

THE CHILD WITH ATTENTION DIFFICULTIES IN THE CLASSROOM

Tips for Teachersⁱ

This list is a starting point to help the classroom teacher find accommodations to help the child with attention difficulties in the classroom. Not all suggestions work for all children in all classrooms at all times. Choose and adapt these tips to meet your needs.

Physical Considerations:

1. Seat student near teacher's desk.
2. Surround student with "good role models."
3. Avoid distracting stimuli. Try not to place the student near: air conditioner, heater, high traffic areas, doors or windows, pencil sharpener.
4. Children with attention difficulties do not handle changes well. Monitor during transitions, changes in schedule, physical relocation, disruptions.
5. Provide a stimuli-reduced study area (accessible to all children).
6. Use of quiet instrumental music to provide calming influence and block out extraneous noise outside the immediate environment.

General Classroom Management - Preventative Techniques:

1. Stress structure and routine.
2. Post important classroom rules.
3. Break up periods of inactivity with activity.
4. As much as possible, integrate listening activities with hands-on work.
5. Try to give constructive ways for child to move around.
6. Beware of negative reinforcement.
7. Use a problem-solving approach to behaviour management. Example:
 - a) Have clear and consistent expectations.
 - b) Communicate your expectations.
 - c) Post classroom rules.
 - d) Help the child to think about behaviour and its consequences to develop greater self-control.
 - e) Follow a problem-solving approach:
 - i. Define the problem/descriptive feedback.
 - ii. Generate alternatives.
 - iii. Student makes a choice.
 - iv. Evaluations/feedback.
8. Use process questions.
9. Ask the student what would be helpful.



They're not out to "get you:"

Students with Attention difficulties often become defensive because they feel teachers are picking on them. They are usually quite unaware of the impact of their behaviour on others.

1. Provide descriptive feedback to encourage awareness of behaviour.
2. Give them lots of explanation as to why you are asking them to change their behaviour or move to another desk, etc.
3. Control your own emotional reactions:
 - a) Remember the behaviour is the result of the disorder - not the child's fault.
 - b) Try not to personalize his/her behaviour.
4. Provide reassurance and encouragement.
5. Make time to talk alone with the student. Decide on discreet cues to re-focus the student's attention in lieu of reprimands.
6. Value students' differences and bring out their strengths.
7. Respect each student's privacy and confidentiality.

Enhancing Social Interaction:

1. Plan activities in which the child with attention difficulties can participate as an equal or even in a leadership role with other children (e.g. mini-plays).
2. Plan activities that depend on mutual co-operation for success:
 - a) Must be structured.
 - b) Well monitored.
 - c) Tasks should be assigned.
3. Plan opportunities for individualized activities (e.g. swimming, biking, karate, skiing). Team sports may be difficult for the child with attention difficulties.
4. Have classroom jobs and assign them to all children, including the child with attention difficulties. Be sure the child with attention difficulties has a turn doing "choice" jobs.
5. Describe, praise and prompt socially appropriate behaviour for the student with attention difficulties.
6. Provide opportunities to role play socially appropriate interactions.
7. Trouble-shoot difficult situations in advance, through discussion of "what if..." scenarios, and gradual expansion and modelling of acceptable behaviour.

Giving Instructions:

1. Pre-listening strategies:
 - a) Establish a definite purpose for the lesson.
 - b) Need to know what they are required to learn.
 - c) Periodic verbal reminders or cues.
 - d) Organize the information being presented according to time or sequence.

2. Post-listening skills:
 - a) Repeat in your own words.
 - b) Make a picture in your head.
3. If possible, provide students with lecture outlines.

Enhance the Stimulation of Learning Materials:

1. Add colour to new information (graphs, illustrations, key words, etc.).
2. Alternate coloured and white paper for worksheets.
3. Permit the student to use a coloured pencil or pen on occasion.
4. Permit the student to work problems in an unusual order, i.e., from bottom to top, in an X pattern, or even numbers first.
5. Involve students in thinking of creative/interesting ways to acquire or practice knowledge or skills.
6. Use manipulative materials, even with older students.
7. Explore novel means of introducing new topics and skills.
8. Take advantage of alternatives to lecture formats, including the use of technological supports, peer tutoring, and cooperative learning.
9. Deliver lessons in a highly animated, highly structured and clear manner.
10. Use brisk pacing and an interesting mix of activities.

Attention: Getting it, Focusing it, Keeping it:

1. Signal - turn off lights, ring a bell, raise a hand, play a bar of music.
2. Vary tone of voice - present at a snappy brisk pace.
3. Eye contact.
4. Model excitement and enthusiasm about the lesson.
5. Make sure it is quiet before proceeding with instructions.
6. Use visuals - write key words on board, overhead projector.
7. Use colour - chalk.
8. Frame visual material that students are to focus on.
9. Use pointer - overhead.
10. Incorporate "hands on" activities into lesson.
11. Prepare student to be called on, by providing advance notice (e.g. please be ready to explain # 5 when we come to it), thus increasing the chance of successful participation.
12. Have students actively participate in the lesson:
 - a) Brainstorm - students generate ideas related to the topic.
 - b) Turn to your partner and discuss for a few minutes - write down ideas.
13. Accommodate written output difficulties (oral responses, dictation rather than writing, recurring written requirements).

Providing Feedback:

1. Provide frequent positive feedback.
2. Praise and encourage.
3. Be specific - describe what you want the child to repeat - e.g. "Wow! You read all of the information at the top of the page. You were able to do the problems correctly."
OR "You followed your plan and didn't miss anything."
4. Have a private signal to cue student.

Performing Assignments - Keeping Students On Task During Seat Work:

1. Check for clarity - were directions heard and understood?
2. Give out only one task at a time/divide work into smaller segments.
3. Monitor frequently. Use a supportive attitude. Circulate.
4. Modify assignments as needed.
5. Give extra time for certain tasks.
6. Integrate the teaching of planning and self-monitoring skills into lessons.
7. Teach the child strategies for better organization and concentration.
8. Use cues, physical contact (e.g. a gentle touch on the shoulder).
9. Give other "failproof" work that student can do if he is stumped on an assignment and needs to wait for assistance.
10. Consider using a timer for students who work well under a "beat the clock" system for work completion.
11. Study buddies may be assigned for clarification purposes during seat work.
12. Decide on signals for: "I need help."
13. Encourage students to highlight key words in instructions.
14. Encourage regular checking and review of completed work. (Did I follow all instructions? Did I omit any items?)

Dealing with Written Language Problems:

The student with attentional problems may write more slowly, produce less work, and have difficulty organizing their thoughts. Try:

1. Using a computer, which greatly assists in editing and revisions.
2. Teaching strategies for theme writing.
3. Using note cards for main ideas.
4. Using an alternative to writing (e.g., oral exams, dictation, tape recorder).
5. Modifying the test.
6. Providing a reader for tests.
7. Modifying the assignments.
8. Minimizing board work and copying from overheads (e.g., provide an outline).

Poor Reading Comprehension:

1. Slide a bookmark down the page.
2. Allow student to use published book summaries.
3. Use "Talking Books"/Audiotapes.

Organizational Strategies:

1. An organizational notebook.
2. Encourage the use of lists/Post It Notes.
3. The use of a wrist watch alarm.
4. Encourage the use of time lines - things to do list.
5. Remind student to clean out their locker, knapsack, desk, periodically.

6. Buddy who provides reminders - or a coach.
7. Teach expectations for materials expected in class at all times.
8. Positive reinforcement - role modelling.

Homework:

1. Assign a peer study buddy, students check that each has recorded assignments.
2. Write assignments on board - as you write, students write.
3. Review assignments to be done at the end of the day.
4. Communicate with parents when there is a problem with homework.
5. Modify assignments when necessary.
6. Check books/assignments are in backpack.

ⁱ These tips are drawn from the experience of the Calgary Learning Centre staff together with ideas adapted from the C.H.A.D.D. Education Committee's "Attention Deficit Disorders: A Guide for Teachers" (1988); Ann B. Welch's "Teaching Students with Attention Deficits" (Virginia Murray Elementary School, Ivy, VA); Harvey Parker's "ADAPT: Accommodations Help Students with Attention Deficit Disorders;" Chris A. Zeigler Dendy's, "Teenagers with ADD: A Parent's Guide;" and Sandra F. Rief's "How to Reach and Teach ADD/AD/HD Children."