

Autumn NewsLetter No 14

*“It is easier to build strong children
than to repair broken men”.*

Frederick Douglass (American social reformer, abolitionist, orator, writer)

Sebda at ENSEC CONFERENCE

Social Emotional Learning for Lifetime Achievement Chania, Crete 2024

Sebda members contributed to this truly international conference.

Presenting the work and role of our organisation ; including planting trees with displaced people, using photo elicitation to gather children's views of LEGO based therapy, positive psychology and research with young survivors of domestic violence.

We also promoted the Sebda/Oxford Brookes PGDip course in SEMH.

We all left informed and enthused. The next ENSEC conference will be in Portugal in 2026.
hope to see you there.

SEBDA

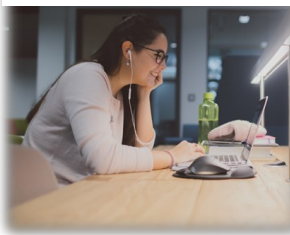
OXFORD
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ONLINE POSTGRADUATE STUDY IN SEMH

SEBDA, in partnership with Oxford Brookes University offers a Postgraduate Diploma in Social Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties.

This two year, part time online Diploma generates 120 masters level credits towards a full masters degree.

Our team includes specialist teachers, authors, psychologists, behaviour support professionals and SEN advisers – all with expertise in supporting children and young people with mental health needs.



The Diploma will enhance your understanding, skills and expertise to support children and young people with social, emotional and mental health difficulties.

Emotional & Behaviour

Difficulties Journal

Vol 28 Vol 4 Dec, 2023

<https://sebda.org/ebd-journal/>

School staff often feel that academic journals are not for them. Think again. This journal is full of articles about daily life in schools. This volume considers the SEMH needs of the bully – a group of young people whose SEMH needs are often overlooked in schools – anxiety in pre-school children and how to break the culture of suspensions and exclusions. There is an article that considers the usefulness of diagnosis for SEMH and neuro-diverse young people.

The articles are short enough to read during your lunch break or on the bus ride home. There is access to back volumes on the SEBDA website that are free to access for SEBDA members. <https://sebda.org/join-sebda/>

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How to Join SEBDA:
Contact
[SEBDA.org](https://sebda.org)

ADHD in Girls By Jo Lockley - Sebda Course Tutor

(Whilst the term 'girl' will be used throughout for ease, there is an awareness that many young people, with or without ADHD, do not recognise themselves in the gender binary and much of the discussion will be relevant to a range of gender identities and presentations)

"Chatterbox, disorganised, ditsy, over emotional, flitter, underachiever, disorganised, forgetful, shy, untidy" – these are amongst the terms that girls and women with ADHD identify as being used to describe them: all carrying a degree of negative connotations; the presumption that these are behaviours that can be altered and very different from the terms used to describe males with ADHD. As with many neurodiverse diagnoses, each individual presents differently but ADHD in females appears to have some commonalities of experience.

ADHD remains one of the most frequently diagnosed health conditions in children and young people (CYP) in Western societies with prevalence rates of 1.9% to 5% in the UK (Steer, 2021). Despite this, many aspects of ADHD have, both historically and currently, been the subject of debate and controversy, from the perceived causes of ADHD (e.g. poor parenting, additives in food), to how it is assessed and treated. Recently there has been increasing awareness and discussion around the perceived male bias in the ADHD diagnostic criteria leading to a difference in the UK diagnostic rates of between 4-6:1 between boys to girls (Steer, 2021).

There are consistent and legitimate arguments around the over medicalisation of ADHD and while developments in neuroscience do indicate brain differences (Giedd, 2019) it is widely accepted that that social environmental factors play a part in the outcomes and functioning of CYP with ADHD (Barkley, 2015). As such, it is important to recognise that while the behaviours associated with ADHD may be rooted in biological tendencies, social, environmental and psychological aspects also require factoring in when considering the needs of and adjustments for

ADHD in Girls (Cont.)

CYP with ADHD (a biopsychosocial perspective) (Cooper, 2008). This is especially relevant when considering the experiences and pressures for girls with ADHD.

ADHD and girls

Despite the evidence that ADHD presentation and needs are impacted upon by a variety of environmental factors, the majority of CYP and their families are faced with a system where the medical aspects take precedence and the language used is that of symptoms, diagnosis and medication. Now considered a neuro-developmental disorder in the diagnostic manuals, the ADHD criteria allows clinicians to specify whether an individual presents with inattentive ADHD, a hyperactive/impulsive presentation or a combined presentation of ADHD.

The diagnostic criteria are based on observations of boys as clinically, ADHD (along with other neurodevelopmental disorders) continues to be perceived as having male predominance (Barkley, 2015). However, there is now an increasing belief of an under-recognition and under-diagnosis of ADHD in girls (NICE, 2018) and issues are now being raised about the appropriateness of the diagnostic criteria to capture the presentation and behaviour of girls.

In contrast to the disruptive behaviours of stereotyped boy with ADHD, girls with ADHD often seek to be co-operative and comply with adults' requests, being fearful of even slight criticism and hating being the centre of attention (Nadeau, Littman and Quinn, 2015). It has been suggested that girls with ADHD often differ more from neurotypical girls than ADHD boys do from neurotypical boys: they operate further from the expected behaviours and can appear increasingly different and isolated from their peers. They may struggle with awkwardness and shyness in social situations and as they get older and begin to take responsibility for their own friendships, they often struggle to maintain relationships or have more frequent

ADHD in Girls (Cont.)

conflicts and relational aggression than non-ADHD girls. They may also experience being rejected more frequently than their non-ADHD peers resulting in being more socially isolated and, potentially, victimised or bullied.

The impact of gender expectations

Girls are expected to mature more quickly than boys, displaying increasingly developed executive functioning skills, such as self and emotional control, organisation and task initiation – skills where girls with ADHD may be two or more years behind their peers in some areas of development (Nadeau, Littman, and Quinn, 2015). More typical ‘boy’ behaviours such as hyperactivity and disruptive behaviour can be seen as inappropriate for girls and are judged harshly, risking girls being labelled as either trouble or troubled.

Impact of missing ADHD in girls

The hypothesis that there are late or missed diagnoses of girls is given weight with the shift in the ratios of adult male to adult female diagnosis which is closer to a 1:1 ratio. Many women are diagnosed subsequent to having a child diagnosed with ADHD and then recognising that they have also struggled with similar issues.

Strategies to support girls with ADHD

Many strategies listed below are useful for any child or young person with ADHD, there are, however, some strategies, that are useful to consider specifically with girls and/or those whose ADHD presentation is more inattentive. In a way, they could be thought of as over riding considerations rather than specific strategies. (For more specific strategies, Eva Atkins (in Steer 2021) has collated an excellent list of 101 reasonable adjustments for ADHD.)

- **Understand their strengths.** In understanding their ADHD, it is also important to understand strengths that they might have, both in character and specifically linked to their ADHD. So, for

Strategies to support girls with ADHD (Cont.)

- **Understanding their own ADHD.** Support the individual to develop an understanding of their personal presentation of ADHD and how it might be affecting school and other aspects of life. Having a clearer understanding can support in reducing the shame felt by girls with ADHD when they struggle with tasks, sensory issues and situations that are considered easy by their neurotypical peers, for example remembering equipment or making impulsive comments that are considered inappropriate. For girls, this can also include understanding how their ADHD is impacted by hormonal changes and puberty.
- **Understand their strengths.** In understanding their ADHD, it is also important to understand strengths that they might have, both in character and specifically linked to their ADHD. So, for example, those who spend time day dreaming may also be creative with a vivid imagination, impulsivity can also mean being spontaneous and adventurous.
- **Develop their self-esteem.** Many girls with ADHD get little positive feedback in school and find the school environment a challenging one and so it is increasingly important to find ways for them to understand their strengths, have experience of success and, where possible, the opportunity to let their abilities shine.
- **Support the development of executive functioning skills.** Executive functioning skills are the tools we use daily to organise ourselves and function in work, school and life (time keeping, working memory, task initiation etc). These are aspects that are a struggle for many of those with ADHD – there is an argument that ADHD is actually an executive functioning deficit condition (Barkley, 2015). Identifying strategies that support executive functioning difficulties can make a significant difference to the daily life of someone with ADHD, for example seemingly simple memory strategies for those who are regularly in trouble at school for forgetting equipment. Consideration of executive functioning issues can support teachers to practically address needs

Strategies to support girls with ADHD (Cont.)

- Consideration of executive functioning issues can support teachers to practically address needs rather than simply perceiving the difficulties as behavioural 'choices'. An example of this would be addressing task initiation issues by breaking work into small chunks or providing writing frames to support longer pieces of writing.
- **Encourage healthy habits.** ADHD difficulties can increase in severity if the individual is not looking after themselves, e.g. not drinking enough or going to bed late. Developing healthy habits in relation to things such as sleep, exercise and eating and understanding the reason why these things are important can support girls in managing their difficulties, and no less importantly, managing the emotions related to these difficulties.
- **Develop positive teacher/student relationships.** Research has shown that, in general, students with ADHD have less positive relationships with their teachers than students without ADHD. Girls with ADHD also perceive higher levels of rejection from teachers than boys with ADHD or neurotypical girls (Plantin Ewe, Holmqvist, and Bölte, 2023). Positive teacher/relationships are often key for successful outcomes, both socially and academically, for girls with ADHD and are, therefore, an important strategy to focus on in school settings particularly in the teenage years.
- **Widen staff understanding of ADHD.** Wider understanding of all presentations of ADHD in children and young people has been shown to both impact positively on teacher/student relationship and supports staff to know what to do and how to effectively support pupils with ADHD. It also increases the empathy and understanding for the individual and the challenges that school creates for a girl with ADHD.

A full unabridged article with references is obtainable at: <https://sebda.org/resources/>