

UnderstandingZoe

How to Understand and Support Your ADHDer

A practical, neuroaffirming guide for
parents navigating ADHD with
confidence, compassion, and the right strategies.

If you're here, you're already doing something powerful.

You're learning. You're seeking out better ways to understand your child. And that matters more than you know.

ADHD is one of the most common neurodivergent profiles in children and adults. It shapes how your child thinks, feels, moves, and connects with the world around them. It also comes with extraordinary strengths: creativity, energy, passion, out-of-the-box thinking, and the ability to hyperfocus on things that light them up.

But let's be honest. Parenting an ADHDer in systems that weren't designed for their brain can feel relentless. The school emails. The morning battles. The feeling that nothing you try sticks for more than a week. The exhaustion of being your child's external brain, translator, and advocate all at once.

In Australia's largest independent study of neurodivergent families (1,091 parents), Understanding Zoe found that parents of neurodivergent children spend an average of **33 hours per week** on caregiving. That's not a hobby. That's a second full-time role.

This guide is designed to help. Inside, you will find clear explanations of how ADHD works, practical strategies for home and school, advocacy scripts you can actually use, and the research that validates everything you have been feeling.

We use **neuroaffirming language** throughout this guide. That means we talk about ADHD as a difference, not a deficit. We say your child *is* ADHD or *is an ADHDer*, not that they "have" ADHD, because neurodivergence is part of who they are, not something separate from them. And we focus on strengths first, always.

A note on personalisation

This is a high-level guide. It does not replace personalised advice from qualified professionals. We know that intersectionality is huge: your child's experience of ADHD is shaped by their culture, gender, co-occurring profiles, family context, and so much more. Every child is unique, and a one-size-fits-all approach will never be enough. That is exactly why Understanding Zoe exists. Our AI coach Pip provides personalised, neuroaffirming guidance tailored to your child's specific profile when you use the app. This guide is a starting point. Pip is your ongoing partner.

You are not failing. You are parenting in hard mode, in systems that have not caught up yet. This guide is one step toward changing that.

1 What is ADHD?

ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) is a neurodevelopmental difference that affects how the brain manages attention, impulse, energy, and emotion. Despite the name, ADHD is not about a "deficit" of attention. ADHDers often have plenty of attention; the difference is in how it is regulated.

ADHD shows up differently in every person, but it generally presents in three ways:

Predominantly Inattentive

Difficulty sustaining focus on tasks that are not intrinsically motivating, trouble with organisation, forgetfulness in daily activities, and being easily sidetracked. This presentation is often missed in children (particularly girls) because it looks like daydreaming rather than disruption.

Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive

Restlessness, difficulty sitting still, talking more than peers, acting before thinking, and a constant need for movement or stimulation. In younger children, this often shows up as physical energy. In older children and adults, it may look like mental restlessness or impulsive decision-making.

Combined Presentation

A mix of both inattentive and hyperactive-impulsive traits. This is the most commonly identified presentation. It can shift over time as the brain develops and as a child's environment changes.

ADHD Strengths

The same brain wiring that creates challenges also produces remarkable gifts. ADHDers are often:

Highly creative • Energetic and enthusiastic • Innovative thinkers • Capable of intense hyperfocus • Deeply empathetic • Natural problem-solvers • Spontaneous and fun • Strong pattern recognisers

When we focus only on what is hard about ADHD, we miss what is extraordinary. Your child's brain is not broken. It is wired for a different kind of brilliance.

2 Understanding Executive Function

Executive function is the brain's air traffic control system. It manages working memory, flexible thinking, impulse control, emotional regulation, task initiation, organisation, and time awareness. For ADHDers, this system works differently.

When professionals mention "executive function," here is what it actually means in your child's daily life:

Working Memory

Your child hears the instruction but it is gone by the time they reach the next room. This is not ignoring you. This is how working memory differences show up.

Time Awareness

"Five more minutes" genuinely feels different in an ADHD brain. Time blindness means your child is not being defiant when they lose track of time; their internal clock works differently.

Task Initiation

They are not lazy. Starting a task requires the brain to sequence steps, estimate effort, and manage the discomfort of beginning. For ADHDers, this process takes significantly more energy.

Emotional Regulation

Big reactions to small triggers are not drama. The ADHD brain processes emotions more intensely and has less access to the "pause" that neurotypical brains use to moderate responses.

■ REFRAME IT

Every executive function challenge has a strength on the other side. The same wiring that makes task-switching hard also creates remarkable hyperfocus. The emotional intensity that leads to meltdowns also produces deep empathy and passion. Understanding this changes how you see your child, and how they see themselves.

3 Phrases to Rethink

Language shapes how we see our children, and how they see themselves. Small shifts in how we talk about ADHD can make a real difference in your child's sense of belonging and self-worth.

Instead of: "You're not listening"



Try: "Let me get your attention first, then I'll share what I need"

Instead of: "Why can't you just sit still?"



Try: "Your body needs to move. Let's find a way that works here"

Instead of: "You're so disorganised"



Try: "Let's build a system together that works for your brain"

Instead of: "Stop overreacting"



Try: "I can see you're feeling this really strongly. That makes sense"

Instead of: "They have ADHD"



Try: "They are ADHD" or "They're an ADHDer"

Instead of: "Suffers from ADHD"



Try: "Is neurodivergent" or "Has an ADHD brain"

Why identity-first language matters

When we say someone "has" ADHD, it subtly frames neurodivergence as something separate, something added on. Identity-first language ("is ADHD," "is an ADHDer") recognises that ADHD is part of how your child's brain works. It is not a disease they caught; it is a core part of who they are. Many neurodivergent adults and advocates prefer this framing because it supports pride and belonging rather than pathology.

Common Misconceptions

Myth: "ADHD means they can't focus"

Reality: ADHDers can focus intensely, especially on topics they are passionate about. The challenge is directing and regulating focus, not an absence of it.

Myth: "They'll grow out of it"

Reality: ADHD is a lifelong neurological difference. Presentation may shift with age, but the brain wiring remains. Early understanding builds lifelong self-advocacy.

4

Home Strategies That Work WITH the ADHD Brain

Most parenting strategies are designed for neurotypical executive function. Here are approaches that work with your child's brain, not against it.

Morning Routine Support

Instead of a list of tasks to remember, externalise the routine. Create a visual sequence (pictures for younger children, a whiteboard checklist for older ones) that lives in the same spot every day. The goal is to move the plan out of your child's working memory and into their environment.

■ TRY THIS

Pair each step with a sensory anchor. Brushing teeth happens when the playlist starts. Getting dressed happens after they feel the cold floor (shoes are the last step before leaving their room). Routine becomes body-based, not brain-based.

Homework and After-School Support

The after-school transition matters more than the homework itself. ADHDers need decompression before they can access learning again. Build in a 20 to 30 minute "landing zone" when they get home: movement, snacks, low-demand activity. Then approach homework with a body double (you nearby, working on your own task) and a visual timer so the task has a visible end point.

The 2-Minute Rule for ADHDers

If any homework step takes less than two minutes, do it first. Crossing items off early creates momentum and dopamine that carries through harder tasks. ADHD brains struggle most with task initiation, so shrinking the first step makes everything that follows more accessible.

Bedtime Wind-Down

Stimulant brains struggle with the transition to rest. Reduce sensory input gradually in the 45 minutes before bed. Dim lights, lower voices, offer a predictable sequence. Some ADHDers regulate better with gentle background noise (white noise, audiobooks) rather than silence, which can feel activating for a brain that craves input.

■ TRY THIS

Instead of saying "it's bedtime," try: "In 10 minutes, we start our wind-down." Use a visual timer. Give a 5-minute warning. Then begin a sensory sequence: warm shower, dim lights, audiobook or soft music. Predictability is the scaffold; their body learns the cues over time.

5 Navigating School with Confidence

School is where most parents feel the most alone. Here are tools to help you advocate with confidence.

Starting the Conversation: An Email Template

Subject: Supporting [Child's name] at school

Hi [Teacher's name],

Thank you for everything you do for [Child's name]. I wanted to share some information that might be helpful as you get to know how they learn best.

[Child's name] is ADHD, which means their brain processes information, time, and emotional input a bit differently. Some things that tend to help them in learning environments include: [list 2 to 3 specific things, e.g., "written instructions alongside verbal ones," "movement breaks between tasks," "sitting closer to where instructions are given"].

I would love to find a time to chat briefly so we can work together on what supports look like in the classroom. I am happy to share some resources if that would be helpful.

Warm regards,
[Your name]

What to Ask For: Accommodation Ideas by Age

PRIMARY SCHOOL (AGES 5-12)	HIGH SCHOOL (AGES 13-18)
Preferential seating near the teacher, away from high-traffic areas	Printed or digital copies of class notes or key points
Written instructions alongside verbal directions	Permission to use noise-cancelling headphones during independent work
Movement breaks built into the day (as a need, not a reward)	Flexible deadlines with advance notice
Extended time for task transitions	A nominated support person for regular check-ins
A quiet space for when sensory input becomes overwhelming	Modified assessment conditions (extra time, separate room)
Check-ins at the start of tasks to confirm understanding	Understanding that inconsistent performance is an ADHD pattern, not a motivation issue

When School Frames ADHD as a Behaviour Problem

When a teacher says "they just need to try harder" or "they're choosing not to focus," it helps to redirect with calm, specific language:

SCRIPT: REDIRECTING BEHAVIOUR FRAMING

"I understand it looks that way, and I appreciate you wanting the best for them. What we know about ADHD is that the difficulty is not willpower; it is the brain's ability to regulate attention and impulse in the moment. When [Child's name] struggles to focus, that is the ADHD showing up, not a choice. Can we talk about what environmental supports might help them access their focus more easily?"

SCRIPT: REQUESTING A MEETING

"I would like to set up a time to talk about how we can best support [Child's name] together. I have some information about how ADHD affects their learning, and I would love to hear what you're noticing in the classroom so we can align on strategies."

6

Building Your Child's Support Team

Raising an ADHDer often means becoming the bridge between every professional, teacher, and family member in your child's life. Our research found that parents dedicate **10.5 hours per week** to emotional regulation, advocacy, and administration alone. You are essentially doing a second job, and most of it is invisible.

Building a support team that actually communicates can reduce that load. Here is how to start:

Identify your core team

Your child's classroom teacher, any specialist teachers or support staff, your GP, allied health professionals (OT, psychologist, speech therapist), and key family members or carers involved in daily life.

Create a one-page child profile

A single document capturing: your child's strengths, what they find challenging, what helps them, what does not help, and current strategies that are working. Share this with every new professional. It saves you from repeating the story and ensures everyone starts with the same understanding.

Set a communication rhythm

Even brief, regular check-ins (a fortnightly email or a five-minute chat at pick-up) create continuity. Where possible, ask professionals to communicate with each other directly, not just through you.

7 You're Not Alone (and You're Not Failing)

If reading this guide has made you feel seen for the first time, you are not alone in that feeling.

In Australia's largest independent study of neurodivergent families, Understanding Zoe surveyed 1,091 parents and found:

33 hrs

per week spent on caregiving support

64%

regularly feel exhausted and overwhelmed

78%

feel their experience is misunderstood or invisible

63%

of parents of ND children are neurodivergent themselves

These numbers confirm what you already know: this is hard, invisible, essential work. And it is not sustainable without support.

Understanding Zoe exists because we have lived this. Our founder started this company after her daughter Zoe was assessed with autism and ADHD, and she could not find the help her family needed. Today, our platform provides the tools we wish we had had from the start.

Ready for ongoing, personalised support?

Our AI coach **Pip** provides neuroaffirming, ADHD-specific strategies tailored to your child's unique profile. Our **Care Village** connects your child's entire support team. And our **Knowledge Base** holds the evidence-informed resources you need, whenever you need them.

Every child is different. That is why personalised support matters. Intersectionality, co-occurring profiles, cultural context, and family dynamics all shape your child's experience. Pip meets you where you are.

Start your free 30-day trial. No credit card required.

Start your free trial at understandingzoe.com

**You have already taken a powerful step by seeking out this guide.
Let us help you carry the rest.**

Recommended Resources

Continue your learning with these trusted, neuroaffirming resources.

Books

The Amazingly Disorganised Help Dictionary by Georgia Productions

A practical guide with stories and tips to help children with hyperactivity and distractibility see their strengths.

Neurodivergence Skills Workbook for Autism and ADHD by Monique Mitchelson & Jennifer Kemp

Exercises for executive function, emotional regulation, and sensory integration suitable for school-aged children.

- **Different, Not Less** by Chloe Hayden
- **We're All Neurodiverse** by Sonny Jane Wise
- **Self-Reg: How to Help Your Child (and You) Break the Stress Cycle and Successfully Engage with Life** by Dr Stuart Shanker
- **Unconditional Parenting: Moving from Rewards and Punishments to Love and Reason** by Alfie Kohn
- **Learning Outside The Lines: Two Ivy League Students With Learning Disabilities And ADHD Give You The Tools For Academic Success and Educational Revolution** by Johnathan Mooney

Understanding Zoe Research

The Hidden Realities of Family Life and Neurodiversity

Our 2025 white paper based on 1,091 families. Download free at understandingzoe.com/research

Support Services (Australia)

Lifeline: 13 11 14 (24/7 phone and text support)

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636

Carer Gateway: 1800 422 737

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