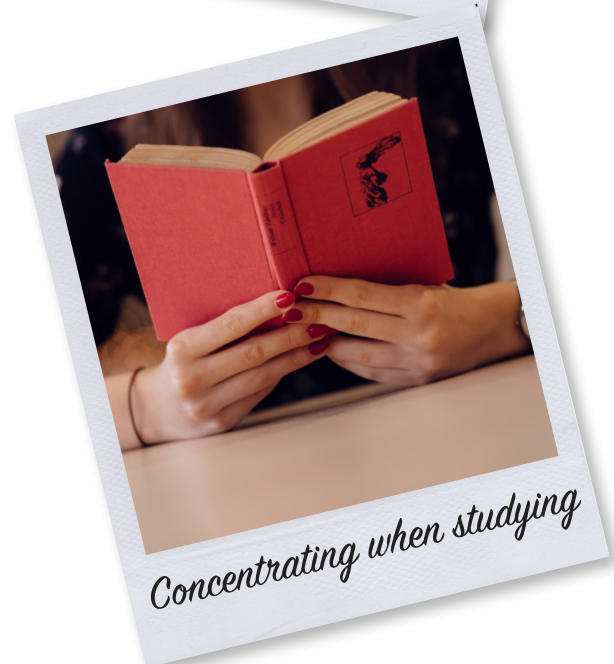
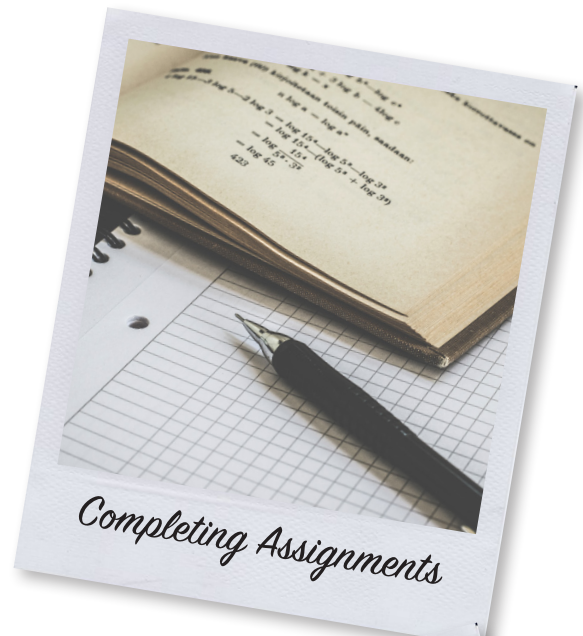
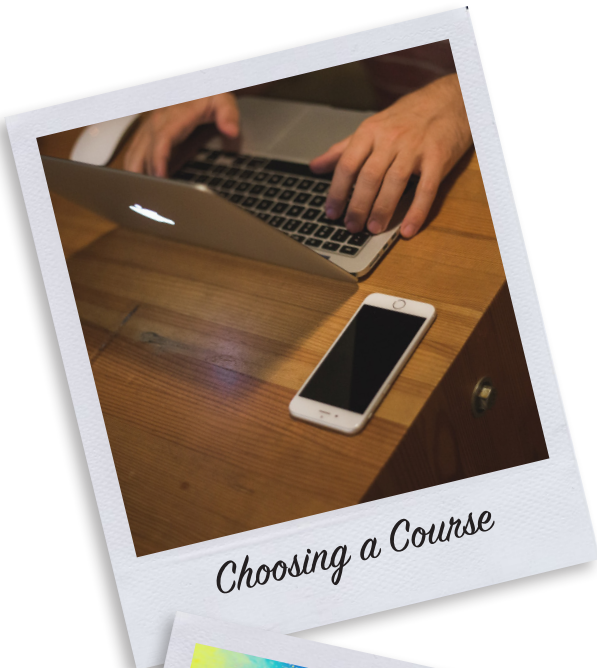


# GOING TO COLLEGE

## A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS WITH ADHD







# GOING TO COLLEGE

## A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS WITH ADHD

Written by  
Maria Clince and Dr. Clodagh Nolan for ADHD Ireland  
August 2017

## FOREWORD

AHEAD Research shows that over 10,000 students representing over 5% of the student population in higher education in Ireland have a disability of some kind, the most prevalent being specific learning difficulties and mental health issues, including ADHD.

This rate of participation represents real progress and shows that interventions and supports in second level are working and that students are succeeding. For those of you reading this guide in preparation for college, you have expectations of gaining qualifications, having successful careers and participating in all aspects of the college experience - lectures, work placements, field trips, international study abroad experiences and importantly, clubs and societies.

The challenge for institutions is that inclusion has to be everyone's job and cannot be solely the responsibility of the disability support service. Students with disabilities including ADHD will succeed if they are welcomed and supported on their journey. The task for higher education institutions is to recognise that not all students learn in the same way and that they must create learning experiences adapted to the needs of students, rather than expecting the students to adapt to the course. Students need good information, flexibility, technology and understanding to succeed and meet rigorous academic standards.

For students, the challenge is to be as prepared as possible, to adapt to your new social and academic environment, to embrace every opportunity that comes your way and make the most of this unique time in your life.

This guide will help to set you on the right path.

**Ann Heelan**

Executive Director, AHEAD

## A message from ADHD Ireland

For anyone going from 2nd level education to 3rd level, it is an adventure, a whole new way of learning and education awaits you. There can be challenges too, if you have ADHD. Working with AHEAD and stuffed with useful information, hints and tips, we have developed this booklet to help you meet those challenges.

ADHD Ireland envisages a future where all individuals affected by ADHD are included, supported, and empowered in all contexts of their lives (e.g. school, work, home, and socially) to participate fully within, benefit from, and contribute meaningfully to Irish society. ADHD Ireland is the national organisation that will enable this.

We hope you find this guide useful and may we wish you every success on your journey through 3rd level, wherever it takes you!

**Stephanie Mahony**

Co-Founder and Board Member, ADHD Ireland

## CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Students With ADHD: The Numbers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Choosing A Course</b>	<b>3</b>
What Courses Do Students With ADHD Study?	3
Things To Think About	4
<b>Applying For College</b>	<b>9</b>
Leaving Certificate Points	9
Mature Students	9
DARE	10
HEAR	11
<b>Managing College Life</b>	<b>12</b>
Completing Assignments	13
Concentrating In Lectures	14
Concentrating When Studying	15
Working When There Are Distractions	16
Having A Balanced Routine	17
Maintaining Social Relationships	18
Managing Feelings	19
Getting Enough Sleep	20
Being Organised	21
<b>Positives Of ADHD</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Supports</b>	<b>23</b>
Disability Or Access Services	23
Exam Accommodation	24
Counselling	24
Occupational Therapy	25
Careers Service	25
Assistive Technology	26
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Other Resources</b>	<b>28</b>

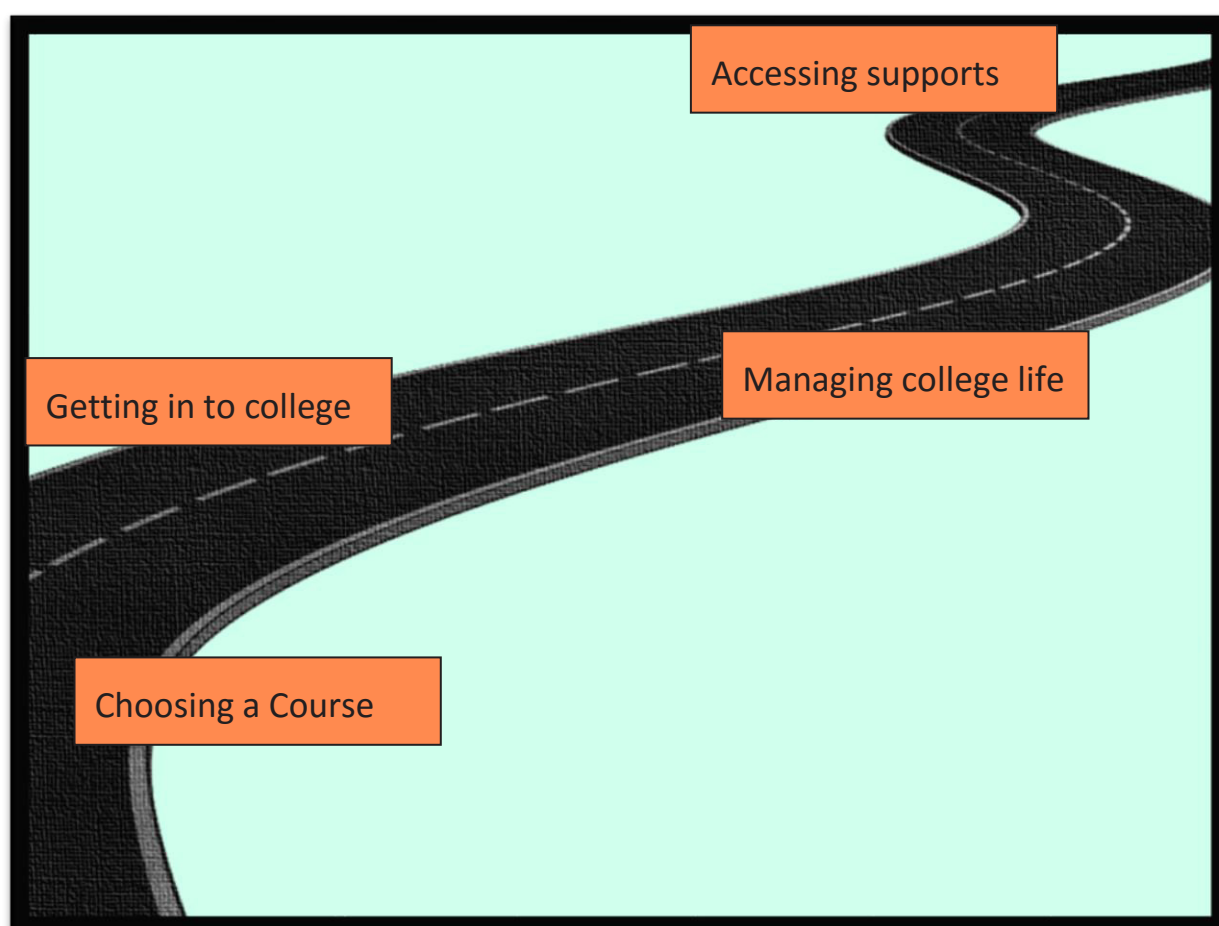
## INTRODUCTION

This guide is mostly for secondary school students with ADHD who are interested in going to college.

It may also be helpful for college students with ADHD, parents of students with ADHD, guidance counsellors and teachers and student support services in colleges.

The guide talks you through each stage of college; choosing a course, getting in to college, managing college life and accessing supports.

We hope that this guide will answer your questions and address some of the concerns you may have.



## STUDENTS WITH ADHD: THE NUMBERS

1% -  
4.7%

- The prevalence of Adult ADHD is estimated to be 5% (Willcutt, 2012).

5%

- Students with disabilities make up 5% of students in Ireland.

413

- In 2014/15 there were 413 students with ADHD registered with Disability Services in 27 higher education institutions in Ireland\*

3.8%

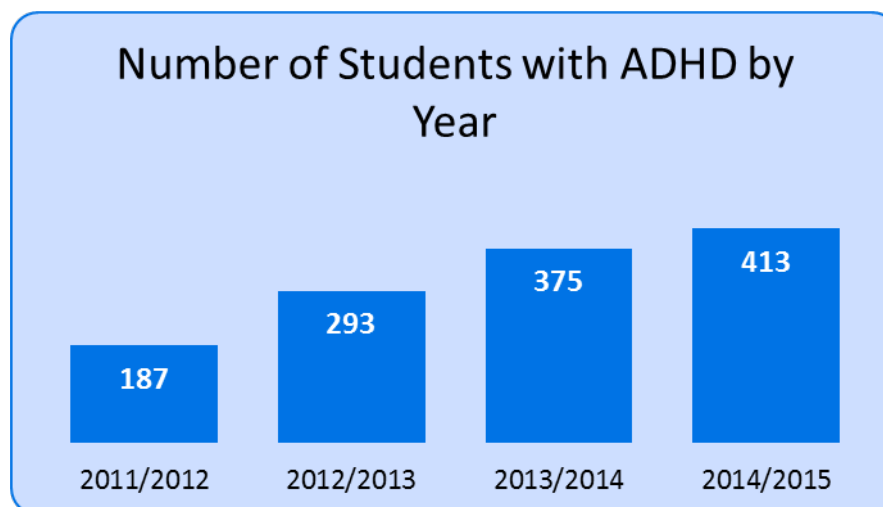
- Students with ADHD make up 3.8% of students with disabilities\*

0.2%

- Students with ADHD make up 0.2% of all students in Ireland\*

\*Figures taken from AHEAD. (2016). Numbers of Students with Disabilities Studying in Higher Education in Ireland 2014/15. Dublin: AHEAD Educational Press.

The numbers of students with ADHD in Ireland are increasing every year. This graph shows the numbers of students with ADHD over the past 4 years.



## CHOOSING A COURSE

The following pages are designed to help you start thinking about what courses or colleges might suit you best. There's space for you to write down your thoughts as you read through the information. The important thing to remember is there is no right or wrong when it comes to choosing a course!

### WHAT COURSES DO STUDENTS WITH ADHD STUDY?

The table below shows information about the courses that people with ADHD studied in the 2014/2015 academic year.

Field of Study	Numbers of Students with ADHD Studying in this Field	% of Students with ADHD Studying in this Field
<b>Broad Programmes</b>	6	1.6%
<b>Education Science</b>	4	1%
<b>Humanities and Arts</b>	94	24.4%
<b>Social Science and Business</b>	84	21.8%
<b>Law</b>	8	2.1%
<b>Science</b>	29	7.5%
<b>Computing</b>	28	7.3%
<b>Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction</b>	55	14.2%
<b>Agriculture and Veterinary</b>	16	4.1%
<b>Health and Welfare</b>	25	0.5%
<b>Nursing</b>	13	3.4%
<b>Services</b>	15	3.9%
<b>Combined</b>	9	2.3%

As you can see, students with ADHD study a wide range of courses. There is no right or wrong course for people with ADHD to study but there are some things it can be helpful to think about when choosing a course.





### HOW DO YOU LEARN BEST?

Another thing it can helpful to think about is how you learn best. Think about your favourite class in school....what is it about that class that you enjoy?

My favourite class is.....because....

A learning styles questionnaire such as the VARK can help you work out your learning style and can also help you work out what study methods might suit you.

You can do the VARK here: <http://vark-learn.com/the-vark-questionnaire/>

Record your results below.

My learning style is:

Some people learn best when they are listening to a lecture. Others prefer to discuss the information with others. Some people like doing lots of practical work. College usually has different types of learning situations depending on the course. Some examples are:

- **Lecture:** Lectures usually have a large number of students and take place in a lecture theatre. Lectures are not usually very interactive because there are so many students.
- **Tutorial:** Tutorials are smaller classes and usually involve some discussion or group work.
- **Lab:** Labs involve practical work e.g. doing science experiments or working on computers.
- **Work placement:** Some courses involve work placements or internships. This means going out to a workplace to get practical experience related to your course.
- **Problem-based Learning (PBL):** PBL involves working with other students to discuss a problem, choose learning goals, work independently and then come back together as a group to discuss what you have learned.
- **E-Learning:** There are many types of e-learning including podcasts, online discussion forums, blogs and online assessments.



Remember that most courses have more than one type of learning environment so if you notice that your dream course has lots of lectures and you don't think they would suit you don't panic! There are strategies you can use to manage different situations and these are described later.

Think about all of the different types of assessments you have done in school. Some examples might be written exams, essays, oral exams, presentations, skills-based assessments, projects, group work, and science reports.

List some of the assessments you have done here and put a tick beside the ones you liked best or did best in.

[illegible]

Types of assessment in college vary depending on the course. Some courses have lots of exams and some have lots of essays. Some courses have lots of group work projects and others require lots of independent study. Finding out about the types of assessment in courses you are interested in and comparing them to the types of assessment you like best can be useful when thinking about what to study.

### **RESOURCES TO HELP YOU CHOOSE A COURSE**

Hopefully this section has helped you to think about the type of course you might like to do. The following resources have some information about courses in college:

- <http://www.qualifax.ie/>
- <http://www.cao.ie/>
- <http://www.irishtimes.com/higher-options>
- [www.ahead.ie](http://www.ahead.ie)

## APPLYING FOR COLLEGE

There are four main ways to get into college in Ireland. They all require a Central Applications Office (CAO) application. This section describes each of the ways of applying through the CAO to study undergraduate courses in college.

### LEAVING CERTIFICATE POINTS

Most students enter college in this way. Only your Leaving Certificate grades are taken into account so it is based on merit.

Points for each course may change each year as they are decided based on the points of the applicants.

Some courses and colleges have additional entry requirements e.g. a C1 grade in a science subject. It is a good idea to check the requirements for each course before you apply.

You apply to get in to college based on your Leaving Certificate points by completing a CAO application.

More information about applying through CAO is available here:

<http://www.cao.ie/index.php>

### MATURE STUDENTS

Applicants who are aged 23 or more on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January of the year of their application do not have to apply based on their Leaving Certificate points but still have to complete a CAO form and may have to attend an interview.

Some colleges require mature applicants to apply directly to the college so it is important to read the about the application procedure before applying through CAO.

More information about applying as a mature student is available here:

<http://www.cao.ie/index.php?page=mature>

## DARE



The Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) is an alternative way of getting into college for people who have a disability which has impacted on their education.

DARE offers college places with reduced points.

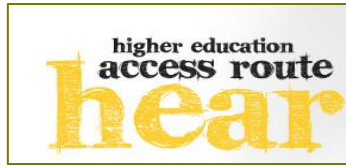
You can apply for the DARE scheme through the CAO. To apply for DARE you must:

1. Answer “Yes” to the question “do you wish to be considered for DARE?” on the CAO form.
2. Get your school to complete the Educational Impact Statement and send it to CAO.
3. Send Evidence of Disability to CAO. This means completing the Evidence of Disability Form or submitting an existing report from an appropriate professional (Consultant Psychiatrist, Psychologist, Neurologist or Paediatrician). The report must be less than three years old.

Further information about applying for DARE is available here:

<http://accesscollege.ie/dare/>

## HEAR



The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) is for people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in the Republic of Ireland. It offers places with reduced points and extra support in college.

You can apply on the CAO website. As part of the application you will be asked to submit documentation such as a P21 or Self-Assessment Letter or a Department of Social Protection Form.

Further information is available here:

<http://accesscollege.ie/hear/>



## MANAGING COLLEGE LIFE

College life isn't just about academic work; socialising, joining societies, part-time work and looking after yourself are all part of life in college. Starting college is an exciting time for most students but it can also be very challenging.



Some of the challenges that students may experience in college are:

- Managing college work
- Studying and learning
- Having a routine
- Balancing college work and life
- Getting enough sleep
- Finding your way around
- Staying motivated
- Managing stress and anxiety
- Making friends and getting involved in societies
- Staying motivated
- Managing money
- Being organised

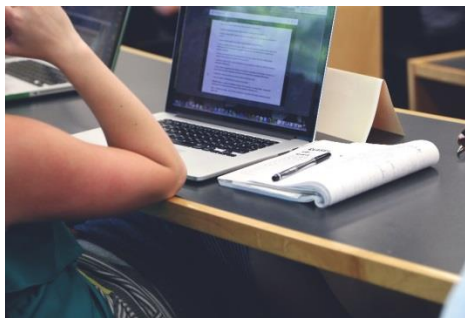
Students with ADHD may experience extra challenges. The following pages describe some of the challenges students with ADHD may experience and gives some suggestions for managing these.

## COMPLETING ASSIGNMENTS

There are many parts to writing assignments; choosing a topic, understanding what you are being asked to do, reading about the topic and finding additional information, planning what you want to say, actually writing the assignment and finally editing and proofreading.

Common difficulties for students with ADHD in relation to writing assignments are:

- Completing assignments on time
- Getting started with the work
- Planning and structuring assignments
- Staying motivated
- Finishing the assignment



### STRATEGIES:

- Plan your assignment before you begin
- Give yourself plenty of time and aim to complete it a few days before the deadline
- Figure out how you work best – some people like to do a small amount each day and switch between tasks while others prefer to work consistently for a few hours. There is no right or wrong way to work.
- Think about the time of day when you work best – if you find that you are at your best early in the morning then that might be a good time to do the most difficult part, for example; reading a complicated article.

## CONCENTRATING IN LECTURES

Difficulty concentrating is one of the defining characteristics of ADHD. Sitting through a boring lecture after a long day of college is a challenge for anyone and if you have ADHD it makes this part of college even more difficult.

“Some lectures, after 10 minutes I want to go. Sometimes I’ll go for a toilet break...just to get out.....and I feel a bit better then.”

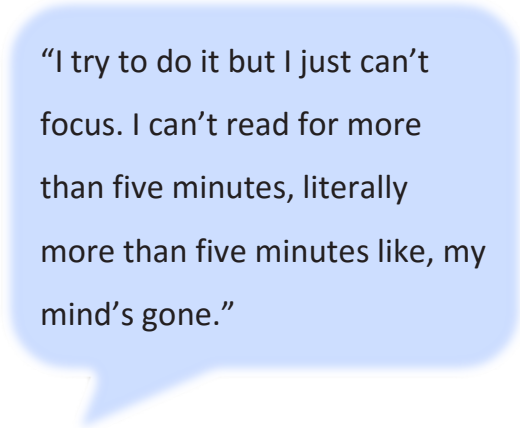
### STRATEGIES:

- Print notes in advance when possible so it’s easier to follow the lecture
- Write notes during the lecture to help you stay focused
- Drink water or chew gum
- Fidget with a piece of blu-tac or a stress ball
- If you really need to get out go to the bathroom or stand outside the room for a minute



## CONCENTRATING WHEN STUDYING

College can involve spending a lot of time reading and studying. Many students with ADHD find it difficult to concentrate when studying. It's important to remember that everyone learns in different ways and have different preferences for studying. Just because someone else is studying for 10 hours a day doesn't mean you have to too – work out what works best for you!



"I try to do it but I just can't focus. I can't read for more than five minutes, literally more than five minutes like, my mind's gone."

### STRATEGIES:

- When reading write a list of questions and try to answer them while you read – this will make your reading more focused.
- Take regular breaks – try to move around during your breaks
- Before you start studying take a piece of paper and write down all of your thoughts – this will help you start with a clearer head!
- Try a variety of different study methods – take notes, watch videos, study with friends, listen to audio of lectures or practice exam questions.
- When you complete a task, no matter how small, write it down. This will give you a sense of achievement at the end of the day and help you to stay motivated.

## WORKING WHEN THERE ARE DISTRACTIONS

Colleges, even libraries, can be busy and full of distractions. Crowded places, sounds like traffic, music or people talking and interesting things to look at can all be distracting. Students with ADHD can find it especially difficult to manage all of these distractions in their environment.



### STRATEGIES:

- Figure out what kind of study environment suits you best. Some people like to work in complete silence. Others prefer to work with some background noise. Some people need to be in a library to study while others prefer to lie on the floor with loud music on. Once you know what type of environment suits you best you can try to study there as much as possible.
- If you are distracted by noise around you, you can try wearing earplugs or using white noise or instrumental music to block out the sounds.
- If you are distracted by things happening around you, you should try to sit facing a wall or even put your hood up so it's harder to see what's around you.
- Phones, social media and other websites can be very distracting. It can be helpful to block the websites that distract you the most and turn your phone off while you are studying.

"If I'm in the right environment and I have what I need, books that I need, I have my laptop there, enough space and I can sit down and get at it then yeah I'm fine"

## HAVING A BALANCED ROUTINE

In college there's a lot going on all the time. Between attending lectures, working on assignments, studying, socialising, going to events, doing sports or other activities, getting involved in college clubs and societies, eating and sleeping it can be really difficult to keep on top of everything.

It's really important to make time to do all of the things you need and want to do in a week.

“I was so involved in so many different things.... I just spread myself far too thin and I wasn't able to focus correctly on one thing”

## STRATEGIES:

- Write a to-do list that is separated into “Need to do” and “want to do”
- Use timetables, calendars, diaries or to-do lists to manage everything that needs to be done.
- Make sure you get enough sleep.
- Try to prepare some meals in advance so you can eat well even during stressful or busy times.



## MAINTAINING SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Many students with ADHD find it easy to make friends and meet new people however sometimes they find it challenging to keep friendships going when there are so many other things going on. Sometimes students also find it difficult to get involved in college clubs and societies.



### STRATEGIES:

- Explain to your friends if you are too busy to meet up – they'll probably understand
- Schedule time to meet up with people
- Set reminders on your phone half an hour before the scheduled time if you've made plans to meet someone – this can help you remember appointments too
- Many societies hold welcome events for new members so keep a look out for those and try to attend a few so you can see what interests you.

"I try to have lunch with people I'm good friends with but I spend a lot of my time by myself like because it's more that I've forgotten to meet people for lunch and it gets to lunch time and I'll think I meant to text"

## MANAGING FEELINGS

Some students with ADHD can become stressed or feel overwhelmed. Being a perfectionist, managing anxiety and low self-esteem can be challenges for students. Some students with ADHD can become frustrated with themselves when they are finding things difficult or with others if they are not understanding of the challenges they are experiencing. Sometimes these feelings can lead to risky or self-destructive behaviours.

“It’s frustrating sometimes because I really study and I really focus and I really know the material and sometimes I don’t what it is I just don’t do as well as I think I should be doing and it’s frustrating”

### STRATEGIES:

- Find activities that make you feel good and make time to do these every week
- Try to find ways to relax e.g. listening to music, deep breathing
- Try to work out what causes you to feel different ways. What makes you angry? Stressed? Frustrated? Understanding what causes these feelings can help you learn to deal with them.
- Avoid self-destructive behaviours e.g. gambling, alcohol
- Focus on the positives – keep track of the things that are going well and remind yourself of your strengths
- Talk to someone about how you’re feeling – a friend, family member or a professional.





## GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP

With the big workload, busy social life and other distractions getting enough sleep can be really challenging in college. Lack of sleep can affect concentration and make it really hard to do all the things you need to do.



### STRATEGIES:

- Try to have a fixed sleep routine – go to bed and get up at the same each day as much as possible
- Exercise regularly (but not right before you sleep)
- Avoid sugar, caffeine and alcohol 4-6 hours before bedtime
- Build habits to help you sleep – read, listen to music or practice mindfulness before you sleep every night.
- Avoid looking at screens before you sleep – if you really can't avoid them then use an orange filter to reduce the stimulating blue light.

## BEING ORGANISED

It's really important to stay organised in college because there is so much to keep track of. You'll have notes from different classes, library books and personal belongings to look after. You will need to make sure you have the right things with you every day and be organised enough that you can leave your house on time to make it into college.

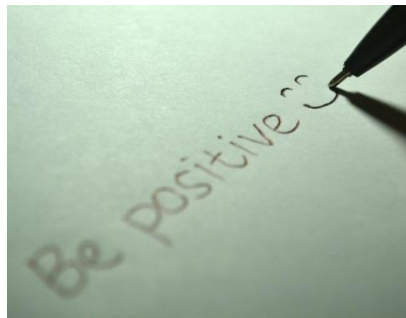


### STRATEGIES:

- Write the date, subject name and lecture topic on all of your lecture notes
- Have a labelled folder or box for each subject and put your notes into them at the end of each day so you will have everything together when you start studying
- Keep things in the same place all the time e.g. keep your keys on a hook beside the door and your student card in your wallet to avoid losing them
- Set reminders when books are due back to avoid library fines
- Set aside time at the start of the week to organise clothes and snacks for the week so it's easier to get ready each morning
- Write a list of things you need to bring with you every day and check your bag before you leave

## POSITIVES OF ADHD

Although having ADHD can be challenging there can also be many positive aspects. Many students find that when they recognise the positives of having ADHD they can use these to their advantage.



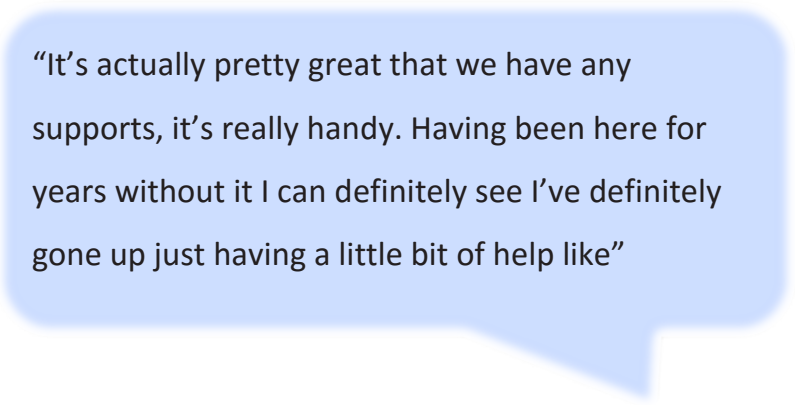
Some of the positives are:

- Creative thinking – seeing the world a little bit differently
- High energy levels
- Intense focus at times
- Can be very good at multi-tasking
- Ability to find other ways to do things

“You can get through college and you can do very well I think it’s just one of those situations that you have to recognise it for what it is and take it from there.”

## SUPPORTS

There are many supports available that can help you to settle in to college and manage any challenges you experience. The following pages describe some of the supports available. You can also look at [www.ahead.ie](http://www.ahead.ie) for more information. Services available can vary so it's a good idea to look at college websites for more information.



"It's actually pretty great that we have any supports, it's really handy. Having been here for years without it I can definitely see I've definitely gone up just having a little bit of help like"

## DISABILITY OR ACCESS SERVICE

When you start college you should register with the Disability or Access service. If you applied through DARE a Disability Officer or Advisor will contact you to arrange a meeting. If you have not applied through DARE you can still register with the service.

Once you have registered you will meet with a Disability Officer or Advisor. They will carry out a needs assessment to help work out what supports can help you to do your best in college. They might refer you to other services within college, write up a needs report that can be shared with your lecturers or provide exam accommodations.

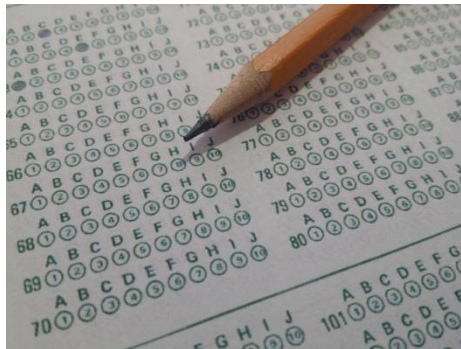
Even if you don't think that you need support it's a really good idea to register with the Disability or Access Service as it can be nice to meet a friendly face and know where you should go if problems do come up later on.

## EXAM ACCOMMODATIONS

There are many types of exam accommodations – you may have had exam accommodations for your Junior or Leaving Certificate. According to the 2014/2015 AHEAD survey, 81% of students with ADHD receive exam accommodations.

Some of the exam accommodations that might be available are:

- Extra time
- Alternative venue (low distraction/individual)
- Use of a computer and assistive technology
- Spelling and grammar waiver
- Reader
- Scribe
- Alternative formats (e.g. enlarged paper)



## COUNSELLING

Many colleges offer a counselling service. Counsellors are trained to help you deal with any emotional challenges you might be having. Counselling services often offer individual appointments and group counselling sessions. Sometimes counselling services also offer workshops and peer support. They may also offer online support if you think this would suit you better.

**If you are feeling lonely, sad or anxious it is important to talk to somebody.**

## OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Some colleges have an occupational therapy (OT) service. OTs are professionals who focus on how activities affect your health and wellbeing and on how your physical and mental health can affect how you take part in activities. They can help you to manage all of the things you need and want to do. Some things you might focus on with your OT are:

- Time management and routine
- Planning your workload
- Developing self-management skills
- Managing the college environment
- Exploring your sensory preferences
- Engaging in social and leisure activities.

## CAREERS SERVICE

Most colleges have a careers service where you can meet someone to talk about planning your career. Sometimes Career Services run events focused on writing CVs or doing job interviews. As well as supporting you in preparing for leaving college the Careers Service can often help with your search for part-time jobs or internships.



## ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Assistive technology can be really helpful for students with ADHD. Most of us have access to a smart phone or laptop all of the time and there are many ways we can use them to make our lives easier. Some colleges may have an Assistive Technology Advisor who can give you advice about assistive technology that might work for you. Many of the resources listed below are free to download.



Examples of assistive technology are:

- Reading and writing tools such as Ginger (proofreading), Balabolka (Text-to-Speech) and Re-wordify (simplifies text)
- Note-taking tools such as Livescribe pens and Dictaphones
- Voice recognition software such as Dragon
- Mind-mapping tools to help you study and plan assignments such as FreeMind
- Apps such as My Study Life which can help you to plan out your routine

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The student quotes and much of the information about managing college come from a MSc. thesis entitled “Using the Person-Environment-Occupation Model to Investigate the Occupations Which Are Challenging For Students with ADHD and to Explore How They Can Be Supported Within Higher Education Environments” by Maria Clince, supervised by Dr. Clodagh Nolan, Discipline of Occupational Therapy, Trinity College Dublin.

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## OTHER RESOURCES

These are some other resources that you may find helpful:

[www.adhdireland.ie](http://www.adhdireland.ie)

[www.accesscollege.ie](http://www.accesscollege.ie)

[www.ahead.ie](http://www.ahead.ie)

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**Phone:** 01-874 8349 **Email:** [info@adhdireland.ie](mailto:info@adhdireland.ie) **Web:** [www.adhdireland.ie](http://www.adhdireland.ie)

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