

Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder: Effective Management Strategies for Young Children

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ABSTRACT

The neurodevelopmental disorder ADHD, or “Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, presents considerable challenges in the primary school settings, particularly in the Indian context, where limited awareness, cultural misconceptions, and insufficient teacher training contribute to delayed identification and inadequate classroom support. The article covers practical classroom strategies in four domains—academic, social, behavioural, and emotional—to support primary teachers in managing children with ADHD and provide an inclusive learning environment. These include structured routines, task breakdown, visual aids, peer buddy systems, and positive behaviour reinforcement. The article concludes by recommending that early screening and identification of children with ADHD can help teachers develop suitable plans and interventions. It also stresses the need for teacher training to ensure that students with ADHD can succeed both academically and socially in regular classroom settings.

Keywords: ADHD, primary education, inclusion, classroom strategies, teacher training, India, neurodevelopmental disorders

In several developing countries disorders that fall under the neurodevelopmental category, like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), are often shrouded in misconceptions, cultural stigma, and a general lack of awareness. Although physical disabilities are gradually receiving more attention and support in India, conditions like Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)—which are less visible—often remain misunderstood, particularly in school settings. Children with ADHD commonly exhibit behaviours such as difficulty focusing, impulsiveness, and excessive activity. However, these behaviours are frequently misinterpreted as signs of laziness, poor discipline, or deliberate defiance. Such misconceptions can delay appropriate identification and intervention, while also taking an emotional toll on the children and their families.

In many classrooms, especially in the early years of schooling, ADHD tends to go unnoticed. Limited awareness among teachers and caregivers, along with the absence of standardised screening tools, contributes to underdiagnosis and delayed support (Sharma et al., 2019). Research across different regions in India shows wide variation in ADHD prevalence rates, reflecting differences in methodology and assessment tools. For example, a study in

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Coimbatore reported an 11.3% prevalence among 6–11-year-olds (Srinath et al., 2005), while a study in Assam found a slightly higher rate of 12.6% in primary students (Hazarika et al., 2014). Another study conducted in Tamil Nadu indicated a prevalence of 8.8% among children aged 8 to 11 years (Garg et al., 2018).

The primary school years are a critical window for recognising and managing ADHD. Several national initiatives in the field of education stress the importance of early identification, inclusive education, and the creation of a supportive and participatory learning environment. Teachers often serve as the first observers of concerning behaviours, such as difficulty staying seated, inability to follow instructions, or frequent conflicts with peers (Gupta & Sharma, 2006). Unfortunately, in many cases, these behaviours are attributed to poor parenting or indiscipline rather than viewed as signs of a neurodevelopmental disorder. When teachers label these students as “disruptive” or “difficult,” it can lead to emotional alienation and reduced self-esteem, further affecting the child’s ability to succeed.

Many teachers’ preparation programs, both at the pre-service and in-service levels, do not adequately cover neurodevelopmental conditions. A recent study by Thomas and Jacob (2022) revealed that most teacher trainees had limited understanding of ADHD and were unfamiliar with classroom strategies for managing it effectively. This knowledge gap leaves many teachers feeling ill-equipped and overwhelmed when working with neurodiverse learners (Mukhopadhyay & Mani, 2002).

Furthermore, most schools continue to follow a one-size-fits-all curriculum, with minimal adaptation for learners with special needs. Although the RTE Act and NEP 2020 promote inclusive education, the on-ground reality often reflects a lack of training and resources. Teachers are rarely trained in differentiated instruction or behaviour management strategies, and support systems within schools are typically underdeveloped (Kaur & Vaid, 2021). In some rural and low-income settings, cultural beliefs may also influence how ADHD is perceived. Parents might view symptoms as intentional misbehaviour or attribute them to spiritual causes, which can result in delayed diagnosis and resistance to professional help (Narayan & John, 2017).

Despite these challenges, diverse and culturally rich classrooms also provide an opportunity to promote empathy, collaboration, and adaptive teaching strategies. When properly supported, children with ADHD can thrive alongside their peers. Effective strategies include visual aids, structured routines, task breakdowns, positive reinforcement, and seating arrangements that minimize distractions (NASET, 2020).

Additionally, implementing early screening measures can have a significant impact. With proper training, teachers can learn to identify, refer, and support students effectively, creating a classroom atmosphere that is more inclusive and responsive, especially for children with ADHD.

Thus, in line with this thought, let this article help provide the opportunity to the primary school teachers to develop knowledge, skills and the aptitude towards ADHD.

The diagram (Figure 1) below outlines the major themes discussed in this article to provide a comprehensive yet concise understanding. A detailed explanation of each element follows.

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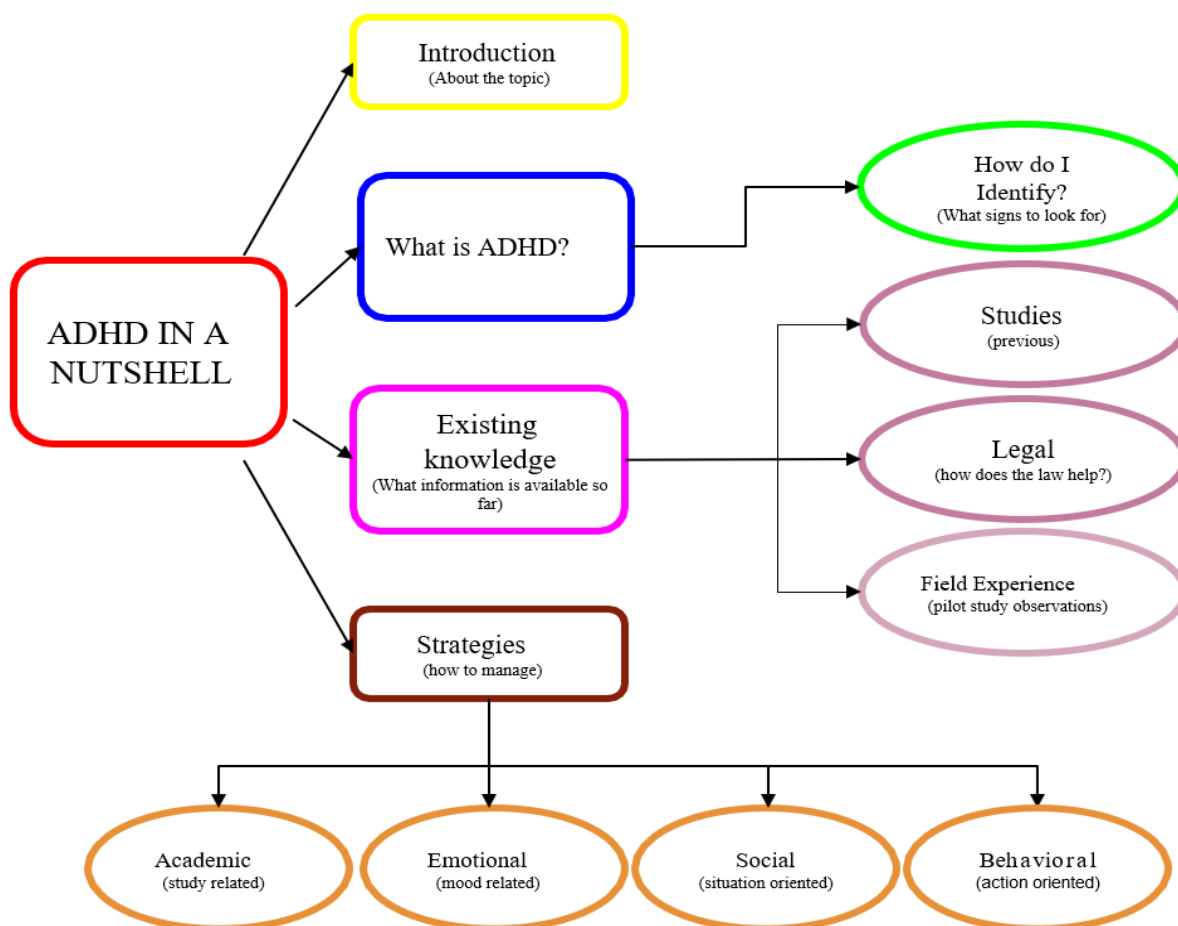


Figure 1

What do previous studies say about ADHD?

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is widely recognised as one of the most prevalent neurodevelopmental conditions affecting children in school-age groups. Over the years, studies have consistently shown that ADHD has a considerable impact on a child's academic performance, social interactions, and emotional growth. (Barkley, 2015). Studies indicate that children with ADHD are at higher risk for poor academic performance, low classroom engagement, and strained teacher-student relationships (DuPaul & Stoner, 2014). They may struggle with sustained attention, task completion, and appropriate classroom behavior, which can lead to frequent disciplinary actions or academic failure if not properly supported.

Teachers often report difficulties in managing behaviour associated with ADHD due to a lack of training, large class sizes, and inadequate access to resources (Sciutto, Terjesen, & Frank, 2000). In response, inclusive education strategies have been increasingly emphasized, promoting differentiated instruction, behavioural support plans, and collaboration with school psychologists or counselors.

Schools, now, have begun to adopt more inclusive and supportive practices for children with ADHD. This shift includes the use of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and classroom accommodations under frameworks such as Response to Intervention (RTI) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Despite progress, research suggests that many children with ADHD still remain underserved due to delayed identification, lack of awareness among

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teachers, and stigma associated with behavioural disorders (Nugent, 2018). Continued teacher training and systemic reform are essential for sustaining inclusive practices.

Despite growing awareness of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as a significant neurodevelopmental condition, most legal and educational systems around the world, including in India, continue to treat it under broad and non-specific disability categories. Such generalizations often hinder the proper understanding of the specific needs of children with ADHD, leading to shortcomings in their diagnosis, support systems, necessary accommodations, and the readiness of teachers to address their challenges. In India, legal recognition for disabilities is primarily governed by the *Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016*. While this Act is a landmark piece of legislation promoting equality and inclusion, it does not explicitly mention ADHD as a distinct category. Instead, ADHD is vaguely included under broader terms such as "specific learning disabilities" or "mental illness." This lack of specific mention often leads to confusion at the school level about whether a child with ADHD qualifies for accommodations or not.

Several national initiatives stress the importance of accessible and inclusive education; however, the teachers' knowledge and awareness level, to implement such guidelines, often are observed to be inadequate. As a result, children with ADHD may fall through the cracks, especially when their symptoms are mild or when schools lack awareness

Although inclusive education is strongly advocated in national frameworks such as the *National Education Policy (NEP) 2020*, there is little operational guidance on how to implement inclusive practices specifically for ADHD.

Furthermore, it has become evident that primary school teachers are often the first observers of ADHD-related behaviour, yet they are not sufficiently empowered to act on their observations. Most primary are dedicated and observant but lack adequate knowledge about ADHD as a neurodevelopmental disorder. Many times, symptoms such as restlessness, inattentiveness, or impulsive behaviour are interpreted as deliberate misbehaviour or poor parenting. This misunderstanding may lead to inconsistent classroom responses, including scolding, exclusion, or labelling the child as a "troublemaker." Teachers were frequently found to be underprepared and overwhelmed when required to manage students exhibiting hyperactivity and impulsive behaviour. Concerns were consistently expressed regarding the challenge of maintaining control over the entire classroom while simultaneously addressing the unique needs of a child who may have ADHD.

Also, the responsibility of addressing the needs of students potentially presenting with undiagnosed ADHD is seen to impose considerable emotional and professional strain on primary school teachers. Interviews reported feelings of helplessness, frustration, and guilt, particularly when teaching objectives were hindered or when it was perceived that adequate progress could not be facilitated for the affected child.

Strengthening their role through proper training, support, and policy implementation is not just helpful—it is essential. Without it, the objective of providing inclusive and supportive education for every child remains unfulfilled.

Therefore, to enhance conceptual clarity, each of the key terms will be examined systematically and explained in a step-by-step manner.

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition that impacts attention, activity levels, and self-regulation. Children with ADHD may struggle to concentrate, manage impulses, and remain still or focused. These behaviour must persist for at least six months and be observed in two or more environments, such as at home, in school, or at the park. It is important to note that ADHD is not the result of poor parenting or intentional misbehaviour

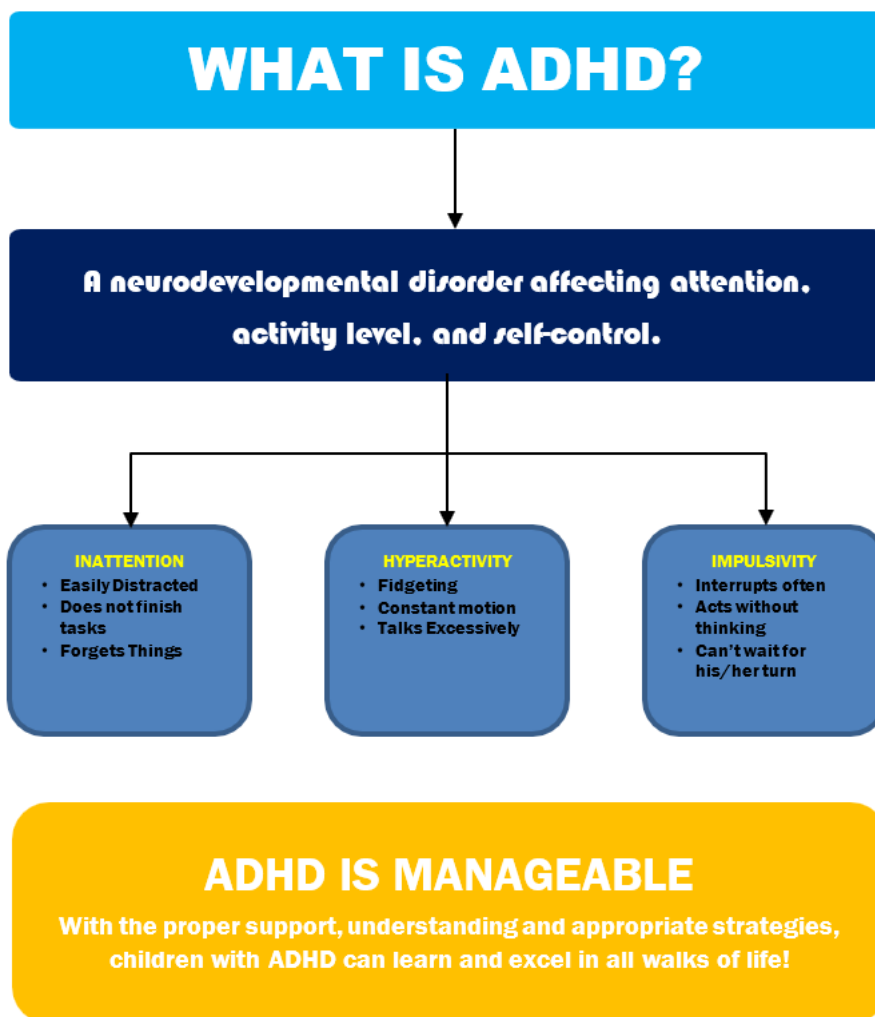


Figure 2

Primary school teachers have a crucial role in recognizing the early signs of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in children. Early recognition can lead to timely support and improved outcomes for the child. ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition that interferes with a child's ability to concentrate, regulate impulses, and maintain energy levels suitable for their age.

How to Identify a Child with ADHD?

The table (Table 2) below outlines key symptom categories and corresponding observable indicators that may help primary teachers in the early recognition of ADHD. These observations, when consistently noted over a period of time, can inform referral for further evaluation and support.

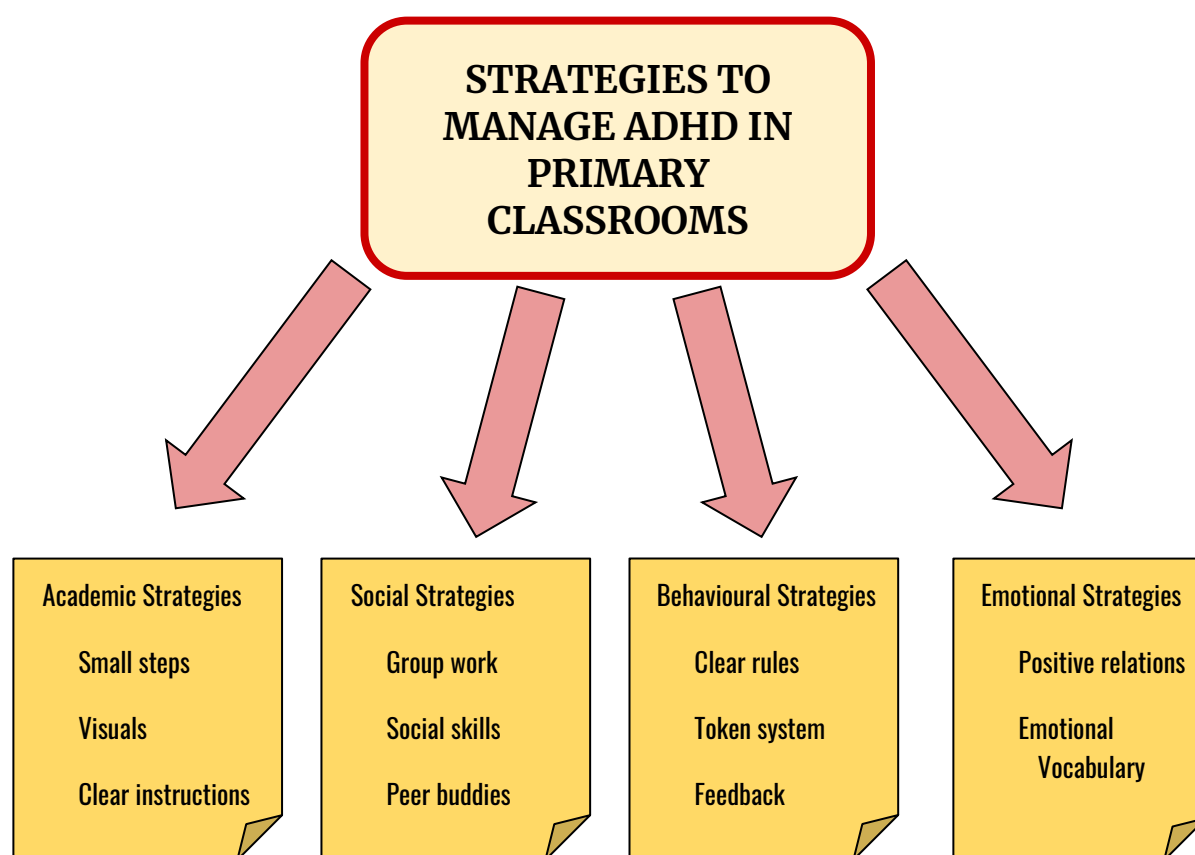
Table 1

Symptom Category	Observable Indicators
Difficulty Sustaining Attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appears distracted and struggles to stay focused, especially during tasks requiring mental effort. • Avoids or leaves reading/writing tasks incomplete. • Frequently daydreams or stares into space.
Impulsivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blurts out answers before the question is completed. • Interrupts conversations or classroom activities. • Engages in risky or inappropriate behavior without thinking.
Hyperactivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant movement: fidgeting, tapping, or leaving the seat. • Talks excessively or has difficulty playing quietly. • Restlessness is more noticeable in structured settings like classrooms.
Disorganisation and Forgetfulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequently loses items (e.g., pencils, books, homework). • Struggles with multi-step instructions or forgets assigned tasks. • Maintains a messy desk or disorganised school bag.
Emotional Outbursts or Mood Swings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overreacts to minor frustrations or becomes easily upset. • Experiences difficulty managing emotions, possibly leading to tantrums or social withdrawal. • Emotional fluctuations affect learning and relationships.
Inconsistent Academic Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excels in some areas but struggles in others due to attention difficulties. • Academic performance varies day-to-day. • Needs repeated instructions or additional time for tasks.

Strategies to Help Children with ADHD

The diagram below (Figure 3) outlines key strategies that primary teachers can use to support students with ADHD more effectively. These strategies are practical, easy to implement, and designed to promote positive behavior, improve concentration, and foster a more supportive and inclusive learning environment for every student. The strategies are broadly divided into four main areas – Academic, Social, Behavioral and Emotional.

Figure 3



Academic Strategies

Children with ADHD may struggle with focus, organization, following instructions, and completing tasks. Academic strategies aim to improve their engagement with learning material and help them perform to their full potential in the classroom. Some strategies that can help teachers are:

- 1. Smaller Steps:** Dividing lessons and assignments into manageable parts with clear objectives can help with clearer understanding.
Example: Instead of asking a student to "write a paragraph about your family," the teacher can break it into steps:
 - Step 1: Write the names of your family members.
 - Step 2: Write one sentence about each person.
 - Step 3: Put all sentences together into a short paragraph.

This helps the child stay focused and complete the task without feeling overwhelmed.

- 2. Visual Aids:** Providing structure and support for comprehension through diagrams, charts, and colour coding can be helpful technique
Example: While teaching a story from the English textbook, the teacher can provide a **story mind map** with boxes labelled "Characters," "Setting," "Problem," "Solution." Students fill it in as they read or listen.

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This visual structure supports memory and attention, making it easier for students with ADHD to organize information.

- 3. Clear Instructions:** Giving step-by-step directions and repeating them when necessary is helpful.

Example: For a craft activity, instead of saying “Make a paper flower,” the teacher can break it down:

- First, fold the paper in half.
- Next, draw the shape of a petal.
- Then, cut along the line.
- Finally, stick the petals together.

Instructions are also written on the board or shown in pictures for added clarity.

- 4. Extended Time:** Tasks that are challenging and require complex mental operations to be applied can be assessed with a little relaxation of time.

Example: For a GK quiz or a maths test, a child with ADHD can be given extra time and made to sit in a quiet, distraction-free room.

This simple step takes away the stress and pressure of time and deadlines from the child’s mind, allowing him/her to focus and perform better.

- 5. Teaching Methods:** Instead of focusing on the traditional paper-pen methods or chalkboard teaching, the usage of interesting visual aids and new objects sparks interest in the child, thereby increasing the level of attention in class.

Example: During the teaching of complex concepts like Addition or multiplication in class, the teacher can use coloured blocks or small objects to practically demonstrate the operations.

Using this approach allows the engagement of the child’s visual, auditory and kinesthetic senses, helping students with ADHD to understand and apply concepts better.

- 6. Checklists and Planners:** Introducing planners and lists to help children keep track of their tasks, responsibilities, and assignments independently.

Example: At the start of the day, each student receives a simple checklist with tasks like:

- “Finish the English worksheet.”
- “Pack your bag”
- “Return the library book.”

The student ticks off each task as they complete it. This fosters independence, improves organization, and reduces forgetfulness.

Social Strategies

Children with ADHD might find it difficult to maintain relationships with peers due to impulsivity or a lack of social awareness. These are some strategies designed to enhance their interpersonal skills and promote healthy classroom interactions.

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- 1. Group Work:** Assigning roles in group tasks to foster participation and reduce conflict. **Example:** During a group science activity on “Types of Plants,” the teacher assigns roles like:
 - *Reader:* Reads out instructions.
 - *Writer:* Notes down answers.
 - *Material Collector:* Gathers materials.
 - *Presenter:* Shares the group’s findings.

Assigning defined roles to each student, especially the ones having ADHD —instils a sense of responsibility in the child. He/she not only feels responsible but also experiences a sense of belongingness.

- 2. Social Skills:** Important skills like communication, empathy, and cooperation can be taught using various activities like storytelling, role-plays, and even educational films. **Example:** A child-friendly film on ‘Feeling thankful’ or ‘Sharing is caring’ can be screened in class instead of reading from Moral Science textbooks. After this, a discussion can be facilitated and the child with ADHD can be asked to lead it.

Such approaches let students understand and apply the positive social behaviours in real- life settings.

- 3. Peer Buddies:** Supportive and calm classmates can be paired with the hyperactive ones to help navigate social situations. **Example:** A student with ADHD is paired with a calm and responsible classmate as a “study buddy” for reading time. The peer gently reminds them to stay on task and helps them follow directions.

This promotes inclusion, builds friendships, and provides the ADHD student with a role model.

- 4. Monitoring Transition Times:** Offering supervision and structure during less formal parts of the school day. **Example:** During recess, the teacher or helper can give the student a list of 2–3 play options (e.g., “swing, ball game, drawing”) and check in with them halfway through. During transitions, such as moving from the classroom to the library, the teacher can remind the child of expectations (“walk in a line, keep your hands to yourself”) and praise them afterward if they follow the rules.

- 5. Positive Social Behaviors** **SHAPÉ\MERGEFORMAT:** Consistently acknowledging efforts in teamwork, sharing, and conflict resolution helps strengthen the social skills of the child. **Example:** When the child waits for their turn during a group game, the teacher immediately says, “Great job waiting patiently!” A simple sticker or praise note (“You were a kind teammate today!”) can reinforce behaviors that may not come naturally to students with ADHD, encouraging them to repeat those actions.

Strategies behavioural Strategies

Behavioral strategies aim to manage hyperactivity, impulsivity, and distractibility. These approaches help create a predictable classroom environment where expectations are clear and behavior is consistently supported. Some of the suggested behavioural management strategies are:

- 1. Clear Rules:** Predictability reduces anxiety and improves self-regulation.
Example: From the beginning of the school academic year, the teacher can introduce five simple classroom rules using picture cards (e.g., “Raise your hand to speak,” “Keep hands to yourself”). These rules are repeated daily through chants or songs. A daily schedule with visuals is displayed so the child with ADHD knows what to expect next (e.g., circle time, reading, snack, play).
Such consistency helps reduce impulsive behaviour and keeps the child grounded in routine.
- 2. Token Systems:** Visual tracking of behaviour can encourage goal-setting and self-monitoring.
Example: The teacher uses a “**Star Chart**” where the student earns a star each time they complete a task or follow a rule (e.g., “Stayed in seat during story time,” story time “Used quiet voice”). After five stars, the child chooses a small reward like reading a book with the teacher or 5 extra minutes of drawing. This provides positive reinforcement and motivates the child to stay on track.
- 3. Feedback:** Reinforcing desired behaviour and correcting misbehaviour constructively
Example: Instead of saying “Good job,” the teacher says, “I like how you raised your hand before speaking—that was respectful!” If the child blurts out, the teacher might gently say, “Remember, we wait for our turn. Let’s try again,” and praise them when they get it right the next time. Timely and focused feedback helps children understand what behaviour is expected and builds self-awareness.
- 4. 'Cool Down':** Providing a calm area where students can regroup without punishment, along with correctional behaviour, also reinforces the understanding of the idea of different demarcated spaces.
Example: A corner of the room is decorated with soft cushions, sensory toys, and emotion cards. The child is encouraged to visit this area when they feel overwhelmed or overly energetic. They spend a few minutes there using calming tools like a glitter jar or a deep breathing chart. This approach helps the student learn to regulate emotions without feeling shamed or excluded, along with acknowledging the fact that ugly behaviours (like anger or frustration) are not to be taken out on others or expressed publicly.
- 5. Ignorance:** Avoiding unintentional reinforcing attention-seeking actions.
Example: If the child starts tapping a pencil lightly or makes small noises to get attention but is not disturbing others, the teacher calmly continues the lesson without reacting. When the child redirects themselves, the teacher acknowledges the improvement: “Thank you for focusing again.” This minimizes power struggles and reinforces appropriate behaviour.
- 6. Short Breaks:** Incorporating movement breaks to release energy and reset focus.
Example: After 15 minutes of seated work, the teacher can allow the child with

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ADHD to do a 2-minute “movement break” — jumping jacks, stretching, or walking to the window and back. These short, planned breaks help manage restlessness and improve concentration when returning to tasks.

Emotional Strategies

Children with ADHD often experience emotional outbursts, low self-esteem, and frustration. Emotional strategies aim to help students manage their feelings, develop resilience, and feel supported in the school environment.

- 1. Positive Relationships:** A supportive bond increases trust and emotional security.
Example: The teacher can greet each student at the door every morning with a smile and a personal “Good to see you, Rohan!” For the student with ADHD, this small ritual builds a sense of belonging and connection. When the child is upset or off-task, the teacher’s calm tone and personal connection help redirect the behaviour more effectively.
- 2. Emotional Vocabulary:** Help students identify and express their feelings appropriately.
Example: During circle time, the teacher can use a “**Feelings Wheel**” or **emotion cards** and asks, “How are you feeling today?” Students—including those with ADHD—are encouraged to point to a card like “frustrated,” “happy,” or “nervous.” This practice teaches emotional awareness and helps the child communicate their state of mind instead of acting out.
- 3. Coping Strategies:** Showing healthy ways to manage frustration, restlessness, or anxiety. **Example:** Before a challenging test, the teacher can lead the class in a “Calm-Down Routine” — slow breathing, stretching arms, or imagining a peaceful place. A poster on the wall shows steps like “Breathe – Count to 5 – Drink Water.” Students with ADHD learn that emotional control is a skill they can practice and apply.
- 4. Encouragement and Validation.** Recognizing effort and emotional growth, not just outcomes.
Example: When a student who often gets frustrated with mistakes calmly erases an answer and tries again, the teacher says, “That’s wonderful self-control! I can see how hard you’re trying.” Acknowledging emotional progress boosts the student’s confidence and reinforces self-regulation.
- 5. Safe Environment:** Encouraging students to express themselves without fear of punishment or ridicule.
Example: When the child with ADHD has a meltdown or cries during an activity, the teacher can gently invite them to the “**peace corner**” and allow them to draw, listen to calming music, or sit quietly with a stuffed toy. Later, the teacher can help the child reflect without blame: “What happened? How can we handle it next time?” This builds emotional resilience and trust.
- 6. Emotional Visual Cues:** Helping students recognize emotions and seek help early.
Example: A “Mood Meter” with coloured zones (green = calm, yellow = excited, red = upset) can be placed on the wall. Students move a clothespin with their name to the color that matches their current feeling. This non-verbal system may help the teacher monitor emotions and intervene early if a child is struggling emotionally.

CONCLUSION

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that typically emerges in early school years. It impacts a child's capacity to concentrate, control impulses, regulate emotions, and manage behaviour. Children in primary classrooms who present with ADHD may demonstrate behaviours such as limited attention span, heightened activity levels, impulsivity, inconsistent academic engagement, emotional reactivity, and disorganized work habits. According to NEP (National Education Policy) 2020 and the NCF (National Curriculum Framework) 2005, fostering an inclusive, responsive, and participatory learning environment is essential for addressing such diverse learner needs and promoting equitable access to quality education.

Early identification is crucial. Primary teachers play a vital role in observing and recognizing these symptoms, as they interact with students in structured settings daily. To manage ADHD effectively within the primary classroom, a combination of **academic, behavioural, social, and emotional strategies** is essential. Ultimately, fostering understanding, patience, and proactive support enables educators to not only manage challenges effectively but also to help all the children, including those with ADHD, succeed and achieve their full potential. With proper training, resources, and collaboration among teachers, counselors, and families, early primary years can become a solid foundation for sustained academic achievement and emotional development over time.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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