

ADVICE FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH ADHD

Children and youth with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) often have serious problems in school. Inattention, distractibility, impulsiveness, hyperactivity, disorganization, poor time management skills and other “executive” difficulties can lead to unfinished assignments, careless errors, and behaviour which is disruptive to themselves and others. Through the implementation of relatively simple and straightforward accommodations to the classroom environment or teaching style, teachers can adapt to the strengths and weaknesses of students with AD/HD. Small changes in how a teacher approaches the student with AD/HD or in what the teacher expects, can turn a losing year into a winning one for the child.

Examples of accommodations which teachers can make to adapt to the needs of students with AD/HD are grouped below according to areas of difficulty.

Inattention

- Seat student in quiet area (away from window, door etc)
- Seat student near positive role model
- Seat student near “peer tutor”
- Increase distance between desks
- Avoid having to sit facing another pupil across desk or table
- Allow extra time to complete assigned work and for copying from board
- Shorten assignments or work periods to coincide with span of attention; use timer
- Break long assignments into smaller parts so student can see end to work
- Assist student in setting short-term “achievable” goals
- Give assignments one at a time to avoid work overload
- Require fewer correct responses for grade
- Reduce amount of homework according to “time” rather than “amount”
- Instruct student in self-monitoring using cueing
- Pair written instructions with oral instructions
- Provide peer assistance in note-taking
- Give clear concise instructions
- Seek to involve student in lesson presentation
- Cue student to stay on task, i.e. private signal/visual cue (auditory processing is often poor)

Organisation

- On a daily level, to-do lists/ visual checklists can help organize your schedule according to the importance of each activity.
- Use stars, arrows, numbers, or letters or devise your own system.
- Prioritize daily activities into urgent, important, and nonessential.
- Allow some margin for unpredictable interruptions and delays. Plan to maximize your sense of accomplishment while creating space for relaxation too.
- Color-coding files, reminders and schedules can be particularly useful as many people with ADHD are visually oriented. Take advantage of this by making things memorable and attention-grabbing with color.

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Impulsiveness

- Ignore minor, inappropriate behaviour

- Increase immediacy of rewards and consequences
- Use time-out procedure for misbehaviour
- Supervise closely during transition times
- Use “prudent” reprimands for misbehaviour (i.e., avoid lecturing or criticism)
- Attend to positive behaviour with compliments, etc
- Acknowledge positive behaviour of nearby student
- Seat student near good role model or near teacher
- Instruct student in self-monitoring of behaviour, ie., hand raising, calling out
- Call on only when hand is raised in appropriate manner and praise for correct response

Motor Activity

- Allow student to stand at times while working
- Provide opportunity for “movement breaks” i.e., run errands, provide job in classroom
- Provide short breaks between assignments
- Supervise closely during transition times
- Remind student to check over work product if performance is rushed and careless
- Give extra time to complete tasks (especially for students with slow processing speed)

Mood

- Provide reassurance and encouragement
- Frequently compliment positive behaviour and work product
- Speak softly in non-threatening manner if student shows nervousness
- Review instructions when giving new assignments to make sure student comprehends directions
- Look for opportunities for student to display leadership role in class
- Conference frequently with parents to learn about student’s interests and achievements outside of school
- Send positive notes home
- Make time to talk alone with student
- Encourage social interactions with classmates if student is withdrawn or excessively shy
- Reinforce frequently when signs of frustration are noticed
- Look for signs of stress build up and provide encouragement or reduced workload to alleviate pressure and avoid temper outburst
- Spend more time talking to students who seem pent up or display anger easily
- Provide brief training in anger control: encourage student to walk away; use calming strategies; tell nearby adult if getting angry; provide ‘safe’ corner/space where the child can go if anxious/overwhelmed/angry.

Academic Skills

- If reading is weak: provide additional reading time; use “previewing” strategies; select text with less on a page; shorten amount of required reading; avoid oral reading; avoid embarrassment.
- If oral expression is weak: accept all oral responses; substitute display for oral report; encourage student to share new ideas or experiences; pick topics easy for student to talk about

- If written language is weak: accept non-written forms for reports (i.e., displays, oral projects); accept use of computer/word processor, tape recorder; do not assign large quantity of written work; test with multiple choice or fill-in questions; provide a “formula” template for essays or story writing
- If maths is weak: allow use of calculator; use graph paper to space numbers; provide additional maths time; provide immediate correctness feedback and instruction via modelling of the correct computational procedure.

(Adapted from Harvey Parker)