little Deeper. All rights reserved.