

CHILDREN AND ADHD • 6.6

ADHD and Behaviour at School: When the Reports Get Bad

A run of difficult behaviour reports from school is one of the most stressful experiences a parent goes through. The language is often vague, consequences can escalate fast, and the framing rarely reflects what is actually going on.

FOR

Parents dealing with school behaviour reports about their child

AUDIENCE AGE

6-17

REVIEWED

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PART OF

The NeuroFX resource library

IN SUMMARY

ADHD and Behaviour at School: When the Reports Get Bad

How to read what the reports actually say

- **Most ADHD-related school behaviour is impulsivity, inattention and emotional dysregulation.** Calling out, leaving the seat, fidgeting, difficulty waiting, not completing work, emotional outbursts, conflict in unstructured time. These are direct consequences of the underlying ADHD, not signs of a child unwilling to behave.
- **Report language often hides what specifically happened.** 'Disruptive' usually means calling out or not staying seated. 'Defiant' can mean refusing or can mean overwhelmed. 'Inappropriate behaviour' is a placeholder. Always ask what specifically happened, what triggered it, what staff did, how it ended.
- **Knowing the difference between behaviour and ADHD matters.** A child with ADHD knows hitting is wrong; the difficulty is stopping the action mid-flight. A child knows walking out of class will cause trouble; the difficulty is regulating the emotion that drove them out. Both still require a response, but the response needs to address the actual difficulty.

What helps and what does not

- **Consequences still apply, but they need to fit ADHD.** Predictable, immediate, fair, proportionate. Long delays between behaviour and consequence reduce learning because the cause-and-consequence link is weaker in ADHD. Loss of break or movement time is often the wrong consequence because movement is part of how the child regulates. Public shame produces more dysregulation.
- **Recurring incidents mean the adjustments are not working.** If the same behaviour pattern keeps appearing, the school's adjustments are not enough. This is the moment to ask for a formal SEN review, not the moment for harder consequences.
- **Watch for the escalation pattern.** More frequent reports, calls home, detentions becoming weekly, formal language about behaviour, mention of behaviour management plans, suggestion of a managed move or part-time timetable. Children with ADHD are over-represented in school exclusion statistics.
- **Connect the behaviour to the ADHD explicitly.** In meetings, name the ADHD-related contributors. A child overwhelmed by sensory input who acted impulsively in seconds is different from a child who chose to misbehave. The response needs to fit the actual difficulty.
- **Document everything.** Dated notes of every behaviour incident, every meeting with school, every adjustment promised and delivered. This is essential if escalation continues.

What to do when escalation is starting

- **Request a formal SEN review meeting.** If behaviour incidents are accumulating without effective adjustments, ask the SENCo for a formal review. Bring specific examples and a clear statement of what is not working.
- **Consider an EHC Needs Assessment request.** If SEN Support is not enough, parents can request an EHC Needs Assessment directly. You do not need the school's permission. IPSEA has detailed guidance.
- **If exclusion is being discussed, get independent advice immediately.** A child with SEN cannot be permanently excluded for behaviour the school has not made reasonable adjustments to support. IPSEA, the Coram Children's Legal Centre, and local Citizens Advice all provide free or low-cost guidance on school exclusion.

WHEN TO SPEAK TO A PROFESSIONAL

Speak to the school SENCo when behaviour reports start to recur. Speak to your GP if a paediatric ADHD assessment is needed to support the school case. IPSEA (ipsea.org.uk) provides free legal advice on SEND matters including exclusion. Seek urgent help via 111, 999 or A&E for any acute mental health crisis or significant safety concern.

SOURCES

NICE NG87; SEND Code of Practice 0-25; DfE Behaviour in Schools; DfE Suspension and Permanent Exclusion guidance

NEXT STEPS

Speak to NeuroFX

Private ADHD and autism assessment for adults and children aged 6 and upwards.
CQC-registered. Bedford Consulting Rooms, 4 Goldington Road, Bedford MK40 3NF.

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