

Every Child Can Learn Podcast Episode 4: ADD & ADHD

- **Intro**

Glades: You are listening to the Every Child Can Learn podcast. The podcast is offered to you by Backup Uganda and Brainstud. You can listen to our podcast online on our website, www.backupuganda.org, and if you are in Gulu, you can pick up the audios offline from Mega FM, Divine Video & Music Library, Highland Primary School, Gulu Prison Primary School, Gulu Town Primary School, Mary Immaculate Primary School, St Joseph's Primary School, or Christ the King Demonstration Primary School. Do you like our podcast? Feel free to share it with your family, friends and neighbors! The more people learn about learning difficulties, the better we can help our children!

- **Episode intro**

Glades: Welcome to the fourth episode of Every Child Can Learn, a podcast series about how to meet every child's learning needs - even if they are a little more complicated.

My name is Glades and I work as the Lead Trainer at Backup Uganda. Today, I am joined by Joan. Joan, please introduce yourself?

Joan: Thanks Glades. My name is Joan and I work at Backup Uganda as a trainee. In today's fourth episode of Every Child Can Learn, we will be taking you through yet another learning difficulty specifically known as ADHD. Today, we actually have 2 related difficulties: we will include ADD as well. Do not let the abbreviations scare you, because they will keep coming back in the whole episode, meaning at the end of it all, you will be able to understand them very well. After listening to this episode, we shall be able to answer ourselves, whether our children might fall in this category or not. I know this is a common difficulty that many families experience with their children.

- **Recap on the previous episode**

Glades: In the previous episode, we discussed in detail one of the learning difficulties called dyscalculia, which has everything to do with numeracy and mathematics. We shared how you can help your child if he or she is facing this condition. I am not going to go into the details of that right now, because I hope our listeners are following us very well. If you have not listened to the previous episode, you can still find it online on our website, www.backupuganda.org, and offline at Mega FM, Divine Video & Music Library, Highland Primary School, Gulu Prison Primary School, Gulu Town Primary School, Mary Immaculate Primary School, St Joseph's Primary School, or Christ the King Demonstration Primary School.

In today's episode, we will talk about what ADHD and ADD are all about, their characteristics, causes and how best we can help our children if they are experiencing this. So, let's get to the real deal.

- **Topic: ADHD**

Joan: ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, which generally means that a child can show 3 specific symptoms:

1. They can be having trouble with their concentration - the attention deficit part
2. They can be overly active - which is the hyperactivity part
3. And they can be impulsive, which basically means they act first and think later.

Most children with ADHD show all three of these symptoms, but some only show the hyperactivity and the impulsivity - they do not really have challenges with their concentration.

Then we also have ADD, which stands for Attention Deficit Disorder. Just like with ADHD, children with ADD have difficulty in their concentration, which can make them seem forgetful, distracted and disorganized. However, they are not hyperactive or impulsive, they specifically have a challenge in staying attentive. We will talk more about the examples of these symptoms in a couple of minutes.

Let's keep it at the back of our minds that not every stubborn child has this condition. Some children just show challenging behavior, which could include some of these characteristics we mentioned, but they can learn how to improve immediately when you correct them. They have different reasons for showing this behavior. For example, a child who is much more interested in talking to the neighbour in class than paying attention to the teacher, could be reminded to shift their attention back to the lesson without much trouble. Children with ADD or ADHD, when they know they need to improve on specific things, they have to first learn how to control it, it will take them a lot more effort than most children. I know someone is going to say, but how? Good question, this is why we are here to help you understand that part.

In the first episode, if you have been following us, we mentioned different names that sometimes we use to call these children. For example: that child is big-headed, cursed, lazy, slow, among others. I hope by now you have known these names don't add anything supportive to these children, but rather demotivate them from learning and trying instead. So, why don't we think of alternative ways of how we can help them learn to deal with their difficulties and their behaviour, both at school and at home.

- **Characteristics**

Glades: Now let's look at the details of these specific symptoms that you find in children with ADD or ADHD. Remember, the three main symptoms are hyperactivity, impulsivity and inattentiveness. Let's get started with understanding them one by one:

Hyperactivity means being overly active or constantly doing an activity. For example, these children often leave their seat in the classroom when they are expected to remain seated, they often run around even when the teacher is teaching, they talk non-stop when they are supposed to be quiet, they are always on the move but they don't really have a goal of going anywhere - when you ask them where they are going, they normally have no response. Are these behaviours new in your ears? I hope not, we have many of these children with us. They are found both in school and at home, they can sometimes annoy you and we understand how that feels, especially when you are not sure where this behavior is coming from. Before we look at how best we can help them, let's continue with other symptoms first, then we get to the practical tips later.

Joan: Other than hyperactivity, we have what we call **impulsivity**, which means basically doing things without thinking first. For example, children who show this say whatever comes to their mind, they can blurt out answers before the teacher has even completed a question. As a parent, you may be saying something and before you finish, your child has already mentioned something very different. They are children who always intrude on conversations, whether they know the topic being discussed or not, they say what comes to their mind. Do we have these children with us? I know it's a yes. So what do we normally do to deal with this? If you have used punishments, for example, has that helped the child change? Let's think about it. After this episode, you will have seen more ideas for what you could do.

Glades: The third and last symptom is **inattentiveness**. This is where children are not able to concentrate or pay attention for a longer period of time, for example for even 30 minutes. They easily lose focus, they have what we call a short concentration span. They easily get distracted by whatever happens around them, for example any slight movement or busy environment: let's say the classroom is near the roadside. Any activity happening outside, definitely distracts them from learning. Or let's say the teacher is teaching for 30 minutes - in 5 minutes, this child's attention would have been taken somewhere else. Or say the parent is having a meeting with them and takes 15 minutes talking to this child - in just a few minutes, the attention is gone, maybe because their brother came home and started doing things in the sitting room. Of course this is something that the majority of us experience, if there is noise outside, you can't give your attention to other things. Just like if you talk for 30 or 40 minutes and what you are saying is boring or does not make sense, in the course of your talking, my mind will move out or I will leave the meeting or teaching. Will that mean I have ADD or ADHD? I think not. Now to a child who experiences this symptom all the time, it's a different story. They will get distracted by even the smallest interruptions, even their own thoughts, and they will find it difficult to go back to the task they were doing. Instead, their mind gets taken up by this thing that distracted them.

Seeing one or two of the symptoms we have just explained in a child, doesn't automatically mean this child has ADD or ADHD. We all have a little extra energy sometimes, and we all get distracted every now and then too. If it keeps happening and it is preventing a child from

learning and functioning well, it will be important to take this child for further assessment to find out whether they are dealing with one of these specific disorders.

Let's listen to someone's personal experience of living with ADHD:

Julia: Hi, my name is Julia and I have ADHD. I was diagnosed when I was 13 years old. In school I had trouble concentrating in class and it had a bad effect on my grades. It was also difficult to do my homework, because most of the time I was distracted by something else. In high school, but also now at work, it helps me to provide structure in my day and in my week. For example, I really love 'to do lists', because it's very clear for me all of the things that I have to do this day or this week and it makes sure I don't forget anything. Some other thing that really helps me is working in a room that's very quiet, because I'm easily distracted. That's why I was always allowed to learn outside of the classroom if I felt it was too loud with people or noises around me. My ADHD has never been a big, big problem for me with all the help around me like my parents, teachers, friends. I think I turned out pretty good. My school career never has been an easy road, but with the good and supportive people around me, I got my diploma. My tip for you is to believe in people who are suffering with ADHD. Most of the time, they could be very insecure about themselves. You can make a big difference by believing in them, showing and telling that you believe in them. It doesn't take a lot, but you can make a difference.

- **Causes**

Joan: Just like for other learning difficulties, the main cause of ADHD and ADD lies in the brain. In this case, it mostly has to do with the front part of the brain in particular. This front part of your brain receives all the signals of what is happening around you, and then it sends the signals to the rest of your brain to decide how to respond. For someone with ADHD or ADD, those signals are always not constant - they have what we'd call an Umeme problem. Let's take a look at Umeme that supplies power through all its electricity wires: if one wire happens to break down, it will automatically lose power. If there is a lot of wind and the wires keep swinging back and forth, power may go on and off repeatedly. That is more or less what happens with the connection between the front part of the brain and the rest of the brain for someone with ADHD or ADD: that connection is not stable, and that influences how this person reacts to what happens around him or her.

When your brain is still developing, this problem can start for several reasons, because there is a lot that happens from when you are conceived to when you grow up. First of all, just like with all other learning difficulties, you can inherit it from your parents, grandparents, or even your great-grandparents. That means the likelihood that you develop ADD or ADHD is with you from the day one in the womb. Then, we talked about other causes in the previous episodes as well. Anything that a mother does during pregnancy that affects the brain and how it works, it could eventually lead to a learning difficulty in a child. Examples are drinking alcohol, using harmful medication, even getting into an accident. The environment in which a child grows up may not

cause ADD or ADHD, but it can definitely make it worse or better. That is why it is key to identify it early, so that as a parent, you can make sure you can be as supportive as possible.

- **How we can help at home and at school**

Glades: Let's start with a couple ideas for how to help children with ADD and ADHD at school specifically. Since we know that children with ADHD in particular like moving around a lot, as a teacher, you can create opportunities that will help control the movement of these children. Like giving them responsibilities to distribute books in class, cleaning the chalkboard, or being a class leader. Of course this has to come with monitoring from the teacher, since they may end up taking advantage of these opportunities, but it can be a way to channel their hyperactivity.

Other things you could try as a teacher are, for example:

- change the child's seating position in the classroom to make sure there is minimal distraction,
- create a quiet learning environment
- give extra exercises that would occupy them instead of disrupting others
- agree on a secret hand signal that you show them when they are losing their concentration - to make sure you don't have to keep repeating their name.
- and encourage breaks when teaching.

We usually address a lot of these examples in the workshops we do with our partner schools.

We believe teachers have these children in their classes and you are doing your best to try and help them in one way or the other. Has it ever crossed your mind that they didn't choose whatever difficulty they are dealing with? Therefore, their teachers need to understand them and learn how to help them in managing their behaviour. It may be challenging and tiresome, but when you get to understand the different learning difficulties, how to recognize them and help, then you will change the way you teach and at the same time put a smile on the faces of these learners with learning difficulties.

Joan: From home, there is still a lot you could try as a parent or caregiver. Actually, if you are a teacher, please do not stop listening here, many of these tips are useful for your classroom as well. To begin with, we could focus more on how we communicate to our children, depending on the activities we give them. For example, having a daily schedule for them could be something that is helpful to these children more than simply giving them a number of tasks that at the end of it all, they forget to do. You can help your child by keeping the day organized, having activities happen in the same order on most days or have specific things happen at specific times, like meals. If you can, you could even write down a simple schedule in the morning. This is quite helpful in the classroom as well. As the day goes by, you can remind them about the tasks they were meant to do, and as well appreciate them for the effort they have put into their work, regardless of how well they have done it. That does not mean you should not correct them if they have made a mistake, but by praising their efforts at the same time, you let them know that what they do is valued. When you shout at these children when talking, or cane them for their

mistakes, trust me, you wouldn't have helped them solve their problem. They do not choose to behave the way they are behaving. Instead, we need to help them learn how to deal with the situation.

It is also very helpful to have them take breaks in between tasks, or even in the middle of a task, if it requires a lot of focus and the child is struggling to keep their mind on the task. This helps them release some of the urge to be very active, and prepare them for the next task. For example, if they are doing their homework, let them take a 5-minute break after every 15 minutes of reading. What is most important here, is that not every child with ADD or ADHD is the same, you will have to tailor your approach to your individual child. Some cases are more severe or more complex than others.

Glades: Then, give your child instructions step by step. For example, do not give a child so many tasks at a go, like, wash the dishes, sweep the compound, fetch water, bathe the baby, go to the market, collect firewood. Rather, it would be easy for them if their parent told them in this way: first wash the plates, then when the child is done with that task, you give them another task to do. It makes it easy for them to understand what is expected of them, and you can repeat it if necessary. This may happen sometimes with someone without ADD or ADHD as well: if you give them many tasks verbally, don't expect them to have mastered everything off head, although some have that strong memory to remember. For a child with ADD or ADHD, there are high chances that they will forget some of what you have asked, because they easily get distracted and switch their mind to something else.

It can also help to allow your child to do their homework in environments with less distraction. You can provide for them a more conducive environment that is quiet and has no interruptions, like doing their homework in their room, or in the sitting room when the TV or radio is off. In a noisier area, some of us may be able to do this, but it is definitely challenging, and for a child with ADD or ADHD, it is almost impossible.

Other ways of helping these children while at home is through continuously building their confidence, motivating them, correcting them in a friendly way, providing love and care and being patient with them. I believe we are familiar with these examples now, because we have gone through them in our previous episodes where most of them have been explained in details. When we look at children with learning difficulties, you find that some of the different ways of helping them almost work for all the learning difficulties. Motivation, love, patience et cetera will help them have a feeling of excitement about learning and at the same time learn to deal with their conditions as well.

Lastly, ADD and ADHD are some of the few learning difficulties that could be addressed with a specific type of medication. It is important to know that this medication will not make the condition go away, it just helps reduce the symptoms. For example, it can help a child with ADD

or ADHD concentrate on their work better, or control their impulsive behavior more. This is not something you should start experimenting with on your own. It always has to be prescribed by a psychologist or psychiatrist, in particular someone who is specialized in such disorders. The medication does often come with side effects, and people who take it sometimes complain that they do not so much feel like themselves anymore. It can be quite dangerous to take it when you do not have ADD or ADHD, and it is risky to get the dosage wrong, so please, always first seek guidance from a specialist before you consider this option.

- **Closing**

Glades: Thank you for listening to our 4th podcast discussing how every child can learn, where we do our best to help you understand the different learning difficulties and how they can be managed well. We hope you keep track of our next episodes to get all the details on these difficulties one by one. In the next episode, we will be talking about autism, which has everything to do with social interactions and communication, so make sure you don't miss it. See you there!

- **Outro**

Glades: Thank you for listening to Every Child Can Learn. Please share your thoughts with us! Join the conversation on Facebook or send your questions to 0772630078. Do you want to learn more about Backup Uganda and stay updated about our activities? Check our website on www.backupuganda.org and follow us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn.