

Compilation of general guidelines on ADHD

How teachers can engage children with ADHD in the classroom and inspire better behavior from all students.

Children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, or other learning disabilities are sometimes the most fascinating, the most knowledgeable, and the deepest thinkers. Children with attention deficit disorder might go unappreciated — unless teachers look for the positive qualities while helping them improve their behavior. Here are some things that have worked for teachers.

1. Avoid Humiliating Children

It's easy to call out the names of children with problematic behaviors. "Jack, don't do that!" "Gracie, don't touch that!" But not only does the rest of the class tire of hearing these refrains, it's terrible for the morale of the child who may not be able to control his constant movement.

2. Choose seating wisely.

Have the dynamo sit near the teacher or other adult. That way, the teacher can whisper, rather than broadcast reminders, about behavior.

3. Agree on signals.

Work together with the child on some non-verbal signals. For example, one child in a class was constantly tapping the floor or poking other children. He and the teacher had decided that, when she looked directly at him and patted her knees, he would put his hands on his lap.

4. Plan for Smooth Transitions

For some children, transitions from one activity to another, or from the classroom to the lunchroom, are difficult times. Review expectations. Before every transition, the teacher can give a signal and review what is expected. She might say, "We are finished with writing workshop. You will put your writing folders in the box." When that is completed, she'll say, "You will bring your reading journal and a pencil to story circle." When children know exactly what is expected of them, it is much easier to develop and follow that pattern of behavior.

5. Assign special jobs.

If a child has trouble with a task, such as getting his coat from the closet and waiting in line to go to lunch, give him a special job while the rest of the class is getting ready. Say quietly, "Braydon, hurry and get your jacket, then sharpen these pencils." Braydon is delighted to use the electric sharpener, and he knows he's making a contribution that actually helps the class.

6. Stay close.

Allow students to choose new line partners each month. Determine which pairs of kids are toward the front of the line. A child who has difficulty with behavior will walk closer to the teacher. In some cases, a child will be the teacher's partner. This changes as a child's behavior improves.

9 ADHD Strategies Every Teacher Should Know

"If I have something subtle to occupy me — like a small fidget toy — I am neither distracted nor seeking out distractions. I am relaxed and alert." Hearing students with ADHD describe their unique challenges in their own words can unlock amazing collaboration and tremendous learning.

1. Learning is a collaboration

Success in the classroom is a two-way street. To learn, students must show up prepared and excited for class. But teachers must prepare as well. Understanding a student's unique challenges will help teacher and students become a winning team. Understanding ADHD will provide valuable clues in teaching students with ADHD best.

2. Grab my attention

I don't always make eye-contact, sit upright or even still, but that does not mean I am not listening. If you're not sure ask me what you just said rather than constantly asking if I'm paying attention. If I respond correctly, then I am. If I can't repeat the information, try to gain my attention before starting again.

3. Get all of me involved

It is a challenge for me to learn passively for extended periods of time. Get me as involved as possible because my brain does better with interactive learning. The more of my sense you address, the more engaged I will be. Don't just tell me what to do, show me how, and then let me show you I understand.

4. I can be distracted or not distracted enough

Sometimes I don't pay attention because I am distracted. Sometimes I need a distraction. A totally silent environment can cause my ears and eyes to strain to find out where my distractions went. If I have something subtle to occupy me – two coins to rub together or a small fidget toy – I am neither distracted nor seeking out distractions – I am relaxed and alert.

5. I need stimulation

Don't take it personally if I seem bored. I have a hard time motivating myself to do tasks not highly interesting to me. My brain craves stimulation, so even listening to soft background music through headphones helps keep of my part busy. Give me incentives too. Small rewards encourage me, so that I can pull my attention back to the work you gave me to complete

6. I need to move

My attention span is tied to my energy levels. I know I am supposed to complete work at a desk. But how am I supposed to go forward if my brain is always in neutral? If I cannot move while I think, my engine will stall.

If a shutdown occurs, let me stand, move or shift gears before returning to the subject. Sometimes a movement break – a few jumping jacks – can jump-start my progress. This works better for me than suggesting I sit down to do a task.

7. Lead the way for me to learn

What I learned in school is not always apparent, even to me. I need you to show me what I have learned. When I have to answer a question, make the answer be a goal I want to reach and that I will be proud of achieving. I need to feel like you are guiding me towards finding an answer.

8. Do not interrogate me

If you tell me I'm not trying hard enough or not co-operating, my motivation and mindset become that of a prisoner locked in a room. When stress clamps down on my mind, I drag around the mental and emotional chains of judgement – that I should know this, but am just not smart enough. Being interrogated, especially in front of my classmates, does not motivate me, but discourages me from wanting to try,

9. Encourage me - don't shame me

Sometimes I draw attention to myself without meaning to, like when I am fidgeting and don't know it, or when I stare off into space because my mind has wandered. I need your patient encouragement, not shaming or derogatory remarks. In fact, I need more positive reinforcement than my peers, but I get much less than they do due to my struggles.

10. I want what you want: success

I want to succeed. I am not acting this way to annoy you or to be disrespectful. My brain works differently, but it does work. I can tell when adults do not seem to like me. I may miss out on a lot of subtle tones, but if you like me and are on my side I will know it and will work a lot harder than if you are just putting up with me.

ADHD: Using the Stoplight System to Manage School Behavior

Many teachers use this system for managing the classroom behavior of children with ADHD who need clear expectations, visual reminders, and positive incentives.

Teachers and parents can use a simple strategy — called the stoplight system - to put the brakes on bad behavior in children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

The system uses the graphic of a stoplight and a clothespin bearing a child's name to indicate when he is behaving well or having difficulty.

The behavior management system works well in the classroom as well as at home to reinforce household rules. The use of explicit guidelines, rewards, and consequences is particularly helpful for children with ADHD. Read on to find out how to get started.

Step 1: Establish Rules

The teacher and student(s) work together to establish the class rules and expectations. Write them on poster board and hang it prominently near the classroom door.

At home, post household chores and rules on the refrigerator or on the bathroom door.

Step 2: Identify Rewards

Each student receives two bottle caps at the beginning of the week. More can be earned by positive behavior, such as lining up quietly or helping others. Children with ADHD might receive rewards for raising their hand rather than shouting out answers or turning in their homework assignments on time all week.

At the end of the week, the caps are traded in for rewards — stickers, school supplies, books, a small toy, or a special lunch with a friend.

Step 3: Enforce the Rules

If a student breaks a class rule or doesn't do a chore at home, the clothespin bearing his name is moved from the green light to the yellow light. He loses three bottle caps and is denied a classroom or extracurricular privilege.

A second infraction takes his clothespin to the red light, and costs five bottle caps and two privileges. If there's a third infraction, he owes 10 bottle caps, forfeits all privileges for the day. If the infraction happens at school, the teacher calls his parents.

TIP: To build leeway into the stoplight system, a teacher or parent should warn a child with ADHD before moving his clothespin. If a child's behavior improves, allow him to move back to green from yellow. That way, a child gets to make a fresh start from the green light.

Impulse-control strategies for learners with ADHD

For children with ADHD who are ruled by their impulses calling out in class or pushing to the front of the line comes naturally. These kids live in the moment, undeterred by rules or consequences.

Lack of impulse control may be the most difficult ADHD symptom to change. Medication can help, but kids also need effective behavior management strategies in place — clear expectations, positive incentives, and predictable consequences — if they are to learn to regulate their behavior.

Enforce Discipline at School

Lead your students in compiling a list of class rules. Include some that are difficult for kids with ADHD, such as "Always raise your hand to ask for help." Be sure to define each rule: What does it mean to "Use materials appropriately"?

In general, discipline should be immediate.

If one student pushes another on the playground, for example, have him sit out part of recess. A delayed consequence — such as after-school detention — doesn't work for kids who have trouble anticipating outcomes.

Provide visual reminders to keep kids on track.

To spare a child the embarrassment of frequent reprimands, agree upon a secret gesture you'll use to signal her to stay in her seat or to stop calling out. Some children benefit from a reminder taped to the desk. That, too, can be private; no one else has to know that "N.I." stands for "No Interrupting."

Encourage appropriate behavior with recognition and rewards.

This is especially important for children with ADHD, who get a lot of negative attention for misconduct. Acknowledge good behavior with specific praise, such as: "Edward, I appreciate how quickly and quietly you cleared your desk."

Some older children are embarrassed by compliments, so give a thumbs-up or a pat on the back instead.

Clear, Enforceable Expectations

Write the day's schedule on the blackboard, and erase items as they're completed. This gives kids with ADHD a sense of being in control of their day. Provide advance notice of any changes to the usual routine.

Issue frequent alerts as the end of an activity draws near.

Give the class a five-minute warning, and then a two-minute warning, to ease the transition from one activity to the next. Devise a plan for students for whom change is especially difficult. Assign them to a special task, like collecting classmates' papers, to help them maintain self-control.

Use a daily report card.

This tool allows a child's teacher and parents to monitor academic and behavioral goals — and gives the child a chance to earn rewards. Each day, the teacher records whether the goals were met, and the child takes the report card home to show his parents. In some cases it is important to break the day in periods and indicate successes after each period (eg remaining seated the whole day may be difficult and unrealistic to attain).

What can parents do at home to enforce the appropriate behaviors learned at school?

Rewarding Positive Behavior

Be explicit about how your child is to behave.

Instead of telling her to "be good" at the playground, tell her to "wait in line for the slide, and don't push."

Hold your child accountable for his actions.

Keep punishments short and appropriate, but let them remind your child that he is responsible for his own behavior. A good rule of thumb for time-outs is one minute for each year of a child's age.

Discourage a problem behavior by "charging" for each infraction.

This strategy rewards your child for not engaging in an inappropriate behavior, such as interrupting your phone calls.

How it works:

Determine, roughly, how many times a week your child interrupts you during a phone call, and fill a jar with slightly fewer quarters. Tell your child that these are hers to keep at the end of the week, but that you will remove one each time she interrupts a call. As the behavior begins to diminish, reduce the number of quarters you put in the jar at the beginning of the week.

Special Rules for Special Occasions

Go easy on minor missteps.

If your child spills milk because he's pouring it quickly, help him clean the mess, talk to him about the importance of being careful, and move on.

Anticipate potentially explosive situations.

Children with ADHD need consistency and routine, but the unpredictable will sometimes happen.

Prepare your child for special occasions: Explain where you're going, who will be there, what activities are planned, and how he should behave. Plan a way for him to signal you if he's becoming overwhelmed, such as putting his hand in yours. (You can do the same if you sense a meltdown in the making.)

Take A Deep Breath: Teaching Kids to Control Emotions

Meltdowns happen. But when your child has ADHD, it can be more difficult for him to learn how to control impulse reactions. Teach him how to keep his cool with a plan for action and coping strategies.

Controlling emotions, or emotional control, is the ability to manage emotions to achieve goals, complete tasks, or direct behavior. A young child who has this skill can recover from a disappointment — a low grade on a math test — in short time. A teenager can manage anxiety over taking a test and perform well. Some kids with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) handle their emotions just fine, others don't. Empathy works well with all these children. Parents and teachers can say, "This is frustrating for you, isn't it?" or "It gets to you when teachers (or parents) don't understand how hard you're working to control your feelings, doesn't it?"

Control Emotions in the Classroom

Avoid problem situations. Don't place a child with ADHD next to someone who knows how to push his buttons. If a child gets upset with open-ended assignments, quickly help her get started so she doesn't have time to feel frustrated.

Give the child a plan for handling problem situations. "When you don't understand an assignment, I want you to raise your hand and say, 'I think I need a little help to get me started on this.'"

Control Emotions at School

Encourage the child to forgive himself for mistakes. Emotional upset is caused less by specific situations or events and more by what we tell ourselves about that situation. Say to the child, "It looks like you're telling yourself that leaving your homework at home is a disaster. Maybe you could tell yourself, 'Oops — forgot that homework assignment. What can I do to remember to bring it tomorrow?'"

Create a 5-point scale to help the child gauge how upset she is. Help her make a coping strategy for each step on the scale. For a child who has meltdowns when there's an unexpected change in schedule, the scale might look like this:

1. This doesn't bother me at all.
2. I can talk myself down.
3. I can feel my heart speeding up a little ... I'll take 10 deep breaths to relax.
4. OK, this is getting to me, I probably need to "take 5" to regroup.
5. I'm about to melt down, so I need to leave the class for a few minutes.

Write a story. Create a one-paragraph “social story” that addresses a child’s problem situation — getting in trouble on the playground, the disappointment that comes with earning a bad grade, nervousness when the student has to perform in front of a group — and ends happily with a coping strategy.

Give praise. Notice when a child shows good emotional control. You could say, “I saw how angry you were, but you kept your cool. Nice job.”

Practice Emotional Control at Home

Make sure your child gets enough sleep. Fatigue increases problems with emotional control. Schedules and daily routines help children better regulate their emotions, because they know what they have to do and handle.

Give your child coping strategies. She can say, “I need to go to my bedroom for a few minutes to be alone” or tell you a break is needed. Other self-soothing strategies include holding a favorite stuffed animal (for a younger child) or listening to relaxing music on an mp3 player (for an older child).

Help your child create a “hard-times board”. List three categories on it: 1) the triggers — what makes your child upset; 2) the can’t-do’s — the behavior that’s not permitted at times of upset; and 3) the can-do’s — two or three coping strategies (draw a picture, take a five-minute break, get a drink of water) to help him recover from being upset. Praise your child when he uses one of the coping strategies from his board.

Read books on emotional control with your child. *What to Do When Your Temper Flares* and *What to Do When You Worry Too Much*, both by Dawn Huebner, describe coping strategies for taking control over unpleasant emotions.

Give your child a plan for problem situations. If your child gives up without trying when a homework assignment appears difficult, suggest, “Here’s what I want you to say to yourself before starting this: ‘I know this will be hard for me, but I’m going to keep trying. If I get stuck after trying hard, I will ask for help.’”

Show how you cope with emotional upset. For instance, “If I find myself getting cranky and I’m afraid I might say something mean, I’ll set the timer for three minutes and take a time-out to see if I can calm down.”