

# ADHD: Helping Handout for School

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## INTRODUCTION

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is characterized by clinically significant levels of inattention and/or hyperactivity–impulsivity that are age inappropriate, persistent, and pervasive. Children and adolescents with ADHD often experience academic, behavioral, emotional, and social impairments that adversely affect their everyday lives. These difficulties are seen in children as young as preschool age and often persist into adulthood. If left untreated, individuals with ADHD are at greater risk for long-term negative outcomes, including lower educational and employment attainment and chronic mental health problems. Fortunately, there are numerous empirically supported interventions for students with ADHD. The most common treatments with demonstrated effectiveness are psychotropic medications (e.g., Adderall, Ritalin, Stattera) and behavioral interventions implemented in home and school settings. Whereas parents must consult medical doctors about the need for medications, where appropriate, this handout focuses on school-based intervention strategies (see *ADHD: Helping Handout for Home* for home-based intervention strategies).

## WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN SELECTING SUPPORTS AND INTERVENTIONS

In choosing among recommended intervention strategies for a student with ADHD, teachers should consider the following factors.

### Developmental Level

Problem behaviors in children with ADHD can vary by age and developmental level. For example, hyperactivity and tantrums may be primary concerns in early childhood, whereas greater likelihood of delinquency and substance use may emerge in adolescents with ADHD. Academic concerns, such

as homework completion and performance on tests, may be more stable throughout early childhood and adolescence. Thus, it is imperative that teachers select interventions that not only are appropriate for the target behavior exhibited at a specific time, but also have been deemed empirically appropriate for the child's specific age. Teachers should also reevaluate intervention choices as the student matures.

### Environmental and Cultural Factors

Observed behaviors may be a product of multiple influences. External and environmental factors can have real effects on both development and behavior. When selecting an intervention, teachers should consider environmental influences that may either aid or inhibit an intervention's success, such as the context in which the behavior occurs (e.g., silent seatwork, small-group work, transitions), the child's access to resources, and the child's cultural and language background. For example, interventions that involve home–school communication can be effective for academic problems in elementary school students. However, without modification, this sort of intervention would likely not be an appropriate selection by an English-speaking teacher for a student whose parents are non-English speakers.

### Target Behavior

When a child displays several challenging behaviors, it may be necessary to prioritize intervention targets to address the most relevant concerns first. When prioritizing intervention targets, teachers should first consider those behaviors that pose a danger to the individual or others. For example, aggressive or destructive behaviors (e.g., hitting others, biting self or others, throwing objects) should be targeted before distracting or disruptive behaviors (e.g., excessive talking, constant movement). In addition, it may be best to target key areas of impairment (e.g., problems

with academic work completion or peer interactions) rather than harder-to-track symptomatic behaviors (e.g., fidgeting, off-task).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations address common behavior problems associated with ADHD. When selecting recommendations for use, teachers should keep in mind why different behaviors are occurring (e.g., seeking teacher or peer attention, task avoidance) as well as behavior contingency principles such as positive and negative reinforcement.

1. **Modify, or chunk, the work.** For students who tend to avoid completing work, tasks and assignments should be modified into achievable steps or chunks (e.g., splitting a worksheet of 15 problems into three chunks of five). After the student has completed each chunk, provide performance feedback and praise.
2. **Provide opportunities for active learning.** Active learning emphasizes activities, problem solving, analysis, and synthesis (e.g., role playing, hands-on projects) rather than sitting still and passively listening.
3. **Arrange for class-wide peer tutoring.** Arrange for students to work together in pairs and practice tutoring one another using skills already taught. Give them opportunities to ask one another questions and provide feedback to each other. Peer tutoring maximizes practice time for students to master concepts.
4. **Present clear visual reminders of expectations.** Consider posting classroom rules and expectations where students can clearly see them as reminders. Frequently refer to specific expectations when behavior occurs. The rules and expectations should be worded in clear language that is easy to understand and be consistently referenced and reinforced.
5. **Use transition warnings.** Verbally announce to the class when a transition or shift to a different activity is approaching (e.g., "We'll be closing our books and moving on to our math worksheets in 2 minutes."). Cues such as timers and bells can also be used to signal transitions.
6. **Praise specifically and frequently.** Clear and specific praise lets students know they are supported and their behavior is appropriate. Be sure not to give attention to students when they are exhibiting inappropriate behavior. (See *Using Praise and Rewards Wisely: Helping Handout for School and Home* for recommendations on their use.)
7. **Modify instructions.** Give students instructions one at a time and repeat if necessary. Also, consider providing written copies of directions. It also helps to have the student with ADHD to repeat the directions or instructions to you.
8. **Help guide and support organizational skills.** Students with ADHD may frequently struggle with organizing their work or keeping track of their belongings. Organizational skills interventions aim to equip students with the skills to appropriately store their assignments and personal belongings, track due dates, and use tools such as binders, bookbags, and lockers. To help with organizational skills, consider the following steps (also see *Homework, Organization, and Study Skills: Helping Handout for School*):
  - a. **Establish a system.** Work with the student to develop clear expectations for how assignments should be recorded and organized (e.g., take-home folder, planner system)
  - b. **Introduce a planner.** Introduce a planner system to track important dates, assignments, and exams.
  - c. **Develop a checklist.** Develop an organization checklist that is individualized for the student's skills and developmental level. The checklist should reflect the systems and expectations that you have clearly communicated to the student (e.g., "All of Johnny's take-home work is in the take-home section of his folder" or "Johnny copied all of today's homework into his planner.").
  - d. **Check progress.** Use the organization checklist to check the student's adherence to the established system and record the data from organization checks using yes-or-no criteria. A contingency plan should be set up for rewarding the student for meeting established goals.
  - e. **Plan for discontinuation.** After the student has been successful on the targeted areas for several consecutive checks, begin to fade out the frequency of rewards and formal checks.
9. **Develop and implement a daily behavior report card.** For students with symptomatic behaviors of ADHD that are mild to moderate in severity, a daily behavior report card can help build and maintain

appropriate classroom performance and behavior. Typically, parents and teachers collaborate to identify specific behaviors targeted for change. Then, teachers provide a daily report card for the student's behavior at school that is given to the student to bring home to the parents. Parents incorporate this daily feedback about the student's school performance and behavior into a positive reward system in the home. The following are several steps to the successful implementation of a daily report card:

- a. *Conduct a parent–teacher conference.* The teacher initiates home–school communication and discusses concerns with the parents.
- b. *Define behaviors targeted for change in clear, specific, positive, and observable terms.* For example, define a target as “Student completed at least 80% of assigned work.”
- c. *Design the daily report card.* Components should include basic information (e.g., student's name, date, teacher's signature, any relevant comments); a list of targeted behaviors; the time period during which the behaviors are monitored (class period, subject area); and a place for the teacher to rate whether, or the degree to which, the target behaviors occur.
- d. *Determine responsibilities.* For example, identify that the student brings the card to the teachers and parents, the teacher completes the card, and parents give a reward if the goal is achieved. The parent or teacher should explain the daily report card and the student's responsibilities (e.g., bring the daily report card home each day).
- e. *Establish goals.* The teacher and parents should collaborate to set a minimum daily report card rating that the student must attain to earn the selected reward or incentive.
- f. *Construct a list of rewards and incentives.* Attach a list of rewards that will be consistently given when the student meets daily goals (e.g., playing a game with Mom and Dad, extra TV time). The rewards could be listed on the reverse side of the daily report card.
- g. *Provide feedback (teacher).* At the end of each period or school day, the teacher rates the target behaviors and provides feedback.
- h. *Provide rewards (parents).* If the student meets the goal for the day, the agreed-upon reward should be provided at the agreed-upon

time. Parents are encouraged to use a lot of verbal praise.

- i. *Modify goals.* After several weeks of success, the parents and teachers should discuss modifying goals to encourage additional growth in the type and level of behavior (e.g., expand goals to target social interactions).

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

### Websites

<http://www.chadd.org/Understanding-ADHD/For-Professionals/For-Teachers.aspx>

This website for the National Resource Center for ADHD provides current evidence-based information for teachers and parents regarding assessment and treatment of students with ADHD.

### Books and Documents

DuPaul, G. J., & Stoner, G. (2014). *ADHD in the schools: Assessment and intervention strategies* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

This professional text provides research-based information on school-based comprehensive assessment and management of ADHD.

Pfiffner, L. J. (2011). *All about ADHD: The complete practical guide for classroom teachers* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Scholastic.

This is a research-based guide to ADHD for general and special education teachers.

U.S. Department of Education. (2008). *Teaching children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: Instructional strategies and practices*. Washington, DC: U.S. Office of Special Education Programs.

This document, first published in 2004, is updated to provide detailed descriptions of academic instruction, behavioral interventions, and classroom accommodations designed to enhance school success of students with ADHD.

Volpe, R. J., & Fabiano, G. A. (2013). *Daily behavior report cards: An evidence-based system of assessment and intervention*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

This book provides a comprehensive guide to designing and implementing a daily report card system.

## **Related Helping Handouts**

Attention to Task and Work Completion: Helping Handout for School

Calling Out in Class: Helping Handout for School Engagement and Motivation: Helping Handout for School

Homework, Organization, and Study Skills: Helping Handout for School

Using Praise and Rewards Wisely: Helping Handout for School and Home

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