

Strategies for Teaching Students with ADHD

The research literature has identified classroom characteristics that promote success for students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Predictability, structure, short working periods, a small teacher-to-pupil ratio, individualized instruction, an interesting curriculum, and lots of positive reinforcement are all important to student progress. Researchers have also identified optimal teacher characteristics. They include positive academic expectations, personal warmth, patience, humor, consistency, firmness, frequent monitoring of student work, and knowledge of behavior management strategies.

Below, you will find specific strategies for accomplishing different goals.

Behavior management strategies

- Develop good rapport with the student. Students with ADHD are more likely to respond to positive emotional connections than contingent consequences.
- Ignore as much of the negative behavior as possible.
- If you get a lot of defiant or oppositional behavior, review how often you say negative things and give commands to the student. Students who hear too many negatives and commands will tune out the person they come from. Be positive, encourage the student, focus on progress (however small), etc.
- Focus your attention on appropriate behaviors.
- Prompt correct behavior and verbally reinforce it frequently.
- Provide opportunities for physical movement (e.g., erasing the blackboard, running errands, distributing and collecting materials), and build physical activities into the daily schedule.
- Encourage parents to build physical activity into the student's out-of-school schedule. If social rewards/reinforcement is insufficient to bring about the desired behavior, pair social recognition with earned activities or tangible reinforcement.
- Use progress charts and other visual records of behavior to encourage more appropriate behavior. Use colorful charts and cards to motivate the student and recognize effort.
- Move nearer to the student when he/she becomes restless. Offer verbal encouragement or touch. When misbehavior occurs (or threatens to occur), move closer and soften your voice.
- Assign a capable "study buddy" who can remind and assist the student who is active or disorganized.

- Assign duties that require self-control and build self-esteem (e.g., line leader, materials distributor, etc). Prepare the student for the duty, encourage him/her, and reinforce him/her during and after that activity/task.
- Teach self management of behavior.

Modifications to the classroom environment

- Assign the student to a seat that best allows him/her to observe you and avoid distractions (e.g., away from doors, windows, pencil sharpeners).
- Eliminate excessive noise.
- Eliminate excessive visual stimuli (decorations) and clutter that might distract the student.
- Use study carrels or seat the student in the area of the classroom with the fewest distractions, and/or face the desk toward the wall. However, do not isolate the student for long periods of time as this practice stigmatizes him/her.
- Keep directions and commentary short and to the point. Avoid "overloading" the student with too much language.
- Provide a visual (picture) or written schedule to which the student can refer.
- Provide an inflatable seat cushion. The student will put his/her energy into squirming on it, but he/she will stay in the seat.
- Provide a "kusch ball" or other fidget object for the student to manipulate.
- Allow the student to chew gum to release energy and provide oral stimulation.

Starting your lesson

- Provide "do now" activities for other students while you help the student with ADHD refocus.
- Be sure you have the student's attention before you begin teaching.
- Use alert cues to get the student's attention before giving directions.
- Use more than one modality when giving directions. Supplement verbal instructions with visual ones.
- Repeat and simplify directions.
- Use pantomime to capture the attention of the student when giving instructions.
- To gain the attention of younger students, give directions through a puppet.
- Place instructions on an audio tape that can be replayed by the student as needed.
- To ensure understanding, have the student repeat the directions in his/her own words.

- Use color to highlight important words or phrases on worksheets.
- Have the student underline or highlight directions.

Keeping the student on task

- Reduce the length of assignments so the student does not lose interest.
- Present the assignment in parts (e.g., 5 math problems at a time). Give reinforcement for each completed part before giving the next segment of the task, or have the student mark his/her progress on a chart.
- Keep unstructured time to a minimum.
- Allow the student to use learning aides, computers, and calculators.
- Allow the student to manipulate an object as long as he/she attends and is on task. (Allow the student to doodle, squeeze a ball, bend a pipe cleaner or paper clip, or handle another non distracting item).
- In cooperation with the student, create a "secret signal" (e.g., tugging on your ear lobe, clicking your tongue, saying an odd word - - "snarzelpharf") that reminds him/her to attend.
- To block out distractions on a page, create a "window" in a piece of poster board that exposes only one or two lines of print.
- Provide some choice or variation in assignments to maintain the student's attention.
- Seat the student near to student who are on-task.
- Assign another student to be a "support buddy" or "study buddy" who provides one-to-one attention to assist in completing tasks.
- Motivate the student by having him/her "race against the clock" to finish the task (or part of it) by a certain time.
- Use a clock to remind an impatient student that the next activity must wait until a certain time.
- In a multi-part task, provide visual cues that are written on the student's desk or on the chalkboard.
- Play soft background music without lyrics.
- Allow the student to kneel on his chair, stand, or walk with a clipboard as long as he/she remains on task.
- Allow the student to change seats and places as long as he/she stays on task.

Making lessons more interesting

- Give a general overview first. Let the student(s) know what will be learned and why it is important in life.

- Use examples/illustrations that capitalize on the student's interests.
- Involve the student's interests in assignments.
- Ensure that your style of presentation is enthusiastic and interesting.
- Use game formats to teach and/or reinforce concepts and material.
- Use concrete objects to assist in keeping the student's attention.
- Incorporate movement into lessons.

Memory assistance

- Have the student progress through the following steps while learning: See it, say it, write it, do it.
- Teach memory techniques and study strategies.

Testing accommodations

- Use alternative methods of assessing the student's knowledge or skill level.
- Allow the student to respond orally to test questions, if that format will keep the student's attention and better assess his/her knowledge.
- Use performance testing. Allow the student do something or make something to demonstrate understanding.
- Provide extended time to finish tests..
- Assign the test grade based on performance on different aspects of the assessment (i.e., do not discount for organization, writing mechanics, and penmanship).
- To increase reflection and concentration, have the student identify the correct answer AND cross out incorrect answers on multiple choice tests. Inform the student that there may be more than one correct answer.

Transitions

- Set up routines that prepare the student for upcoming transitions.
- Teach expectations for behavior BEFORE an activity or event.
- Provide a special "transition object" (e.g., puppet, small stuffed animal) that accompanies the student to other classrooms, providing a sense of consistency and support.

Homework

- Have another student place carbon paper under his/her paper while writing down homework assignments. Give the carbon copy to the student with ADHD to take home.
- Provide an adult to whom the student reports at the beginning and end of the day to organize his/her work, assure assignments are in-hand, etc.
- Provide a second set of textbooks for the student to use at home.

Courtesy of Thomas McIntyre (2004)

McIntyre, Ph.D., T(March 4, 2004). Strategies for Teaching Youth with ADD and ADHD. Retrieved February 14, 2007, from Dr. Mac's Amazing Behavior Management Advice web site: **www.behavioradvisor.com**

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