

# **ADD/ADHD in the Classroom**

## **TIPS FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS**



**At any given time, a teacher can expect to have at least one student with ADHD.** The impulsive and hyperactive behavior of such students can be distracting to everyone in the classroom. But there are strategies you can use to help students with ADHD channel their energy and focus their attention so that they can achieve their full potential—and you can conduct lessons with fewer interruptions.

### **Teaching students with ADD/ADHD**

If you're a teacher, you know these kids: The one who stares out the window, substituting the arc of a bird in flight for her math lesson. The one who wouldn't be able to keep his rear end in the chair if you used Krazy Glue. The one who answers the question, "Who can tell me what the 6th Amendment guarantees?" with "Mrs. M, do you dye your hair?"

Students who exhibit ADD/ADHD's hallmark symptoms of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity can be frustrating. You know the brainpower is there, but they just can't seem to focus on the material you're working hard to deliver. Plus, their behaviors take time away from instruction and disrupt the whole class.

### **Challenges of ADHD in the classroom**

Think of what the school setting requires children to do: Sit still. Listen quietly. Pay attention. Follow instructions. Concentrate. These are the very things kids with ADD/ADHD have a hard time doing — not because they aren't willing, but because their brains won't let them. That doesn't make teaching them any easier, of course.

### **Students with ADD/ADHD present the following challenges for teachers:**

- They demand attention by talking out of turn or moving around the room.
- They have trouble following instructions, especially when they're presented in a list.

- They often forget to write down homework assignments, do them, or bring completed work to school.
- They often lack fine motor control, which makes note-taking difficult and handwriting a trial to read.
- They often have trouble with operations that require ordered steps, such as long division or solving equations.
- They usually have problems with long-term projects where there is no direct supervision.
- They don't pull their weight during group work and may even keep a group from accomplishing its task.

Students with ADD/ADHD pay the price for their problems in low grades, scolding and punishment, teasing from peers, and low self-esteem. Meanwhile, you, the teacher, wind up taking complaints from parents who feel their kids are being cheated of your instruction and feeling guilty because you can't reach the child with ADD/ADHD.

## What teachers can do to help

So how do you teach a kid who won't settle down and listen? The answer: with a lot of patience, creativity, and consistency. As a teacher, your role is to evaluate each child's individual needs and strengths. Then you can develop strategies that will help students with ADD/ADHD focus, stay on task, and learn to their full capabilities.

Successful programs for children with ADHD integrate the following three components:

- **Accommodations:** what you can do to make learning easier for students with ADD/ADHD.
- **Instruction:** the methods you use in teaching.
- **Intervention:** How you head off behaviors that disrupt concentration or distract other students.

Your most effective tool, however, in helping a student with ADD/ADHD is a positive attitude. Make the student your partner by saying, "Let's figure out ways together to help you get your work done." Assure the student that you'll be looking for good behavior and quality work, and when you see it, reinforce it with immediate and sincere praise. Finally, look for ways to motivate a student with ADD/ADHD by offering rewards on a point or token system.

## Dealing with Disruptive Classroom Behavior

To head off behavior that takes time from other students, work out a couple of warning signals with the student who has ADD/ADHD. This can be a hand signal, an unobtrusive shoulder squeeze, or a sticky note on the student's desk. If you have to discuss the student's behavior, do so in private. And try to ignore mildly inappropriate behavior if it's unintentional and isn't distracting other students or disrupting the lesson.

# Classroom accommodations for students with ADHD

As a teacher, you can make changes in the classroom to help minimize the distractions and disruptions of ADHD.

## Seating

- Seat the student with ADD/ADHD away from windows and away from the door.
- Put the student with ADD/ADHD right in front of your desk unless that would be a distraction for the student.
- Seats in rows, with focus on the teacher, usually work better than having students seated around tables or facing one another in other arrangements.

## Information delivery

- Give instructions one at a time and repeat as necessary.
- If possible, work on the most difficult material early in the day.
- Use visuals: charts, pictures, color coding.
- Create outlines for note-taking that organize the information as you deliver it.

## Student work

- Create a quiet area free of distractions for test-taking and quiet study.
- Create worksheets and tests with fewer items; give frequent short quizzes rather than long tests.
- Reduce the number of timed tests.
- Test the student with ADD/ADHD in the way he or she does best, such as orally or filling in blanks.
- Show the student how to use a pointer or bookmark to track written words on a page.
- Divide long-term projects into segments and assign a completion goal for each segment.
- Let the student do as much work as possible on computer.
- Accept late work and give partial credit for partial work.

## Organization

- Have the student keep a master notebook, a three-ring binder with a separate section for each subject, and make sure everything that goes into the notebook has holes punched and is put *on the rings* in the correct section.
- Provide a three-pocket notebook insert for homework assignments, completed homework, and “mail” to parents (permission slips, PTA flyers).
- Color-code materials for each subject.
- Allow time for student to organize materials and assignments for home. Post steps for getting ready to go home.

- Make sure the student with ADD/ADHD has a system for writing down assignments and important dates and uses it.

## **Teaching techniques for students with ADD/ADHD**

Teaching techniques that help students with ADD/ADHD focus and maintain their concentration on your lesson and their work can be beneficial to the entire class.

### **Starting a lesson**

- Signal the start of a lesson with an aural cue, such as an egg timer, a cowbell or a horn. (You can use subsequent cues to show much time remains in a lesson.)
- List the activities of the lesson on the board.
- In opening the lesson, tell students what they're going to learn and what your expectations are. Tell students exactly what materials they'll need.
- Establish eye contact with any student who has ADD/ADHD.

### **Conducting the lesson**

- Keep instructions simple and structured.
- Vary the pace and include different kinds of activities. Many students with ADD do well with competitive games or other activities that are rapid and intense.
- Use props, charts, and other visual aids.
- Have an unobtrusive cue set up with the student who has ADD/ADHD, such as a touch on the shoulder or placing a sticky note on the student's desk, to remind the student to stay on task.
- Allow a student with ADD/ADHD frequent breaks.
- Let the student with ADHD squeeze a Koosh ball or tap something that doesn't make noise as a physical outlet.
- Try not to ask a student with ADD/ADHD perform a task or answer a question publicly that might be too difficult.

### **Ending the lesson**

- Summarize key points.
- If you give an assignment, have three different students repeat it, then have the class say it in unison, and put it on the board.
- Be specific about what to take home.

## **School tips for parents**

Success at school isn't the sole responsibility of teachers. There are many things parents can do to help a child with ADHD thrive in the classroom.

How Parents Can Support Success at School

## How Parents Can Support Success at School

### **Communicating with teachers**

- Tell your child's teacher(s) about the child's ADD/ADHD issues and possible interventions as the school year begins.
- Take as a given that the teacher is acting in your child's best interests; support the teacher's efforts.
- Be available for regular conferences in person or on the phone.
- Educate yourself about how ADHD affects school performance.
- Check your child's notebook every day for homework assignments, communications from the school, and items that need your signature.

### **Homework**

- Make sure your child has a quiet, uncluttered place to do homework.
- Help your child with homework, breaking down assignments into smaller tasks and keeping the child focused. Have a regular time for homework and allow for frequent breaks.
- Reinforce study skills such as highlighting, note taking, and reading out loud.
- Praise your child for work done well — and remember, “good” is not necessarily the same as “perfect.”
- Check that completed homework and other materials are where they're supposed to be when your child leaves for school.

### **Behavior**

- Have a reward system for good days or weeks at school.
- Regularly praise your child for appropriate behavior at school.
- Help your child develop social skills.
- Collaborate with the teacher on behavior interventions.
- Involve the school counselor or psychologist if necessary.

## **Special education services**

Students with ADD/ADHD may qualify for special education services, which address the unique needs of children in order to help them learn what other students learn. “Attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder” is listed in the “other health impairment” category of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which requires schools to provide special services for students who need them. Detailed information about *how* a child is found eligible for special education is available at the website of the [National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities](#) (NICHCY).

If one of your students is evaluated for eligibility as a special education student under IDEA, your school will be required to gather a good-sized body of information about the child and convene a group of people, including the parent(s), to discuss how the student is doing in school and what his or her needs are. If you're the student's primary classroom teacher, you'll be part of that group; you may be invited to join it if you're one of a middle- or high-school student's classroom teachers. Whether or not you sit with the group, you'll be asked to provide examples of the student's behavior and how it impedes learning, along with information on interventions you've tried.

Once the student has been evaluated, one of the following outcomes will occur:

- The child is found eligible for special education. At that point, you'll collaborate with parents, other school personnel, and other professionals involved with the child's learning to develop what is known as an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP will spell out how the child's specific problems and unique learning needs will be addressed in the classroom. If you're a member of the IEP team, you'll help determine what services will address the student's needs and where learning will take place.
- The child is found not eligible. Parents may appeal the decision or may ask to have the child evaluated under Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which provides a broader definition of disability. It also provides fewer direct services for the student, but it can wind up mandating many of the accommodations for students with ADD/ADHD listed above.

Keep in mind that neither federal law allows school personnel to pressure parents to put children with ADD/ADHD on medication once they are identified as having an impairment, nor does identification necessarily mean the student will or should be pulled from your classroom. Being placed in a special ed classroom is likely to increase a student's feelings of social alienation and may not give the student an outlet for the creativity and energy that's often part of ADHD. As a teacher, your job is to help the student identified as disabled by ADD/ADHD to gain access to materials and services and to do whatever you can to assist the student in realizing his or her full potential.