

Coping with ADHD

by Dr. Catherine Lee

Almost every group, at some time, has included a youth who continually tries a leader's patience. It seems as though this young person cannot keep still and has to be doing something with his/her hands and feet all the time. He or she may be restless, fidget, tap their feet, drum their fingers on the floor, roll up the carefully made certificates to blow like a trumpet, pick apart pieces of garbage they have found on the floor, or simply wander off.

It is possible that this child may be suffering from attention-deficit-hyperactivity disorder. ADHD, as it's commonly known, affects at least one child in every class at school. Although some girls have ADHD, it

is much more common in boys. The main symptoms are hyperactivity, impulsivity and inattention. ADHD is NOT caused by: too much sugar, too many food additives, too much TV, too many video games, or by poor parenting. Experts agree that ADHD is a neurobiological disorder.

Unfortunately, there is no known cure for ADHD, but there are effective ways to deal with it - including medication, and the provision of a structured, supportive environment. It is not the child's fault that they are hyperactive, impulsive and inattentive; so just as we would make adjustments to help a hearing impaired or visually impaired youth to participate in our programs, so too we must adjust to the needs of a child with ADHD.

Children with ADHD do best in situations in which they get one-on-one adult attention, in which the activities are novel and interesting, the rules are clear, and where there is an immediate pay-off for good behaviour. On the other hand, they have a harder time in groups, with boring activi-

ties (like waiting), where there is no immediate pay-off for good behaviour or when there is low supervision.

How does ADHD affect Beavers, Cubs, or Scouts?

Hyperactivity

Solemn ceremonies and circle time are when we notice hyperactive behaviour.

Impulsivity

Young people with ADHD have trouble thinking before acting. They say whatever comes into their heads and do not edit out the things that most of us choose to think, but not say. Impulsive youth blurt out the answers without putting up their hands, sometimes before we've even finished the question! They butt in as soon as they need something - they may ask for a special privilege or tell something about their day just as you are explaining a craft. They have trouble waiting their turn and may grab for the first Kub Kar. They may say inappropriate things and may hit out if frustrated.



Solemn occasions can be difficult for kids with ADHD.

Photo: B. Furman

Inattention

Inattention has its effects before the youth even leaves home for the activity. S/he may have a hard time locating all items of the uniform and may forget to bring dues. While a leader is explaining an upcoming activity, the youth does not focus attention, may be distractible and wander away from the group. Inattentive youth have difficulty coming up with a good plan on how to complete a project and may fail to complete activities that were started with great enthusiasm.

Natural reactions to ADHD behaviour

Adults may initially be charmed by the energy, warmth and enthusiasm of a young person with ADHD. All too quickly, that early reaction is replaced by frustration that the child needs so many reminders, and irritation that the child consistently interferes with the smooth completion of carefully planned activities. The other youth in the program may at first be amused at the antics of a youth with ADHD. Later they get frustrated at the youth who seems to keep breaking the rules and who takes up so much adult attention. Youth with ADHD will at first be excited at the prospect of new and stimulating activities, but then may be discouraged that others are irritated with them.

How can participation in Scouting help a child with ADHD?

It may be tempting to think that children with ADHD simply do not belong in the Scouting Movement. There are however, excellent reasons participation in Scouting can help youth with ADHD. These kids do well with structured activities, routines, clear rules, and clear expectations. They thrive on fun, stimulating activities and may welcome activities that are in a different format than school. Scouting offers the opportunity to interact with other children and other adults. The philosophy of *do your best* allows each child to work at his/her own level. Let's not overlook that a youth's participation in Scouting also offers parents of ADHD youth a well-deserved break.

A team approach

To successfully integrate a young person with ADHD into the program requires the cooperation of parents and leaders. Leaders know the program and are responsible to all youth in their colony, pack or troop. Parents are the experts on their child; they know his/her likes and dislikes and can be a valuable source of information on effective ways to help the young person. At the beginning of the year parents and at least one leader should *meet to exchange infor-*

Tips for Games and Crafts

- Have materials ready ahead of time.
- Know all the rules, and clearly repeat them for the group.
- Keep materials out of sight until the game or craft begins.
- Include the child with ADHD in setting things up.
- Carefully monitor the game to make sure rules are followed.
- Keep the game brief.
- Offer compliments at the end of the game: "You were a great sport!"
- Let parents know in advance if the game/craft is going to be messy.
- Give instructions before you hand out material.
- Be prepared that the child with ADHD may make many errors, and go too fast.
- Have the next activity ready promptly.

mation. Parents need to know what is involved in the program and how they can help; leaders need to know more about the child and how they

Messy can be good!



Photo: Scouts Canada Archives

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can help. Throughout the year, parents and leaders need to keep in touch to share information on challenges and triumphs. This can be done informally at the end of meetings.

Leaders

Planning the program

All the regular planning activities you learned about in Woodbadge training become even more important if your group includes a child with ADHD; this allows the program to move smoothly with clear instructions, stimulating activities and little down time. As you plan your program think about activities and outings that may pose a special challenge to a young person who has a tendency to be overactive, impulsive and inattentive. Contact the parents to let them know and ask for their help (e.g. with a tricky craft) or an outing where one-on-one supervision is required.

Running the meeting -

designate a leader to shadow the child

During parts of the meeting, e.g. opening and closing, a complicated craft, explaining rules of a game, a leader standing next to the child can give discreet reminders (hand on the shoulder, whispered warning) that are more effective than a reminder across the circle.

Be good detectives for desirable behaviour

A young person with ADHD will behave better handing out supplies than waiting to receive them. Catch the youth behaving well. Give lots of verbal (*wow you brought your Cub book; you did a great job folding the flag; thanks for helping the Tender-pad*) and nonverbal (thumbs up, high five) rewards for good behaviour. Use the *do your best* standard. The uniform may look scruffy compared to others, but if it's better than last week, it deserves encouragement. Avoid the scorpion strategy—that natural tendency to turn a compliment into a grumble and put a sting in the tail. Tell the young person: *that was great. Don't spoil it by adding - it would have been better if you did it the first time, how come you can't always do that, maybe now you'll try harder.*

Rules and reminders

All leaders should agree on clear rules that apply to everyone. Rules should be stated positively: *we walk in the hallway; we raise our hands if we want to say something in the circle.* When you give directions, make sure you have the child's attention and that s/he is looking at you. If necessary ask him/her to repeat back what you said. Natural consequences are fair and easy to apply: *if you want*

to do this, you have to listen; set your equipment out and go step by step; if you do not listen to the instructions, you cannot do the activity.

Leaders must recognize that a youth with ADHD needs more reminders than other youth do. Reminders should be given when you are calm; if you let things get out of hand, it will be harder for the youth to settle down and harder for you to keep calm – tolerance of misbehaviour does not help. It is important to keep track of your own and other leaders' frustration levels; be prepared to take or give a break.

Time-out

- 1) For mild disruptive behaviour give a warning: *if you keep chatting when I am talking, you will need to sit on the bench;*
- 2) If no response, send to time-out: *go sit on the bench for 2 minutes;*
- 3) For any aggressive behaviour, send immediately to time-out: *you shoved another Cub, go to time-out;*
- 4) Time-out starts when the Cub is quiet on the bench: *your time-out starts when you are quiet on the bench, the more you argue, the longer it will take;*
- 5) At the end of time-out, tell youth to come back and repeat the rule, do not lecture: *you may come back to the circle, remember, you have to sit quietly.*

BUSY IS GOOD TOO!

If you have a child with ADHD, try including craft ideas that will keep them busy, and will look terrific when finished!

Knight Tunics

Leaders can cut arm and neck holes out of pillow cases: each youth draws their coat of arms on the pillow case in wax crayon. Then they line up to have the leader iron over the design using parchment.

Decorated Logs

Leaders provide split logs, sprinkles, pine cones, spray paint, and other odds and ends. Youth will have a great time busily decorating their own logs!



There's nothing like outdoor activity for letting off steam.

Photo: Bonnie Phillips

In extreme cases, it may be necessary to send the child home if s/he does not respond. With special outings, advise parents that the child may participate as long as his/her behaviour is appropriate, but that the parent must be available to pick the child up if it is not.

Parents

Prepare for the Meeting

Parents can help by enabling the youth to plan for the meeting. A routine is particularly helpful. The day before the meeting, the parent can help the youth to set out all s/he will need (e.g. uniform, book, dues). Parents need to be good detectives, noticing the youth taking responsibility and complimenting him/her for getting ready and having things prepared. It is important that youth with ADHD arrive on time as this helps them to participate more easily. Youth with ADHD who arrive late may have a harder time than other youth in quietly joining an ongoing activity. Parents can also remind their child of special activities (*e.g. tomorrow at Cubs there will be a visitor who is a wheelchair athlete; you'll need to sit quietly while he is talking; do you have any questions to ask him? Remember, you'll need to put up your hand when you want to talk*).

After the Meeting

All parents should arrange to pick their child up on time. Parents of a youth with ADHD can also check quickly with a leader how the meeting went. On the way home, parents should ask about the activities, making sure they receive from the child any forms, newsletters or special requirements for upcoming meetings. The drive home is an opportunity to compliment the young person on ac-



Photo: Scouts Canada Archives

Sometimes, you just need a little time to yourself.

complishments, new songs and games learned, crafts completed, badges and awards earned, or cooperative behaviour during a meeting. The young person is likely to be quite excited and tired after the meeting and may need extra supervision in putting the uniform away in the proper place.

Being on-call

Even though parents may see the program as a welcome break from the intense demands of caring for their child with ADHD, they should be encouraged to accompany the group for some activities or outings. Parents should also agree to be available to pick up their child if his/her

behaviour at a meeting is too disruptive. This means, of course, that parents should supply a phone number at which they can be reached.

Badge requirements

All Cubs require some help from their parents to complete badge requirements. Youth with ADHD require more help than most. Parents can also discuss with leaders how some requirements may be adjusted to their child's special needs. ^

ADHD information

Surf to: www.help4ADHD.org
- Dr. Catherine Lee is a professor in the School of Psychology at the University of Ottawa.

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Recruit, Retain, and Relax!

*- How to increase
your membership
and have fun at
the same time.*

by Joe Carroll, National Program Services Committee

There has been much debate over the issue of our declining numbers and we have seen many changes both great and small as a result. In "Measuring Success", an article by the Executive Commissioner & CEO of Scouts Canada, Rob Stewart, it stated, "We are convinced there are hundreds, if not thousands of young people who want to join our Movement. The key element impeding their involvement is the diminishing number of adults available to provide leadership."

I could, as I am sure most Scouters could, discuss at great length what I feel has caused our decline in numbers. This would give me a wonderful opportunity to vent my concern and frustration but would do nothing to try to address the problem. Whatever each individual leader believes to be the problems and solutions, I believe that most of us agree that we need to improve in both recruiting and retaining leaders. The remainder of this article will be focused on sharing some ideas and suggestions on how we might work toward achieving this goal.

I have listened to many Scouters try to explain why they became involved in Scouting and why some of them decided to stay. These responses usually focused on having a son or daughter in the Movement, past experiences as a youth member themselves, having a friend in a group, etc.

Many Scouters have difficulty explaining why they stay in the Movement, especially after their own children are no longer involved. Very few leaders will talk of high ideals or lofty goals. In fact, most will speak

of their own children, special outings, a memorable youth, friends they have made, events that they have been involved with, etc. All of these express the notion that these leaders were having fun and felt a sense of accomplishment as a result of being involved in Scouting.

A fellow Scouter in the 1st Paradise Group, NL, explained his method of recruiting and retaining. After identifying a potential leader from having parents participate as volunteers at a variety of activities, he would ask them to get involved as a uniformed leader. He would continue to approach them and would relent by saying, "Try being a leader with us for awhile. I'll leave you alone when you tell me that you aren't having fun anymore". Leaders become involved for a variety of reasons but they leave when they stop having fun!

Recruiting Leaders

- Involve parents by directly asking them, then ensure that they do not simply attend as spectators. Make them feel useful.
- Carefully observe parents at these events to see how they interact with the youth members, other parents and members of the leadership team.
- Plan events that include entire families; e.g. family fun days, picnics, easy hikes, family fishing days, etc.
- Accept whatever help a parent can offer. Often parents will become more involved after they have had positive, fun-filled experiences with a group.



A great leader will always lend a helping hand.

Photo: Sarah Graham Lead photo: Scouts Canada Archives