

School and Classroom Strategies: ADHD

This Quick Fact Sheet contains strategies designed to address potential symptoms of ADHD in students and should be used in consultation and collaboration with your school's mental health personnel or as part of a larger intervention approach. These pages contain only a portion of many possible strategies available to address symptoms of ADHD in the classroom. Strategies should always be individualized and implemented with careful consideration of the differences of each child and the context of their individual circumstances. Additionally, this information should never be used to formulate a diagnosis. Mental health and/or medical diagnoses should be made only by trained professionals after a thorough evaluation.

If you notice a significant change in mood in any child that lasts for more than a week, share your observations with the child's parent and/or guardian and with your school's mental health support team

General Comments About ADHD Intervention

Effective education of students with ADHD requires a multi-disciplinary, multi-pronged approach.

One key to success for students with ADHD is partnership between families, physicians, and schools. Schools are essential partners in the success of students with ADHD. Through providing safe and supportive school environments, effective and responsive academic instruction, behavioral intervention, and classroom accommodations, schools can increase the opportunity for students with ADHD to achieve academic success and overall, life-long well-being. Within the context of a supportive comprehensive plan, schools should maintain high expectations for students with ADHD and must also be patient, creative, flexible, and willing to try new or alternative approaches. Below are some possible strategies to support students with ADHD at school.

School and/or Classroom Strategies for Inattention

- Seat the student in a location in the room with the least extraneous stimuli (often the front of the room with back to the rest of the class)
- Seat the student near positive role models with a high capacity for attention and concentration
- Increase distance between students' desks
- Limit noise distraction by placing tennis balls or pads under chair and desk feet
- Use a variety of auditory signals (e.g. bell, musical instrument) to cue student to transitions or need to focus attention
- Use a combination of audio, visual, and tactile approaches to academic instruction
- Allow the student to work on computer when feasible
- When giving instruction, highlight key points, both verbally and visually
- Be sure to have the student's attention before giving oral directions; give only one direction at a time, speak in short, simple sentences; provide a visual support for oral directions (i.e. written instructions, samples)
- Develop a discreet, non-shaming way for the student to ask for or get clarification on missed directions or to cue the student when they are off task
- Check in frequently with the student; provide lots of genuine praise and/or acknowledgment
- Provide accommodations for testing if necessary (i.e. alternative location, extended time)

School and/or Classroom Strategies for Disorganization

- Set clear classroom routines and rules and practice them over and over and over
- Start each day with a detailed review of the schedule; keep it posted in an easy to see place; refer to the schedule if the student appears disoriented; when activities are completed, cross them off the schedule
- Use a variety of auditory signals to cue the student to transitions (i.e. bell, lights)
- Teach students to use an assignment book to organize their work
- Use multi-colored folders—different colors to represent different subjects
- Write all assignments on the board; provide the student with time to copy the assignment into assignment book
- Have the student explain how he/she plans to organize an assignment before getting started
- Have clearly marked, consistently used homework collection bins
- Allow time during the day for locker and backpack organization; provide “check in” time at the end of the day to make sure the student has what they need
- Chunk assignments into smaller achievable parts
- Allow the student to keep one set of materials at home and one at school

School and/or Classroom Strategies for Impulsivity

- State and restate clear behavioral expectations for the classroom in general, and for each new task
- Post behavioral expectations throughout classroom and school for easy reference
- Establish clear social rules pertaining to social space (i.e. arms length)
- Establish clear classroom routines early in the year and stick to them
- Avoid excessive unstructured time
- Monitor the student’s level of stimulation; avoid activities that are over-stimulating and those that are under-stimulating
- Maintain supervision of the student at all times
- Keep close proximity to the student to intervene if student acts impulsively
- Assist the student in beginning new tasks to decrease impulsivity in their approach
- Provide extra support through transitions; provide a separate transition time for the student if necessary (i.e. 5 minutes before bell rings)
- Teach the student strategies for waiting their turn (i.e. counting, doodling)
- Reinforce close approximations of desired behavior; recognize effort and improvement in behavioral control
- Teach the student decision making steps and reinforce the student when he or she makes reasoned decisions
- Teach the student to think before acting
- Help the student develop increased self-awareness about their behavior

School and/or Classroom Strategies for Hyperactivity

- Surround the student with peers who tend to stay on task
- Design highly motivating curriculum with ample opportunity for hands-on work
- Design lessons so that students have to actively respond to an assignment—get up, move around, write on board, etc.
- Allow the student opportunities to stand while working
- Provide regularly scheduled breaks and/or opportunities for the student to move around in between quiet work periods
- Give the student an in-class outlet for physical restlessness, such as a squeeze ball or soothing stone
- Offer more positive reinforcements than negative consequences
- Communicate frequently with parents, send positive notes home
- Provide small group social skills training
- Make use of additional adults who may be available to sit near the student and/or accompany the student during motor break times
- Integrate physical activity (i.e. shooting hoops) throughout the school day that is not contingent on good behavior