

School Chapter

The ADHD e-BOOK

What Can the School Do?

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Common Sense ADHD School Accommodations

Any teacher can institute the following suggestions, even without formal student classification:

- Understanding Children with ADHD
 - *Learn about ADHD.* Typically, teachers in the higher grades have a harder time “believing” in the condition. The older students no longer appear physically hyperactive. Organization and planning problems are frequently misinterpreted as lack of preparation and motivation.
 - *The chapter on “ADHD: The Tip of the Iceberg”*[available at www.PediatricNeurology.com/ADHD.htm] can be used as a good, quick introduction to ADHD. The school special education staff should also have materials for classroom teachers.
- *Don't take the ADHD behaviors as personal challenges.* The answer to the question "Why can't he listen to me like all of the other children?" is that he can't turn off his ADHD at will. It isn't personal.
- *Take a realistic outlook at the child you get every day.* Periodically, rate the ADHD behaviors using Dr. Phelan's brief checklist (1 means very little; 10 means a lot)
 - Inattentiveness _____
 - Impulsivity _____
 - Difficulty delaying gratification _____
 - Emotional overarousal _____
 - Hyperactivity _____
 - Non compliance _____
 - Social problems _____
 - Disorganization _____

This is your starting point. Not a typical child. This is what you can likely expect from him every day. Once teachers (and parents) accept this starting point (which I assure you the child does not exactly want, either), it is easier not to take everything so personally. Also, anger on the care-giver's part is reduced--since anger arises when there is greater discrepancy between what you expected versus what you got. The parents can also fill out the checklist, and discuss it with the teacher. They will realize that they are allies.

- *Provide help for deficits at the moment it is needed, not negative feedback when it is already too late. Unfortunately, the simple reality is that punishment does not usually teach the needed behaviors. This is because many children with ADHD have difficulty “doing what they know,” not “knowing what to do.” They already “know,” for example, that they should come to class prepared. Once we understand that punishment has not been working, we are ready to provide relief for their disabilities by guiding them at the moment guidance is needed—rather than continued disbelief that they did it wrong again.*

- **Presenting Material to ADHD Children**
 - *Have child sit in the front of the class.*
 - *Establish good eye contact.*
 - *Tap on the desk (or use other code) to bring the child back into focus.*
 - *Alert child’s attention with phrases such as “This is important.”*
 - *Break down longer directions into simpler chunks.*
 - *Check for comprehension.*
 - *Encourage students to underline the key words of directions.*
 - *Encourage students to mark incorrect multiple-choice answers with an “x” first. This allows them to “get started” quickly, while forcing them to read all of the choices before making a final selection.*
 - *Allow physically hyperactive children out of their seats to hand out and pick up papers, etc.*

- **Organizational Help**
 - *Recognize that disorganization is a major disability for almost everyone with ADHD. In fact, it is difficult to diagnose ADHD in the absence of organizational problems. Yes, ADHD students can--and frequently do--write a wonderful paper and then forget to hand it in. This striking unevenness in skills is what makes it a learning disability.*
 - *Ensure that parents and child all know the correct assignment. Yes, most students can take this responsibility upon themselves. Those with ADHD, though, usually cannot. It is unfair and counter-productive to let intelligent students flounder because of this disability. Once informed of the needed work, the child is still responsible to work (with his/her parents) to get it done.*

The following options can be used. This part will take work, especially to keep the system going:

- *Inform about typical routines* (such as vocabulary quizzes on Fridays).
- *Hand out written assignments for the week; or,*
- *Initial student's homework assignment pads after each period. Please do not expect the student to come up after class for the signature on their own. If they were organized enough to do that, we would not need to be doing this. And, yes, the typical student is organized enough to come to the teacher; but this is not the typical student.*
- *Notify family immediately of any late assignments by one of following.* Waiting for mid-term notices is too late to correct the problem, and too late for the student to behaviorally notice the connection between his/her performance and the consequences.
 - *A phone call or e-mail takes the child out of the loop, and works best.*
 - *The parent could call the team leader each week for an update.*
 - *The parent could mail weekly a card to each teacher.* The card would simply have spaces for missed work and comments, and is dropped back into the mail.
- *Allow for expedient make up of late or incorrectly done homework.* If deduction for lateness actually works to correct the problem, then keep doing it; if not, recognize the problem as a currently uncorrectable disability. In such a case, the work does need to be completed, but is not fair for a persistent organizational disability to cause excessive and demoralizing deductions. If, for some reason, it is necessary to give an "F" for incomplete work, remember that an F is 65, not 0. Trying to get a decent grade while averaging in a "0" or two is virtually impossible. A grade of "0" is excessive and counter-productive.
- Simple accommodations for other frequently associated problems
 - Dysgraphia (hand writing problems)
 - *Use of a computer.*
 - *Graph paper helps line up math problems.*

- *Provide a copy of class notes, or arrange for peer to make carbon copy.*
- *Minimize deductions for neatness and spelling. Instead, give extra points for neatness.*
- Dyscalculia (math problems)
 - *Liberal use of a calculator.*
 - *Consider doing every other problem if homework takes too long.*

“Section 504” Accommodations

- Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act (Public Law 93-112) is a Federal civil rights law which aims at eliminating discrimination in any program that receives federal funds (including most all US schools and colleges).
- By 504 definition, the disability:
 - can be physical or mental;
 - must substantially limit one or more “life activities” such as *learning*, performing manual tasks, care for oneself, speaking, hearing, or walking.
- Parents or the school may initiate a 504 evaluation.
- Classification under Section 504 will typically require a school meeting, but less formal psychological and educational testing than classification under IDEA (see below.)
- A written plan for 504 accommodations is not mandated, but certainly makes sense. It should be periodically revised (yearly).
- 504 “accommodations” may be “easier” to obtain as they generally mandate accommodations more than costly special services.
- *Accommodations like those listed above under “common sense” can be mandated via Federal Law Section 504 if needed.*
- *Untimed tests, including SATs, may require 504 classification.*

IDEA Classification

- The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, Part B) of 1990 provides federal funding to schools which guarantee special needs students with appropriate rights and services, including:
 - A free appropriate public education. If unable to provide an “appropriate” public education, the school must pay for alternate education.

- IDEA classifiable conditions include:
 - Specific Learning Disability (LD),
 - Emotional and Behavioral Disorder (ED)
 - Other Health Impaired (OHI)
 - The US DOE (Dept. of Education) memo of 1991 includes ADHD as a classifying condition under OHI.
- Parents must be full partners in the process of developing an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). If nothing else, parents certainly know what has not worked so far.
- The school has the right to decide what evaluation is needed.
- The parents may request an independent evaluation if they disagree with the school's evaluation.
- IDEA classification evaluations and provided services are usually more comprehensive than 504 plans.
- Detailed information can be found through the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities at www.nichcy.org.
- There is annual updating of the IEP, with full re-evaluation every three years. The parents may request review and revision of the IEP at any time.

--Martin L. Kutscher, MD