



# Enhancing Social Cognition through Sleep Management in Children with Hyperactivity Disorder

Almendros Jorge\*

Department of Social Cognition, Yeshiva University, New York, USA

## DESCRIPTION

Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by symptoms such as inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. It is one of the most common childhood psychiatric disorders, affecting millions of children worldwide. While the core symptoms of ADHD have been extensively studied, recent research has highlighted the importance of examining other factors that may contribute to the disorder's complexity. One such factor is sleep disturbance, which is prevalent in children with ADHD and can have a significant impact on their social cognition. Children with ADHD often experience sleep problems, including difficulty falling asleep, frequent night-time awakenings, and restless sleep.

These sleep disturbances can exacerbate their already challenging symptoms. The relationship between ADHD and sleep is bidirectional, with ADHD symptoms contributing to sleep problems, and poor sleep potentially leading to ADHD symptoms. Social cognition refers to the processes involved in perceiving, interpreting, and responding to social information. It encompasses skills such as recognizing emotions in others, understanding social cues, and forming appropriate social relationships. Children with ADHD frequently exhibit deficits in social cognition, which can lead to difficulties in peer interactions and academic settings. They may struggle to pick up on social cues, regulate their emotions, or empathize with others.

### The connection between sleep and social cognition

Emerging study suggests that sleep disturbance may play a critical role in the impaired social cognition observed in children with ADHD. Sleep is essential for cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, and memory consolidation. When sleep is disrupted, as is often the case in children with ADHD, these processes can be compromised.

**Impaired emotional regulation:** Sleep disturbance can lead to heightened emotional reactivity and difficulties in emotional

regulation. Children with ADHD who experience poor sleep may be more prone to emotional outbursts, irritability, and frustration, making it challenging for them to navigate social situations effectively.

**Reduced attention and concentration:** Sleep deprivation can lead to decreased attention and concentration, core deficits in ADHD. In social contexts, these deficits may hinder a child's ability to stay engaged in conversations, follow social norms, and maintain appropriate social behavior.

**Difficulty in perspective taking:** Adequate sleep is critical for developing the ability to take the perspective of others. Children with ADHD who do not get enough sleep may struggle to understand the thoughts and feelings of their peers, which can lead to misunderstandings and social conflicts.

**Memory and social learning:** Sleep plays a vital role in memory consolidation and learning. Sleep disturbances may impair a child's ability to remember social rules, past social experiences, and effective strategies for social interaction.

### Treatment implications

Recognizing the link between sleep disturbance and social cognition in children with ADHD has important treatment implications:

**Sleep assessment:** It is essential for healthcare professionals to assess the sleep patterns and disturbances in children with ADHD. Identifying and addressing sleep problems can significantly improve their overall functioning.

**Sleep hygiene:** Interventions aimed at promoting healthy sleep habits, also known as sleep hygiene, can be beneficial. These may include maintaining a regular sleep schedule, creating a relaxing bedtime routine, and minimizing screen time before bedtime.

**Behavioral interventions:** Behavioral therapies that target both ADHD symptoms and sleep disturbances may be effective. These

**Correspondence to:** Almendros Jorge, Department of Social Cognition, Yeshiva University, New York, USA, E-mail: jorgealmendros89@gmail.com

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interventions can help children develop better sleep patterns and improve their social cognition.

The relationship between sleep disturbance and social cognition in drug-naïve children with ADHD is a complex and multifaceted one. Poor sleep can exacerbate the social difficulties already associated with the disorder, making it essential to address sleep problems as part of a comprehensive

treatment approach. By recognizing the interplay between sleep, ADHD, and social cognition, healthcare professionals can better support these children in their development and overall well-being. Further research is needed to explore the precise mechanisms underlying this connection and to develop targeted interventions for improving sleep and social functioning in children with ADHD.