



Image created by Rosmarie Voegtli.

Tools for Schools: Development and early testing of a school-based toolkit for children with traits of ADHD

Information Sheet for Headteachers Version 4 January 2022

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Thank you for showing an interest in this research, focused on early testing of a toolkit of behavioural strategies and adjustments that will improve the school experience of students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and those with traits of hyperactivity, impulsivity or inattention that are causing impairment at school.

Please read this information leaflet carefully before deciding whether you would like your school to participate. If you decide to participate, we thank you. If you choose not to, there is no disadvantage to you or your school, and we thank you for considering our project.



Background

Every classroom has (on average) at least one child who will struggle to sit still, pay attention and resist impulses to do things like jumping out of their seat. When these problems are significant enough, this can be diagnosed as ADHD. Often, these children face major difficulties at home and in school - being less likely to learn well and make good friendships than other children. They are also more likely to have accidents and other mental health problems.

As you probably know, teaching a child with ADHD can be difficult in any school setting and can impact the learning of other children and increase teacher burden and stress. Strategies are needed to help teachers support their students, but current advice is often complicated and suggest teachers try multiple things at once. Moreover, no child is the same. This can lead to teachers struggling to develop the right intervention for the child. This toolkit aims to overcome these difficulties by being an easy-to-use flexible resource that can be tailored to each child.

Aim of this research study

The toolkit, which has been developed alongside experts, teachers, and parents, includes a range of strategies (organised within “modules”) that educators, parents and pupils can use to ensure that students with traits of ADHD have a better primary school experience.

The aim of this current step of the study is to refine and assess the feasibility and practicality of this toolkit for use in primary schools (not to “treat” ADHD as the toolkit is currently a prototype). If the toolkit is found to be acceptable and feasible, it will go on to be further evaluated in a much larger trial to provide evidence that it works.



Summary of the Tools for Schools project

A prototype toolkit has been informed by theories about how children learn new skills, and how symptoms of ADHD come about as well as the best current evidence about what works for these children. It needs to be acceptable and practical for those who will use it, both educators and pupils with ADHD – this will be assessed using what is known as a “feasibility study”.

This is what we are asking your school to be involved in. To test whether the toolkit is acceptable and practical for teachers to use, 8 primary schools and a total of 16-32 children with ADHD traits will take part. Children eligible to participate in the study will range from 5-10 year olds (school years R-5). Each class teacher will have a maximum of one child participant in their class but 2-4 children from your school could be included in the study. Each school will be using the toolkit for one school term with the children who participate, but we will be collecting information from parents, children and teachers before this and for one school term after the toolkit is tried. If your school participates, we will ask you to help us identify which children might benefit from the toolkit before we approach their parents for consent.

What will we need your staff to do and contribute?

Your Special Educational Needs (and Disabilities) Co-ordinator (SEN(D)Co) will be the main person co-ordinating the delivery of the toolkit to children in your school, and teachers and TAs will work with the SENCo to choose and then implement strategies in the classroom. The research team will collect lots of information about the child from teachers, teaching assistants (TAs) and parents during the “baseline” stage before the toolkit is used, the term where the toolkit is being used and the following school term. Teachers will need to complete questionnaires about the target child’s behaviour once every 2 weeks during the baseline and toolkit terms, and once every 3 weeks during the follow-up term (taking about 15-20 minutes each time). We have chosen short questionnaires, one measuring ADHD symptoms, and one measuring how the child functions in the classroom, through consulting with teachers about what they feel they would be able to complete on a regular basis.

We will also ask you, your SENCo and any involved teachers and TAs for feedback about what went well and what did not via questionnaires and focus groups. Additionally, we will interview parents and children (in an age-appropriate



manner). This ongoing feedback when you are using the toolkit will inform any adjustments we need to make before the next school tries the toolkit and help us to decide whether the toolkit is ready to be tested further in future research. For each member of staff involved, this will be two short phone calls or conversations when the toolkit is being used, and one longer focus group (up to 90 minutes) with all involved staff for each target child in the term after the toolkit is used.

The baseline stage will be one school-term, with schools being randomly assigned to the term in which they start their baseline. When we recruit a group of four schools, we will inform you of when your school will begin the baseline stage. We will be asking your SENCo, teachers and teaching assistants working with relevant children to complete questionnaires throughout the study and allow us to observe the child in class (with parent permission).

Overview of the Tools for School toolkit

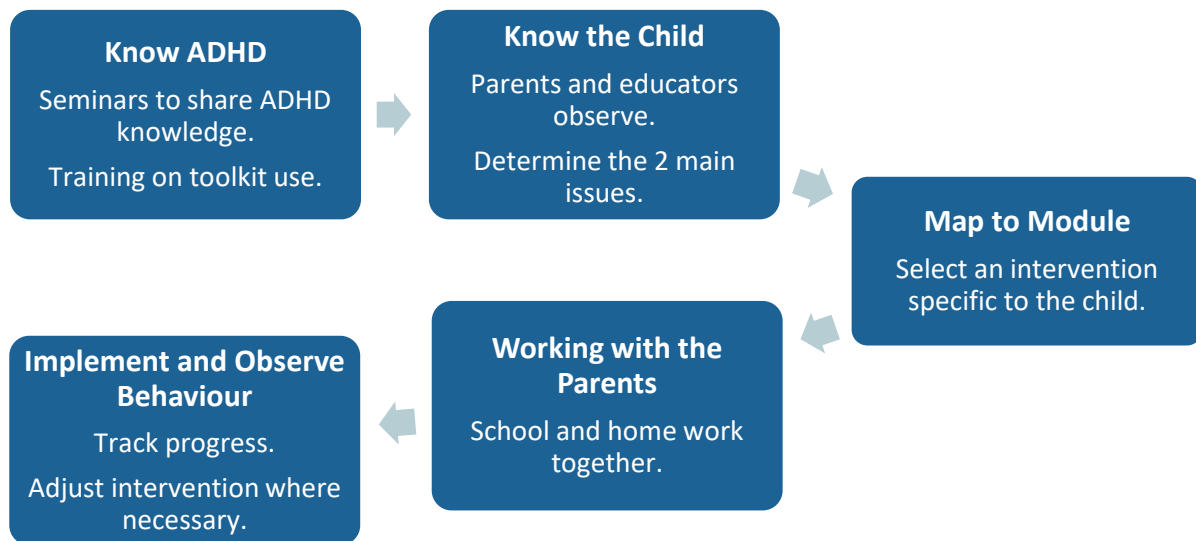
The Tools for Schools toolkit will be primarily a digital resource with printable components, with the key steps outlined in Figure 1. Alongside this, schools will also be given the option to plan and deliver activities to promote inclusivity. This might involve participating in national events such as Neurodiversity Celebration Week, having a school assembly or applying for the ADHD Foundation “ADHD friendly schools award” for example.

To plan and deliver the toolkit, we would ask that your SENCo supports teachers and teaching assistants to follow the toolkit steps, and review progress. There are separate information sheets for SENCos and teachers/TAs that outline their roles, as well as for parents and guardians.

Primarily, the toolkit will support children to remain in the classroom and allowing the child to access the same education and opportunities as their classmates. It will target ADHD symptoms, classroom functioning, conflict with teachers/peers, quality of life, self-esteem, and skills such as working memory, organisation, flexible thinking and self-control.



Figure 1: this schematic summarises the process of the Tools for Schools intervention once eligible students have been identified.



If you would like more details on any of the stages in the toolkit please visit our website: <http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/toolsforschools/about-us/tfs-programme/>

Your role in the research

As the headteacher/senior leadership, your role will include:

- Consenting to your schools' participation and signing a research agreement.
- Allowing the research team access to the school and classrooms of the target children (for example to do observations of behaviour)
- Nomination of a mental health lead such as a SENCo.
- Ensuring that the SENCo and potentially eligible teachers and teaching assistants are supportive and willing to take part in the study.
- Giving permission for the SENCo to identify potentially eligible children and make the first approach to parents about their involvement in the research prior to contact with the research team.
- Enable relevant staff to have the time to use the toolkit, complete questionnaires and take part in focus groups (days and times to be mutually agreed).
- Consideration and support of other ways to foster inclusivity in your school.

To show our gratitude for your participation in this study and the focus group, school staff (headteachers, teachers, TA and SENDCo's) will receive £10.



Confidentiality and data protection

The University of Exeter processes personal data for the purposes of carrying out research in the public interest. The University will endeavour to be transparent about its processing of your personal data and this information sheet should provide a clear explanation of this. If you do have any queries about the University's processing of your personal data that cannot be resolved by the research team, further information may be obtained from the University's Data Protection Officer by emailing informationgovernance@exeter.ac.uk, or at <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/ig/>

The data we will collect from you includes recordings of the group discussion and interviews, notes taken by the interviewer at the time, and any questionnaires completed about your students. Recordings will be transcribed (written down word for word) and made anonymous. These will be analysed along with other interviews and focus groups we are conducting. The data collected will be securely stored and only the researchers working on the project will be able to access it. In the interview if participants feel hesitant or uncomfortable, they will be reminded of their right to decline to answer any question(s).

The results of this project may be published, but any data included will not identify which schools or children took part. A summary of the study findings will be sent to you. Additionally, the anonymised data your school provides may be used other related research – however this is optional.

Withdrawing your consent

You (on behalf of your school), individual staff, parents and pupils can withdraw from participation in the study without needing to provide a reason at any point. You can withdraw your data until the point where the data have been anonymised as, at this point, we will no longer know which information is linked to your school or an individual child.



Potential unintended consequences

It is possible that the toolkit may lead to children feeling singled-out from their peers due to being treated differently, although we aim to avoid this and any other negative impacts wherever possible so please talk to us about any concerns you may have. Via the toolkit children in the study will hopefully develop social skills and greater self-esteem which may help them build stronger relationships with other children. However, the students are also free to withdraw at any time if the intervention is causing them any problems, or if staff or parents consider that it is having negative impacts.

Possible negative impacts of the toolkit will be monitored throughout the study and participating school staff will follow a defined procedure for reporting any negative impacts as soon as possible after they come to light. The research team will abide by any existing safeguarding protocols your school has as well.

Should a child or other participant of the study report severe worsening of ADHD symptoms or distress, the lead researcher (Dr Abby Russell) will consult with psychiatrists and clinical psychologists on the study advisory board to decide on the most appropriate course of action. This may include: a clinician speaking directly to staff and families to ascertain whether the adverse effects are caused by the toolkit or research study or are external to this; the child and family withdrawing from the study; or individual plans being put in place to monitor and manage the situation.

Should a child or family withdraw from the study due to this, their existing data will not be used unless express consent is given at the time of withdrawal, and they will be able to continue to access the prototype intervention (as long as the study team are confident that this is not the cause of adverse effects) if they wish.



Funding

This research is funded by the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR): the research arm of the NHS. Specifically, it is funded by an Advanced Fellowship – Stage 2, Dr Abigail Russell, NIHR300591. The funding currently covers the project for 5 years, which began in July 2020.

Ethical approval

This study has received ethical approval from the University of Exeter College of Medicine and Health Research Ethics Committee (reference Jan22/B/300).

Contact details

If you have any questions about the Tools for Schools project, either now or in the future, please feel free visit [our website](#) for further information, or to contact Abby directly: she leads the research team:

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Our website:
<http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/toolsforschools/>



Complaints

If you have any complaints about the way in which this study has been carried out, please contact the Chair of the University of Exeter Medical School Research Ethics Committee:

cmhethics@exeter.ac.uk

