ADHD PARENTS SUPPORT GROUP FACILITATORS HANDBOOK



All the notes and information you need to deliver your ADHD Parents Support Group sessions

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ADHD
PARENTS SUPPORT GROUP
FACILITATORS HANDBOOK

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GETTING STARTED

These parent support sessions have two key aims:

- To create connection and relationships between parents in your school community.
- To give them support and information they need to help their child succeed.

In practice, we've found that parents initially come for the support and information, but keep coming back because of the links they make with other families.

That's why these sessions have a strong emphasis on communication and problem-solving between your parents - and parents sharing their own experiences and ideas - rather than simply giving them facts and strategies (although there's a bit of that too!)

But don't worry! As the facilitator, you'll never be put on the spot to give ideas or information. Everything you need to know is included in the following, session-by-session breakdowns.

We recommend you host one session per half-term, to give your families support across the year - but feel free to use these materials flexibly. After all, you know your parents and children better than anyone else.

To your success,



Simon Currigan

Session overview



Each support session takes around 30-35 minutes and has been specifically written so the facilitator doesn't need any specific specialist knowledge (so you never feel like you've been put "on the spot").

Except for the first session, each of the sessions broadly follows the format below. All timings are approximate!

Welcome and check in (3 mins)

Start informally by welcoming everybody to the group.

Discuss purpose of group and rule reminder (2 mins)

Explain that we're here to support each other and find and share solutions to problems.

Introduce the session topic / key question (5 mins)

Introduce today's topic and collect parents' experiences about how they've seen this issue affect their child in the home. Focus on the problem at this point, rather than the solution.

Information (5 mins)

At this point, play a video giving parents more information about today's issue. We'll always give you a direct link to video, or embed directly it in the PowerPoint.

Problem-solving activity (10 mins)

Present a question and ask parents to work together to share their experiences of different ways of tackling the problem. It can be helpful to focus on these broad themes:

- What executive function is important here?
- What is a reasonable outcome in the situation? (Think progress not perfection!)
- What's worked for me in the past
- What hasn't worked for me (or made things worse)?

Additional ideas (3 mins)

The facilitator provides additional ideas and strategies the families may not have thought of. These will be provided in the handbook (or a video).

Summary (2 mins)

The facilitator sums up the problems and strategies looked at and thanks everyone for coming. Then they issue the date and time of the next meeting and tell parents what the theme of that session will be.

The First session

The initial session follows the broad outline above, but allows some time for parents to get to know each other, and for the facilitator to explain the aims of the programme and the group ground rules.

The group rules



It's important to make the group rules clear so all your parents feel safe talking about (potentially) confidential matters and know what's expected of them.

Time is allocated to discuss those rules in detail, but there should be a (brief) reminder of the group rules at the start of every session. If anyone new joins the group, the rules should be reviewed in more detail again, so consistency is maintained.

Here are our recommended rules - but feel free to add to these if necessary.

1. **What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas**

Confidentiality is essential for a successful support group, so underline that there is 100% no-gossiping rule. Any information shared in the group, stays in the group - so no sharing on the playground or social media.

2. **We share experience (not advice)**

Research shows support groups work best when participants share and talk about their personal experiences, rather than trying to solve other people's problems by giving them advice (or telling them how to parent). This rule ensures no one feels judged and emphasises there isn't a single "right answer" when it comes to parenting.

3. **We speak one at a time**

In the group, everyone's ideas are valued and respected, so this rules ensures we don't talk over each other and all our parents ideas are listened to. We don't want people to feel like their ideas or opinions are being "shut down" by louder members of the group. Facilitators will need to politely (but firmly) enforce this rule.

4. **Phones and watches on silent (not vibrate)**

Every call, alert and notification interrupts the session makes it harder for everyone to focus. And a phone vibrating is almost as distracting as a phone ringing. Explain time is short and this rules helps us make the most of it!

Session support notes



Session #1: What is ADHD?



This session follows a slightly different format from the other sessions - as some time is allocated to sharing the aims of the session and discussing group rules. The task is aimed at encouraging parents to share their experiences and to start to make links.

Equipment required: flipchart paper and marker pens.

Welcome and check in (3 mins)
Start informally by welcoming everybody to the group.

Discuss purpose of group (2 mins):
Explain that we're here to support each other and find and share solutions to problems. Encourage parents to share their experiences and that everyone is here to learn from each other. Also explain that this group will be more focussed on the needs of children with ADHD (rather than conditions like autism).

Explain that the group will meet half-termly and each session should last about 30 minutes.

- ▷ Take a moment to ask your parents if they have any questions about the purpose of the group or how it will work

Introductions (5 mins):
Start by introducing yourself and explaining your role, and then spend some time going around the group and ask your parents to share:

- ▷ Their name
- ▷ The age of their child
- ▷ What they are most hoping to get out of the group

If you've noticed that some parents seem quieter, to break the ice, it can be a good idea to start with the more confident members of the group.

Group rules (5 mins)

Now introduce the group rules and explain why they are important. Reinforce the importance of trust and confidentiality. After discussing each rule with the group, get commitment from participants by saying something like, "Is everyone happy with that rule?" or "Does everyone agree to the rule?" or "Is everyone good with that rule?"

Some of these rules may seem obvious, but is worth investing time setting up expectations for group behaviour now - rather than having to address it at a later stage.

Here are some notes / talking points:

1. What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas

Everything we talk about in the group is confidential – so anything you hear in the group is private and stays inside the group. We don't share information about each other's children or families outside the group – in the playground or on social media.

Why: People will only feel safe with a 100% no-gossiping rule.

2. We share experiences, not advice

The aim of the group is to share experiences and for us to support each other – so feel free to talk about your personal experiences, what's worked for you (and what hasn't worked). That's different from telling other people what to do.

Why: No one wants to feel judged and there isn't one "right answer"

3. We speak one at a time

In the group, everyone's ideas are valued and respected, so we don't talk over each other and we always listen to other parent's ideas (even if we disagree with them). Walking away with something new or valuable insights will involve talking and listening.

Why: Everyone should feel respected and safe to speak

4. Phones and watches on silent (not vibrate)
Every call, alert and notification interrupts the session makes it harder for everyone to focus, including everyone else. And yes – we can all hear the vibration on your phone, even if the ringer is off.

Why: We only have 30 mins – so let's make the most of it!

Any additional rules required?
Encourage a (quick) discussion about whether participants feel that will cover anything or if any additional rules are required.

Gain commitment one last time to the group rules by saying, "Okay, if we're all agreed on the group rules, let's start the session..."

Key question: What is ADHD (5 minutes)

Ask the group to discuss their thoughts, ideas and experiences as to exactly **what** ADHD is. The facilitator makes a note of those ideas on flipchart paper.

- At this point, the aim for the facilitator is not to say whether they feel these are ideas are correct (or not) - the aim is to **provoke discussion.**

Information video (5 minutes)

Play the information video embedded in the PowerPoint. It will talk about what ADHD is (an executive functioning disorder) and why kids with ADHD might then have difficulty accessing some tasks.

Activity (5 minutes)

Ask the group to discuss, given those difficulties with executive functions, what kinds of situations their children will find difficult to access. The facilitator records these on the flipchart paper. If there is time, pick one of the activities and ask: "How does that affect how we now need to plan ahead?"

Summary: (2 minutes)

Talk through the summary slide then thank everyone for coming.

Explain that the next session will focus on managing anger outbursts and meltdowns, and helping kids get on top of strong emotions.

▷ Important: share the date and time for the next session before closing the meeting.

Session #2: Managing anger outbursts



This session focuses on understanding why children with ADHD may experience strong emotions more quickly - and how to handle those outbursts when they happen (through de-escalation, rather than escalation).

Equipment required: flipchart paper and marker pens.

Welcome and check in (3 mins)
Start informally by welcoming everybody to the group.

Discuss purpose of group and rule reminder (2 mins):
Quickly run through the aims of the group and the group rules agreed at the last session.

- If there are any new parents, you may need to go through the group rules in more detail

Introduce the session topic / key question (5 mins):

Explain that this session we're going to focus on managing anger outbursts and strong emotions. The key question is: "What triggers emotional outbursts in children with ADHD?"

Ask the group to discuss the triggers for their individual child - and their personal experiences of attempting to manner those outbursts. Some parents may wish to move on to solutions, but keep them to the activity of identifying triggers for now.

Bring out the points:

- No two children are the same - and their ADHD and triggers will affect them differently
- That the executive function of "self-control" and "self-regulation" discussed in the last session - which act as brakes - may be less effective than in other children.

Information video (5 minutes)

Play the information video embedded in the PowerPoint. It will talk about what why pupils with ADHD find it harder to self-regulate (or use self-control), why parents need to actively regulate for them - and introduces a few basic de-escalation concepts (i.e. get the child calm first **then** try to resolve the issue).

Activity (10 minutes)

Ask the group to discuss, given this information, what they think are the best ways of responding to an anger outburst. Encourage them to explore:

- What will keep the outburst short
- What will prolong it

Reinforce the ideas that:

- Trying to resolve an incident while a child is in an emotional state won't work
- Focus on calming the child first… then deal with the thing that happened
- Being still and being calm are different things. Some children will sit still quickly after an outburst, but on the inside they are still seething.

Additional ideas (3 minutes)

3 additional strategies parents may find useful:

- Proactively coaching their child through calming activities, so they know what to do **before** they are angry. What works for each child will be specific, so find an activity they can direct their child to. Practise this in short bursts, especially if the child finds it difficult to sit still. However, avoid screens, phones and computer games - although they may sit still and look calm on the outside, these actually leave the child more depleted afterwards. Many children find deep breathing or physical exercise helps them manage strong emotions.

- ▷ Where possible, keep an eye on their emotions and don't wait for them to tip over into anger before taking action. When they start to become frustrated or annoyed, distract or direct them to their calming activity straight away.
- ▷ Sit down with your child, and list the triggers for their anger together (e.g. losing at football). In the future, before an activity where they might experience that trigger (e.g. football club), talk about what to do before they experiencing that trigger. For instance, if your team is losing, and there are 5 minutes to go, it might be better to walk away from your football game than experience the trigger (losing) and then having to try to manage your emotions.

Summary: (2 minutes)

Talk through the summary slide then thank everyone for coming.

Explain that the next session will focus on staying focussed on activities and seeing tasks through to the end.

- ▷ Important: share the date and time for the next session before closing the meeting.

Session #3:
Staying focussed on activities



This session focuses on understanding why children with ADHD may difficulties focused on tasks, seeing a task through to completion, or reject some tasks altogether.

Equipment required: flipchart paper and marker pens.

Welcome and check in (3 mins)
Start informally by welcoming everybody to the group.

Discuss purpose of group and rule reminder (2 mins):
Quickly run through the aims of the group and the group rules agreed in the first session.

- If there are any new parents, you may need to go through the group rules in more detail

Introduce the session topic / key question (5 mins):

Explain that this session we're going to focus on helping child manage their attention and see tasks through to the end. It might also explain why their child rejects or refuses to complete some activities.

Ask the group to discuss what household jobs / tasks / activities they find difficult.

Help them explore:

- Is there any pattern to those activities (do they require lots of concentration, sitting still, use of memory)?
- What are their preferences telling you?

Information video (5 minutes)

Play the information video embedded in the PowerPoint. It will talk about what why pupils with ADHD may have difficulties engaging in tasks successfully, or seeing them through to completion.

Activity #1 (5 minutes)

Say you are going to share an activity to shows what it feels like to have difficulties with working memory. Explain that this task is deliberately going to put your parents' working memories under real strain - and there's no shame at all in finding this difficult!

Tell them you are going to read out 6 words. There job is to listen to and remember the 6 words. They are not allowed to:

- ▷ Write the words down
- ▷ Say, whisper or mouth the words after you've said them

Read out the words - read them slowly, one time only: Hedgehog, Zebra, Green, Printer, Apple, Water

Now, working in pairs, ask your parents to say those words out loud in alphabetical order.

(The correct sequence is: Apple, Green, Hedgehog, Printer, Water, Zebra

Explain that:

- ▷ This task involves using your working memory (remembering the words, using alphabetical order, remembering which words have been used and which still need to be put in order)
- ▷ Ask how many people would like to spend 30 or 60 minutes completing an activity that requires that kind of effort on their working memory
- ▷ Children with ADHD find using their working memory requires lots of effort - and this is how simple working memory tasks feel for them

Activity #2 (10 minutes)

Ask the group to discuss how we can support children with ADHD engage with tasks they find difficult - and see them through to the end, without getting 'lost' in the task. Ideally, refer to the list your parents drew up earlier.

Ask them to think about:

- How could they compensate/find workarounds for their child's difficulties with working memory?
- How could they protect them from unnecessary sensory distractions (noises, movement of others, music, TV, screens, objects)?
- How could they support the organisation of the task?

Additional ideas (3 minutes)

4 additional strategies parents may find useful:

- Using simple task or checklists. These break the tasks down into simple steps that the child can follow, supporting with organisation and working memory. Examples of helpful checklists might be getting your bag ready for school or getting dressed in the morning.
- Chunking - breaking a task into smaller chunks, so the child only has to engage in the effortful activity of using their working memory, and managing distractions, for a short time. A timer can be helpful too - so the child can see the finishing the line for the current chunk of work. Follow the chunk with a low-focus activity.
- Research shows that children with ADHD will put off, or become easily bored, by tasks where it isn't clear what they have to do, or what the end goal is. So make sure you've explained clearly the steps involved and the purpose of the task - why it's important.
- After trying their hardest to manage their emotions all day, your child may experience "after school collapse" - this is where child need time to recharge or blow off steam. Don't plan for homework or focussed activities straight after school - give them time to recover.

Summary: (2 minutes)

Talk through the summary slide then thank everyone for coming.

Explain that the next session will focus on how to positively manage behaviour at home. How to give instructions - and how to say ' no' without saying 'no'.

▷ Important: share the date and time for the next session before closing the meeting.

Session #4: Managing behaviour positively



This session focuses on using positive behaviour management for children with ADHD. It will focus on the idea of managing behaviour (rather than 'controlling it') and ways of managing refusal. This session follows a slightly different order to the other sessions.

Equipment required: flipchart paper and marker pens.

Welcome and check in (3 mins)
Start informally by welcoming everybody to the group.

Discuss purpose of group and rule reminder (2 mins):
Quickly run through the aims of the group and the group rules agreed in the first session.

- If there are any new parents, you may need to go through the group rules in more detail

Introduce the session topic / key question (5 mins):

Explain that this session we're going to focus on positive behaviour management. In particular, we going to think about what to do when our child refuses to follow our requests or instructions.

Start with asking: when it comes to our children's behaviour - what's within our control? And what's beyond it.

Help them explore:

- We can't **control** anyone's behaviour - as an adult, we can only **manage** it. This is particularly true for children with additional needs like ADHD.
- We **can** control what we do, what we say and how we say it. And we can control our responses to our child.
- We **can't** control what they do or what they say.

Activity (10 minutes)

Explain that one thing parents of children with ADHD often say is the word "no" results in explosions.

Read out the slide and ask your parents to think about what approaches have been successful for them in the past, and which have been less successful.

Ask them to think about:

- How it feels managing behaviour in public, compared to managing behaviour at home
- In this situation, what's inside their control? And what's beyond it?

Information video (5 minutes)

Play the information video embedded in the PowerPoint. It will give your parents some additional strategies for giving positive instructions and managing refusal (including how to say 'no' without actually saying 'no').

Summary: (2 minutes)

Talk through the summary slide then thank everyone for coming.

Explain that the next session will focus on managing impulsive behaviour.

- Important: share the date and time for the next session before closing the meeting.

Session #5: Managing impulses



This session focuses on helping children with ADHD to regulate their impulses. This session also introduces one way of using positive reward charts to encourage behaviour change.

Equipment required: flipchart paper and marker pens.

Welcome and check in (3 mins)

Start informally by welcoming everybody to the group.

Discuss purpose of group and rule reminder (2 mins):

Quickly run through the aims of the group and the group rules agreed in the first session.

- If there are any new parents, you may need to go through the group rules in more detail

Introduce the session topic / key question (5 mins):

Explain that this session we're going to focus on helping children with ADHD to manage their impulses. We'll look at when they find it hard to do this, and when they can be more successful. We'll also explore strategies for helping them improve.

Start with asking: in what situations does your child find it hard to manage their impulses? And when do they find it easier

Help them explore:

- How the environment can make a difference (how busy the environment is, how noisy or full of sensory distraction)
- How the child's emotional state can impact their ability to regulate their emotions
- How long they are expected to regulate their impulses makes a difference (the longer they activity, the harder it will become)

Information video (5 minutes)

Play the first information video embedded in the PowerPoint. It will explain exactly what we mean by impulse control, why children with ADHD have difficulty managing their impulses, and how with practice our brains can develop and change (the are "plastic," rather than fixed.)

Activity (10 minutes)

Ask the group to discuss, given this information, which strategies (or activities) help children with ADHD improve the way they manage their impulses.

During the discussion, raise the idea that:

- We, as adults, may have to adjust our expectations to take account of the child's difficulties
- The adult needs to assess the difference between chosen behaviour, and behaviour that is out of the child's control, and respond accordingly

Additional ideas (5 minutes)

Play the second information video embedded in the PowerPoint. It will explain one approach to using positive reward charts and simple games to help children to rehearse managing their impulses.

Summary: (2 minutes)

Talk through the summary slide then thank everyone for coming.

Explain that the next session will focus on behaviours around bedtime and sleep.

- Important: share the date and time for the next session before closing the meeting.

Session #6: Bedtimes and sleep



This session focuses on what we can do to help children with ADHD be ready for bed and find it easier to fall asleep.
Equipment required: flipchart paper and marker pens.

Welcome and check in (3 mins)
Start informally by welcoming everybody to the group.

Discuss purpose of group and rule reminder (2 mins):
Quickly run through the aims of the group and the group rules agreed in the first session.

- If there are any new parents, you may need to go through the group rules in more detail

Introduce the session topic / key question (5 mins):

Explain that this session we're going to focus on helping children with ADHD be ready for bed at a reasonable hour and get the sleep they need.

Start with asking: what are their children's experiences around going to bed and falling asleep? Do they find it hard or easy? What time to they get to bed, what time do they fall asleep (two very different things!), and what time do they wake up?

Prompt them to think about:

- How much sleep their child needs (this may be different from how much sleep they are able to access)
- How the environment can make a difference
- How activities leading up to bedtime can prepare us for sleep - or make it more difficult

Information video (5 minutes)

Play the first information video embedded in the PowerPoint. It will explain exactly how much sleep children of different ages actually need, why children with ADHD often have difficulty getting to sleep, and what kind of environment and activities prepare us for sleep (sleep hygiene).

Activity (10 minutes)

Ask the group to discuss, given this information, which strategies or routines may help their child be tired and ready for bed.

During the discussion, explore the ideas that:

- Helping children into new routines may take time
- Their child may be resistant to the new routines - and we need to plan ahead about how we manage that

Additional ideas (3 minutes)

4 specific strategies parents may find useful:

- Limiting the use of phones, tablets and screens one hour before bed. Games and screens are highly stimulating, leaving children in an emotional state where they aren't ready to turn off and go to sleep. Screens also emit something called "blue light" - a form of light that tells your body that's it's daytime and limits the production or melatonin (the sleep chemical). Modes like "night shift" are really gimmicks and don't really do much to limit blue light.
- Create a predictable routine that you follow every night before bedtime. For example, have a shower, talk about what will happen tomorrow, and then enjoy a story together. Following a predictable set of activities trains our bodies to know when to expect sleep - and then start to prepare for it.
- The ADHD mind dislikes doing nothing and is constantly looking for new ideas to work on. An effective strategy can be to get your child to listen to a familiar audiobook on repeat on a set of earbuds, with the volume turned down low. The low volume…

…means the child's brain is having to do so some "work" to pick out the words and follow the story, keeping it occupied - but it isn't stimulated enough to stop the child from falling asleep over time. White noise machines or apps can work in a similar way.

- ▷ Timetable in physical activities in the run up to bedtime, but not in the hour before bedtime. The aim is to use up all that excess energy so they feel tired. But this is different from feeling exhausted!

Summary: (2 minutes)

Talk through the summary slide then thank everyone for coming.

Thank everyone for participating in the sessions and say you hope they've found the time together useful.



Get In Touch

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Help for schools, teachers and families when behaviour gets in the way of success