

Helping Your Child with ADHD Have Classroom Success

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A child with ADHD is very sensitive to external signals that they perceive as threats. When they become over-stimulated, they become hyperactive, impulsive, distracted, and unable to focus. With this in mind, look at situations that are difficult for your child and view it from the point of view of a child who is afraid, "on guard" and easily stimulated.

Tips Just for Parents

1. Try to get the child some very active exercise, especially before school. Run around the yard or playground, do jumping jacks at home, or walk briskly to school. Join your child to model healthy activity. Also schedule at least 30 minutes of physical movement time each day after school. On the weekends, plan for long walks, bike rides, or swims. Work in exercise when you can: Do sit-ups during TV commercials, or the child must do 50 jumping jacks for every 15 minutes of video game use. Ask the child to help with yard work, washing the car, walking the dog, or housework.
2. Keep a calm home as much as possible, especially before school or when going to events where the child might become overstimulated. Turn off the video games, TV and radio. Make a family rule for no raised voices in the house.
3. Plan and stick to a schedule that allows the family to remain calm. Get organized the night before so the morning schedule goes smoothly and calmly. Allow plenty of time to get out the door to reduce stress.
4. Model calm, relaxed behavior.
5. Children with ADHD are very sensitive to loud voices, a harsh tone of voice and anxious aggression. When disciplining, be calm. Speak matter-of-factly as if you expect cooperation, not as if you are demanding or threatening.
6. Remain consistent -- even when you are tired, frustrated or irritated.

Parents and Teachers:

1. Develop specific behavioral goals and include positive behaviors you want to increase.
2. Avoid the use of any type of reward system or contingent consequences: "Do this or you won't get video game time," or "If you do this you'll get a treat." Children should behave well because it is the right thing to do, not just because they get a treat. Reward systems teach the child to respond only to external rewards rather than internal motivation. These tactics also teach that good behavior is negotiable and special, not a normal expectation. ADHD children need to improve their internal self-control rather than their need for external control. Especially avoid "negative consequences" in general, such as taking away video game privileges. Do this enough and the child will rebel by stating he doesn't want to play the video game anyway. Then what power do you have? Negative consequences tend to turn into a power play and negotiation, which are not skills we need to encourage in any child. If you must, use positive consequences such as earning points or tokens for good behavior. Well-timed, sincere praise or a wink from a parent or teacher can be the best

reward. Research shows (Patterson, 1992) that aggressive boys tend to come from families who use “coercive interactions.”

3. Give directions in short statements and avoid giving multiple steps in a row.
4. Notice good behavior quickly and praise in a calm tone of voice.
5. Give positive direction, rather than negative judgments. Not: “You never sit quietly in church.” Instead: “Sit quietly during church.” Then praise when they do so.
6. Focus on developing a respectful emotional connection. Children want to please, so work with this inclination and be a person they do want to please.
7. Only use “time-outs” when the child is truly tantruming out of control. Frame timeouts as a chance to cool down, not isolation from others or punishment. Check on the child and reassure and comfort him promptly to communicate your love.

Tips Just for Teachers:

1. Reduce distractions as much as possible. **The use of group seating at large tables does NOT provide a good learning environment for most young children, especially those with ADHD. Classrooms should use individual desks separated from other children.** For those with ADHD, put the child in the front of class, and away from windows and doors or classroom pets, eliminate visual clutter, etc. If extra help is needed, use a study carrel but only for testing or short time periods of self-study to avoid stigmatizing. Carrels can be made out of three panels of foam core. They can be set beside the desk easily when not needed.
2. Reduce visual clutter in the classroom. A 2014 study by Carnegie-Mellon University found that children in classrooms with plain walls had better attention, focus, cognitive and memory skills.
3. Write a behavior plan and tape it to the child’s desk or post near him.
4. Provide a bouncy seat cushion or squeeze toy to help contain fidgets.
5. When you notice the child is distracted, go stand in front of or very near him.
6. Develop a secret sign or word with the child to indicate he is acting out.
7. Children with ADHD have low self-worth. Criticizing them in front of others may be counterproductive. They must be reprimanded for impulsivity, disrespect or aggression, but do so in private as much as possible.
8. Praise the child frequently for specific good behavior: “That entire discussion on the reading assignment happened without an interruption. Good job.”
9. Because of sensory issues, children with ADHD have most difficulty in larger groups or when there is noise or confusion. For group activities, be prepared to have the child become over stimulated. This is when their “fight-or-flight” response is especially triggered. So before such an activity, try to work in a breathing exercise or calming exercise to relax the brain’s urge to respond to this “threat.” Suggestion: Have the child be “first in” to assemblies and other group activities. This allows them to slowly accommodate to noise and social interactions.
10. Children with ADHD often have difficulty handling shame, blame and accountability, so they may be reluctant to turn in homework. Carefully consider your grading comments and help the child to understand that a low grade does not reflect on his self-worth.
11. Avoid disciplining by revoking recess or PE privileges. Children with ADHD really need time for active movement.
12. Consider using peer tutoring for the entire class, as this increases retention of material, while providing social interaction and feedback that ADHD children need.