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# GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS

## *Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)*

Created by:

**Cláudio Pina Fernandes**

*Psychological Support office*

Faculdade de Ciências

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# Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

## What is it?

ADHD is a neurobehavioral disorder. At the neuronal level, the brain is functionally distinct from one without the disorder: there is reduced brain activity in the frontal cortex.

The frontal cortex is responsible for our executive functioning (which includes abilities like self-awareness, attention, inhibition capacity, emotional control, working memory, task prioritization, planning and problem solving). Therefore, this alteration in the brain has repercussions in behavior, especially in the functions described above.

## What are the main challenges for a student with ADHD?

A student with ADHD may experience challenges such as:

1. Frequent **forgetfulness** of the activity being carried out.
  - a. Working memory impairment reduces the ability to retain recent information and keep it until it becomes useful. Therefore, a student with ADHD may easily forget what they were doing at a certain moment.
2. Difficulty in **impulse control**
  - a. A student with ADHD may know what would be the best to do at a given time but behave according to what is immediately gratifying. It is not due to a lack of trying, but due to an impairment in self-control.
3. Difficulty in the **perception of passage of time**
  - a. It is common with students with ADHD to underestimate the duration of a task or even to lose track of time. Put simple, a deadline three months from now is not easily conceptualized: it is either “now” or “not-now”.
4. Difficulty in **focusing** on just one thing
  - a. With ADHD, students may be hypersensitive to stimulus from the environment. This makes it difficult to focus on any task, even though it may be detrimental in terms of creativity. These students may also struggle to switch tasks, becoming “hyper focused” on a specific action. This can be helpful to finish last-minute projects but can represent a disadvantage when task switching is required. Some ADHD students focus on details, others have a broader view, while others switch between the two perspectives without successfully merging them.

## 5. Difficulty in **applying knowledge** or skills

- a. Many times, a student with ADHD may have high scores on intelligence tests but underperform academically. This disparity may be due to the ADHD manifestations (e.g. concentration problems, forgetting necessary information or poor time management). A student with ADHD may be highly engaged and quick to learn, which may indicate good test results to teachers. However, there may be a decline in the students' performance when asked of them to produce an organized, formatted task with a specific deadline.

### **Not everything is what it seems...**

It can be hard to us to imagine ourselves with ADHD, especially because some of these difficulties they face might seem like signs of laziness, procrastination or bad behavior.

It is important to remember that the characteristics we associate with ADHD actually representations of an underlying cause: a true disorder of self-regulation and self-control. The difficulties that a student with ADHD face is not due to a lack of trying, for these challenges are often greater than their ability to manage them.

While imagining someone with ADHD as highly active, extroverted, and can easily make friends, these individuals are sometimes socially and physically mismatched. These lapses in attention, lack of self-control, difficulty in controlling and expressing emotions, and impaired perception of time (which can disrupt the natural rhythm of conversation) can lead to a difficult relationship with others and the world around them. Some motor challenges may also exist, like difficulties with writing or catching a ball.

### **How to help these students learn:**

1. One of the most important elements in teaching students with ADHD is to try to understand how they view the world around them.
2. Consider their difficulties with self-regulation and self-control, which may affect how they establish relationships.
3. Students with ADHD feel safer and protected when they know what to expect. Being clear, precise and predictable provides a sense of structure, helping them be more organized when they know exactly what is expected of them.
4. These students have difficulty expressing their thoughts verbally and on paper, as well as completing tasks in the correct order. Helping them organize their thoughts and develop a

sequence of events in the right order can lead to improvements in academic performance. Waiting for quick answers can be frustrating for both the teacher and the student. Sometimes, it's a matter of managing expectations. For example, if I ask a simple, concrete and obvious question (e.g. is the level of solute A higher or lower than that of solute B?), I might anticipate an immediate answer. However, if I ask a question about a concept or expect an explanation of methodology or sequence, I should expect to have to guide the student through their answer. It's not that the student does not know the answer, but they simply have difficulty organizing and synthesizing information.

5. Considering that it is important for them to understand that things must happen in a certain order, when explaining an assignment, for example, start with a simple overview of what is expected to achieve. Then create a structure with steps, so the students know what should happen in sequence.
6. The use of visual maps, diagrams, or flowcharts is a strategy that tends to be useful to students with ADHD, given that it promotes a more organized approach to processing information.
7. When the student has a specific difficulty, it may be helpful to schedule a dedicated time during office hours. A brief explanation at the end of a lesson, that can be useful to majority of students, may not help those with ADHD.
8. As some students with ADHD have serious difficulty in focusing during a conversation, it is important that the teacher be gentle but firm, to steer the discussion back to the intended focus.
9. Allow students to use time reminders, like alarms or teacher prompts, to improve their perception of time passing.
10. Avoid reiterating the student's difficulty in performing specific tasks like the ones described above.
11. Allow extra time in between tasks or events.
12. Provide extra time to complete tests and assignments.

**For further clarification regarding the student's situation:**

Each school of ULisboa has a unit or person who is in charge of the special education needs of students. Regarding the compensatory measures the student is using or could be used in the future, please contact the relevant unit or colleagues responsible for issues related with Special Educational Needs (NEE). You may also consult the [ULisboa Status for Special Educational Needs](#).

Although some students with ADHD are identified, with a known clinical history and ADHD profile, there may be students who are not identified. In case of doubt reach out to the responsible ULisboa unit or person in your school.

**Sources of information:**

- AADDUK- Adult ADHD: <https://aadduk.org/living-with-adhd/university-college-issues/>
- [https://www.buzzfeed.com/carolinekee/it-is-a-disorder-not-a-decision?utm\\_term=.btP6PBr2X&sub=4094314\\_7516703#.wjyM20V1](https://www.buzzfeed.com/carolinekee/it-is-a-disorder-not-a-decision?utm_term=.btP6PBr2X&sub=4094314_7516703#.wjyM20V1)
- <https://neurodiversitysci.tumblr.com/post/139769513631/adhd-community-philosophium-do-i-have-any>
- [https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Teaching-and-Managing-Students\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Teaching-and-Managing-Students_FINAL.pdf)

**Note:** This text was originally created for the Teaching Resources Centre of the Faculty of Sciences at the University of Lisbon, with the author making some adaptations so that it could be made available at the ULisboa Teaching Resources Centre.