

ready for college or university life in a few years. It's a challenging period even for someone without ADHD.

Teens with ADHD face an increased risk of lower academic performance and greater social problems (including peer problems and teacher conflicts). Studies show they are less likely to complete secondary school education; many repeat grades or receive lower academic scores due to problems with attention span, hyperactivity and impulsivity. A very typical problem is displayed by teens who don't turn in schoolwork to the teacher, even though it's been completed, because they forget. Many have "chaotic" school bags and lockers. Notes are often disorganised and important pieces of paper lost in this chaos.

What I most often hear is this kind of thing: "John is not meeting his potential in the classroom" or "He is not presenting on paper what he's capable of" or "If only he handed in his work on time".

Yet, while the academic, social and parental pressures increase in the teen years, the support infrastructure they need most at this time is often lacking. Another thing I hear a lot is, "Sarah doesn't have close friends" or "She finds it hard to keep friends".

How to help
Social functioning

We know that the importance of peer relationships increases during adolescence; this time is harder for teenagers because they go through an online and real-life adolescence. Lack of practice with social skills in early years can make it hard for teens to maintain close friendships.

Provide as many opportunities to increase positive peer interactions by exposing them to team sports or group activities where they learn to listen and follow instructions and participate in activities as a team member.

Academics

I often see teens struggling in the following areas of schooling: planning and organisation of time, focused study and note taking, and getting started on a task. The biggest issue is procrastination – a lack of ability to prioritise.

It helps if you can find the right professionals to oversee ADHD treatment. Early intervention and proper guidance is essential. Also, enlist the school's help to understand your teen's challenges and to get their teachers involved. Frequent follow-up meetings are important to monitor progress.

Teens with ADHD benefit immensely from classroom accommodations (extra-time for homework, preferential seating, oral and written instructions for assignments, for example), and support after school.

Emotional Functioning

As a professional who has worked in the field for many years now, I'm aware that teens in general and especially those with ADHD tend to avoid uncomfortable experiences and have a tendency to give up too quickly in the face of difficulty. As parents, if we give



into this often, we are depriving our children of opportunities for learning from these uncomfortable experiences.

Not everything in life and learning is exciting; it's okay to be bored, and sticking with the seemingly boring tasks is good practice for life because in life they will encounter a fair amount of boring stuff!

Teens with ADHD find repetitive tasks most frustrating; even if they love the activity, they will grow tired of it. Teaching them the discipline to finishing things is key to mastery. Similarly, they often feel less adequate than their peers, and feel less effective in problem solving or finding success. I always encourage parents to ensure they provide as many opportunities as they can in areas where their teen feels successful.

Resilience – that is, adapting to new circumstances and having the ability to bounce back from adversity – is a necessary skill to navigate life. Many research studies have shown over the past decades that school, work and social success rely on tolerance for discomfort and the ability to delay gratification (something that's really hard for the instant gratification generation!). "Grit" is hard for most, and it's even harder for teens with ADHD.

Pay attention to sleep and nutrition, and consider having your teen learn how to relax and meditate. Research shows that Mindfulness has been extremely successful for ADHD challenges.

It's clear that teens with ADHD need understating and supportive relationships at home to help them thrive and reach their potential in the world. Separate the behaviour from your teen. An ADHD brain can be a gift, so nurture and support your teen so that they also feel it's a gift they have. Believe in their potential – and make sure they believe it too. *ei*



Dr Quratulain Zaidi is a clinical psychologist specialising in individuals, families, couples and teen issues including cybersafety, teen parenting, bullying, eating challenges, and self-harm. Her private practice, MindNLife, is in Central. 6347 9955 | mindnlife.com