

## Primary health strategies for working with children who present with ADHD concerns

### Case study – Liam

Liam is 6 years old and lives with his mum, Jade and dad, Simon. He is in his first year of primary school. Liam's teacher, Ms. Anderson, has raised concerns with his parents about his behaviour and attention span in class. She believes that Liam may be exhibiting signs of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) as he has been having difficulty following instructions, fidgets frequently, and is often unable to sit still during lessons. Ms. Anderson feels this is starting to impact Liam academically, as he struggles to complete tasks, often leaving them unfinished, and he is frequently unable to participate in group activities. Ms. Anderson notes that this is very disruptive to the rest of the class. Liam has also struggled to connect with any of the other children in his class or the wider school. Ms. Anderson suggests Jade and Simon take Liam to their general practitioner (GP) for an ADHD assessment. She thinks a formal diagnosis would help Liam get extra support in the classroom to ensure that he doesn't fall behind his classmates.

At home, Liam is a fussy eater and tends to eat mainly white foods like bread, pasta, rice and dairy. He likes sausages and chicken nuggets and doesn't eat many vegetables or other meat. Liam needs his Mum to lie with him when he goes to sleep, and he often wakes in the night to sleep in his parents' bed. On the way to school, Liam gets tummy aches and tells his Mum he feels sick. He is often carried into the classroom, crying. At the end of the school day, Liam's parents find his behaviour challenging and he will often have emotional meltdowns in the afternoon. The only thing that settles him at the moment is an iPad or TV.

Liam's parents schedule an appointment with their regular GP, Dr. Williams, and relay the concerns of Liam's teacher to her along with what they have noticed at home. Dr. Williams is cautious about diagnosing ADHD at such a young age, particularly due to the potential overdiagnosis of ADHD and the associated use of medication in young children. She tells Liam's parents that children's behaviour can vary widely and that many of the symptoms observed in Liam at school can be developmentally normal for a 6-year-old, especially considering he is adjusting to a new environment by starting school. Dr. Williams would like Liam's parents and the school to monitor Liam's behaviour over the next few months to gather more information about any patterns in his behaviour, along with any improvements or changes that occur.

Liam's parents decided to delay the referral to the paediatrician for a diagnosis. Instead, Dr. Williams completes a referral to a local occupational therapist to help Liam's parents in collaborating with the school to implement some strategies that might support his attention and behaviour.