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Ask the Expert Chat Series

October 20, 2010 – Tricks and Treats of Teaching Techniques: Helping Students with ADHD

Moderators – NRC Staff

Expert – Sandra Rief, MA

Moderator 1: Welcome to today's Ask the Expert chat sponsored by the National Resource Center on ADHD (NRC). The NRC is a program of CHADD and is funded by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to provide science-based information on all aspects of ADHD. Today's topic is, "Tricks and Treats of Teaching Techniques: Helping Students with ADHD." Our expert this afternoon is Sandra Rief.

Sandra Rief, MA is a leading speaker, author, and consultant on practical and effective strategies for enabling students with ADHD and LD to achieve school success. Every year, Sandra trains thousands of teachers and other school personnel, as well as parents and mental health practitioners throughout the US and internationally.

She is the author of numerous well-known and popular books including: *How to Reach & Teach Children with ADD/ADHD*, *The ADHD Book of Lists*, *The ADD/ADHD Checklist: A Practical Reference for Parents & Teachers*, and many others. She also produced several DVDs including the acclaimed *ADHD & LD: Powerful Teaching Strategies & Accommodations*.

Sandra taught in public schools for 23 years and was an award-winning special educator (California Resource Specialist of the Year). She is currently an educational consultant, keynote and workshop presenter, and instructor for distance learning/online courses offered through Seattle Pacific University and California State University, East Bay.

Sandra, we are privileged to have you here today. Thank you for joining us!

Now, for our first question.

Sandra Rief: My pleasure to be here today.

Cheryl: Should a student with ADHD be regularly held in from recess to finish class work if they have been trying hard to complete work? What are some ways to avoid this?

Sandra Rief: That is a common problem for students with AD/HD. No, they should not be held in from recess regularly. They need their recess. It is better to find alternatives to incomplete work such as shortening assignments, finding ways to demonstrate their learning in different ways (e.g., verbally).

Missing part of recess on occasion is reasonable, but never should this be a regular consequence for not getting their work done in the classroom.

Madge: My constant struggle is getting my son to turn in the work that has been done to teacher. I'm all bribed out.

Sandra Rief: That is so common. Kids with AD/HD may spend HOURS completing their work, and forget to turn it in for credit (or lose it in transit from home to school. I recommend working out a system with your son's teacher(s) such as: emailing in homework, bringing directly to office to place in teacher's boxes before school starts, having a buddy system with a responsible classmate who reminds your son to turn in work.

The teacher can directly collect your son's work at the beginning of class or have a table captain collect. There are many strategies that can help as well as incentives provided by you or the teacher.

Moderator 1: For more information on school success, see our monthly CHADD Blog by Joan Teach. We also have monthly blogs on parenting, relationships, and coaching. To learn how to receive continuous information from our blog experts, please visit: www.chadd.org/Content/CHADD/Blogs/default.htm.

Kristin: Are there any realistic time limits by age that you recommend for homework?

Sandra Rief: Some districts have guidelines such as recommended 10 minutes per grade level. So, for example a 5th grade teacher might assign 5 x 10 or 50 min. homework per evening, and a 2nd grade student to receive about 20 minutes per evening homework.

That being said, AD/HD is a disorder of production/output/performance and it literally can take a child with AD/HD 2-4 times longer than other students that age to produce the work. So teachers need to factor in the significant extra time it takes these kids to complete the work.

Kapklein: I am a parent, not a teacher, but I'd like to hear about ways to effectively discuss these issues with a teacher who is not "up" on ADHD and ways to address it in the classroom – keeping in mind that I am not "up" on being a teacher, and how exactly one successfully runs a classroom.

Sandra Rief: It might be helpful to let the teacher know that there are lots of resources with practical strategies for enabling students with AD/HD to be successful. Providing such books and resources (e.g., the CHADD Educator's Manual) to teachers as a gift is helpful.

The most important is not to be confrontational or critical, but to offer your help. Also, you and other parents of students with ADHD in your school/district may want to talk to administration about providing training and information about AD/HD to school faculty.

Moderator 1: Want to receive well-rounded comprehensive knowledge about ADHD? [Parent to Parent courses](#) offered in local communities and online, provide educational information and support for individuals and families dealing with ADHD and learning to navigate the challenges of ADHD across the lifespan. To learn more about our Parent to Parent classes visit this link.

Brian_Mc: My son wants to listen to pop music as he does his homework. Is this a good idea or just more 'noise'?

Sandra Rief: This is very individual - everybody has their own learning style. I would let your son experiment, with productivity being the test of whether or not to allow this. If he manages to get his work done listening to pop music, then let him. Music in the background helps many block distractions and better stay on-task.

Woollady: What sort of accommodations would you suggest for a high school student who has to complete long hours of homework in the evening after medication has worn off?

Sandra Rief: It's often the written assignments that are so lengthy and tedious - and frustrating after a long day of school after the medication has stopped working. Accommodations such as verbalizing responses to questions, extra time to complete projects, breaking them down into shorter chunks with teacher feedback on smaller amounts of work can help.

It's important to find out why there is so much work to complete. Can your son get more assistance with class work during the school day so there is less "incomplete work" to tag on to regular homework assignments? Can assistive technology be provided during the school day (as well as home)?

Kristin: I've had difficulty guiding teachers about how to structure group projects and activities for kids with ADHD. Most don't seem to understand that these children need specific structure/roles within a group. Given children are asked to do this more and more, do you have any suggestions for improving group work for children with AD/HD?

Sandra Rief: I agree with you, that in any group project there be specific guidelines and roles. Rubrics (guidelines) for what needs to be accomplished and the standard for grading helps. A child with AD/HD may be given a role within a cooperative group that draws upon his/her strengths such as illustrator or encourager/cheerleader for the group, etc.

Additionally, Children with AD/HD often do best with partner work rather than a full group/team. So, working with a cooperative, supportive buddy is the recommended structure for the most successful instructional format.

Moderator 1: Teacher 2 Teacher If you are interested in the topic of this chat then you will also be interested in our Teacher 2 Teacher Training. From theory to practice you will learn evidenced based interventions to manage every aspect of ADHD in the classroom. If you are a parent, please consider passing the following link on to your child's teacher: www.chadd.org/teacher2teacher.

Mcbird: how do you help a student in the classroom re-focus without drawing attention to that student and making him feel different?

Sandra Rief: There are a number of nonverbal cues and signals that a teacher can use to do so. For example, walking by the desk and lightly touching his/her shoulder, or tapping on desk, or discretely placing a post it note reminder about staying "on task." Verbal cues such as a private word to redirect attention, and incentives such as earning points for x number of minutes without needing reminders or redirection from teacher.

Trekerjo: How do you deal with a child who seems to understand a math concept in the beginning and end of an assignment, yet seems to go off track in the middle of the work?

Sandra Rief: The steps of math processes should be visible throughout the problem-solving so there is a checklist, task card, model examples posted, etc. Kids with AD/HD who have metacognitive difficulties – self monitoring while doing work – should be taught to ask themselves questions and make estimates and checks throughout the process (Does this make sense? Am I on target?) or have someone else who checks frequently throughout while they are doing their work.

In the classroom it helps for teachers to assign problems for students to work together with a partner or do one or two problems at a time before being checked. The worst is to assign a whole page of problems to solve and check work at the end. Often students with AD/HD will end up having to erase and start all over again.

lvmy3xy: My son gets easily distracted while doing homework. While it's important for him to have a quiet place to do homework, isn't it just as important for him to learn how to "tune out" the distractions since the real world isn't always going to be quiet and free of distractions?

Sandra Rief: Yes, the real world will be full of distractions. But the more immediate problem is focusing and getting homework accomplished with as little pain as possible. So, whatever can be done to structure the homework environment to make it easier and less distracting, I recommend working out such a system with your child.

moma96: my son is now in high school where test scores make up the majority of his grade. Any tips to help him memorize and retain the info he is studying?

Sandra Rief: There are a lot of great memory strategies and techniques to help. For your high school son, I recommend the website of James Madison University Learning Toolbox <http://coe.jmu.edu/learningtoolbox> I believe. It provides wonderful learning, memory and study strategies in the form of an acronym.

Mnemonic techniques (acronyms, acrostics, putting information to memorize to simple songs, pegword techniques) are beneficial to teach our students. Also, trying to memorize information in motion helps - such as while jogging or riding a bike or jumping rope or trampoline to practice what they need to memorize.

Lisamarie: What obstacle do you feel prevents most teachers from effectively applying IEP plans in the classroom?

Sandra Rief: Some of the obstacles are: being overwhelmed with lots of students with special needs and few resources; having a lot of content curriculum and material or pacing that they must adhere to and not knowing how to make adaptations/modifications, etc. on their own. It will be important to see where the IEP plan is breaking down and what is not being adhered to and problem solve as a team.

Cheryl: How can a teacher encourage an ADHD child who is frustrated?

Sandra Rief: Providing the frustrated child with numerous opportunities to shine throughout the day - and showcase their strengths to their peers – is important. Offering the necessary assistance and support to achieve what they need to do is necessary. If lacking specific skills (reading, writing, math, social) causing the frustration, it is imperative to get to the bottom of what skills are missing and provide the intervention to build those skills.

Kristin: Any suggestions for note taking strategies for middle school students?

Sandra Rief: There are a lot of beneficial note taking strategies. The 2-column technique with notes taken on one side of page and summary/main idea/questions written on the other column of page is one. The Cornell Note-taking method is one taught commonly from middle school through college. Taking notes with brief phrases and icons/pics, webbing, bullet points, etc. Again, you might check the James Madison Univ. site. Learning Toolbox has recommended techniques.

Jps: My AD/HD 4th grader is really struggling with class participation because she is daydreaming or off-task, but she is doing well academically. Do I just leave it alone or work with the teacher to pull her into the discussions?

Sandra Rief: That's fortunate that your daughter is still doing well academically. There are so many instructional strategies for engaging all students' attention and participation that teachers can implement. I have several listed in my books including the CHADD's Educator's Manual. However, as a parent, it would be hard to recommend instructional techniques to the teacher.

SAL: Given that teachers have many students, what is a "reasonable" amount of extra time for a teacher to spend on a student with ADHD? This includes frequent communication with the parents, IEP meetings, extra help for student, etc.

Sandra Rief: There is no certain amount of time that I would consider reasonable. But, the parent and teacher needs to work out a system that is as easy to implement as possible given the large number of students teachers work with. In my personal opinion it's doing whatever it takes to work with the student, parent, and team and unfortunately it can be very time consuming.

Moderator 1: Before our next question, you should know that the NRC produces a series of information sheets called, "What We Know" ... or WWK for short. All of these WWK sheets are found at

www.help4ahdh.org , in the "About ADHD" section, including our WWK #20A and #20B on AD/HD and Teens.

Jen_L: What are some good rewards that can be used in the classroom for behavior?

Sandra Rief: Incentives for high-schoolers can be such things as: screen time, extended curfew, car keys, privileges or items to purchase that they really want, etc. It depends on your son or daughter's interests/desires. I recommend for your high-schooler to come up with a menu of rewards that he/she values and use as an incentive.

For younger children, some of the best rewards are those such as: uninterrupted time with mom or dad, going to a place/activity together with family, and so forth. Sometimes for individualized behavioral plans designed between home and school, such parent rewards are built in as the incentive.

Mary_B: After a day of school trying to concentrate and trying to stay organized and do all the homework, fatigue sets in. Can you suggest ways to reduce the fatigue?

Sandra Rief: To reduce the fatigue, exercise and fresh air is important. The homework routine can include breaks between tasks or after completion of x amount of work or time spent (using a clock or timer). The breaks can include snacks, listening to music or responding to text messages, returning calls, etc... Anything to break the monotony and reenergize after a reasonable amount of work completion.

Delahantyl: With the longer time it takes my son to complete homework (amount has not been reduced at this time) it makes it difficult for him to have extracurricular activities. Am I right for feeling that this is as important as amount of time spent on homework?

Sandra Rief: You are 100% right that extracurricular activities are as important as the homework. This will be your child's source of motivation and self-esteem. You really need to discuss with your son's teacher(s) the situation and work out a plan that will enable both.

shellsof7: How do I impress on my ADHD child that it is okay to ask for help. It is not a reflection on whether you have the ability. She says she just wants to be normal.

Sandra Rief: I would talk to your daughter and have her teacher(s) also discuss with her how it is very normal to ask for help and that is part of learning and being successful. So many of our kids are very sensitive and are afraid of looking different. We need to encourage them and give examples from our own lives (and of other successful adults) to make them realize it is OK to make mistakes, request assistance when needed, etc.

Moderator 1: CHADD had several blogs that focus on adults with ADHD (Gina Pera) coaching (Nancy Ratey), and our newest blog on ADHD and School Success (Joan Teach). Learn more about them at <http://www.chadd.org/Content/CHADD/Blogs/default.htm>.

Lo: My daughter's impulsivity includes inappropriate comments, laughing and generally disrupting the class (7th grade). Her teachers have tried everything they know of to stop her and redirect her and her

response if often to be worse. They are asking for help. She doesn't seem to have any filtering of her thoughts before they become words. The result is she is alienating everyone. HELP!

Sandra Rief: This is a tough one. There are a variety of techniques such as self-monitoring and setting goals to reduce those behaviors, provide rewards for disruptions occurring less than x amount of times per class period, having a responsible/helpful peer seated near her to remind or cue to stop disrupting, etc. I have a number of recommended strategies in my writings on dealing with disruptive behaviors in the classroom.

Moderator 1: Being a CHADD member not only provides valuable members only benefits, such as Attention magazine, to you and your family; it also supports CHADD's work on behalf of individuals with ADHD at the local, state, and national level. Join CHADD today: <http://www.chadd.org/join>

Margie: My 7th grade son has great difficulty in getting started on writing assignments. It's as if he has no means of "downloading" the thoughts that are in his head. My husband and/or I spend a good bit of time with him helping him structure his work and "pulling" the information from him. We also allow him to dictate while we write or type for him. Do you have any suggestions on how to help with writing assignments? Are we providing too much support?

Sandra Rief: Writing is the most difficult academic area for students with ADHD because it involves multiple steps and brain processes (e.g. organizing ideas, prioritizing, memory, etc.). Helping at the prewriting stage is most beneficial - helping to organize thoughts and brainstorm topics. There is software that helps with this such as Inspiration (www.inspiration.com). Programs such as Write Outloud, Read & Write Gold, and Intellitalk are talking word processors that may help.

The structure that you and your husband are providing in pulling out information from him and allowing to dictate is very appropriate. Teachers who provide rubrics for what exactly needs to be addressed in the written assignment are very helpful.

Moderator 1: Missed part of the chat? Past chat transcripts are available to CHADD members as a benefit. To learn more about joining CHADD, visit: www.chadd.org/join.

Elibadmo: How can I help other children in the class understand and empathize with a student with ADHD rather than seeing him as a "bad" kid.

Sandra Rief: Kids are typically understanding when the teacher explains that we all have various needs and difficulties in certain areas, and that classmates have to be supportive.

You might devise a system in the class where the student with ADHD can be the class hero by earning the full class points or privileges, etc. for his/her meeting individual goals. That way, the child with behavioral challenges doesn't penalize the group, but can earn the group positive reinforcement.

shellsof7: My daughter is in 5th grade and will be entering middle school. How do we and her team work to make this transition as success driven as possible without diminishing her independence?

Sandra Rief: First of all, I strongly recommend if a student is transitioning from elementary to middle school or middle school to high school to ensure that there is a Section 504 plan in place (if possible) to ease the transition and make the accommodations available at the next school.

It helps in transitioning from one school to the next to visit the school in advance, communicate with teachers, counselors, and administration, do a walk through, practice opening lockers, and introducing to the environment and expectations.

Moderator 2: Sandra Rief has kindly agreed to extend the chat until 4:45. We hope that everyone will be available to remain with us until the end of the chat. Thank you Sandra for being flexible!

cnoel12: I have a second grade student who requires constant redirect in order to complete a class assignment. Are there any recommendations to enable her to redirect herself without constant reminders from the Teacher?

Sandra Rief: Sometimes it helps to have a "beat the clock" challenge for a student. You would set an individual timer on her desk with the goal of accomplishing the task(s). If she does so by the time it goes off, the student would earn a reward (sticker on chart, marbles in jar, etc).

Another technique is to have a random timer go off intermittently during the independent work time and all students will give themselves a + or minus on an individual chart if they were or were not busily on-task. This self-monitoring is a good habit to get into.

Geoff: The school is putting an "ADHD checklist on my 6th grade son's desk stating to: Turn in all homework: Planner filled out for the week, Finish class work, Start on work without reminders, Take home all homework (in the correct folders), Take home jacket. Is this what is needed to help get an ADHD kid to do his work in class? Should it be more like "get to work" or "pay attention"?

Sandra Rief: Actually, the specific behaviors listed on your son's checklist is a good technique. Getting to work and staying on-task can be cued by the teacher or responsible peer partners/classmates. But, the checklist of what is expected to earn points and privileges for accomplishment is a recommended strategy.

Gail: My daughter is a freshman in high school. She lacks self-motivation and gets poor grades. Her special ed teacher and I are working harder than she is trying to motivate her, set up supporting systems, etc. What can we do?

Sandra Rief: Finding out from your daughter what type of activities/privileges are motivating her will be key in devising a plan and incentives and making those activities/privileges contingent upon her doing the work necessary to pull up grades. Of course, in the skill area if she is lacking - what works best and is motivating to her in pulling up skills (e.g., individual tutoring? working with classmate or cross age tutor? use of computer-assisted supports and training/skill building?)

Woolliday: I am a learning specialist in a private school and many teachers won't do the accommodations listed for students with ADHD. What should I do?

Sandra Rief: Training teachers in understanding ADHD and building the empathy and awareness for how critical the accommodations are for success is one thing. If the student has a 504 Accommodation plan, it is required under law to provide those accommodations. If the private school receives any federal funding whatsoever, then they are bound by the same laws as other public schools.

Moderator 1: Thanks to everyone for all your questions! While we try to post as many specific questions as possible, we also try to post questions about different issues. We appreciate your patience and will continue trying to get through as many questions as possible in our time remaining

Kristin: Any suggestions of programs that are good for math supplementation (e.g., programs to help with math fluency, etc.) for a child with attentional issues/dyscalculia?

Sandra Rief: Here are some math supplementation programs: Teach Your Child the Multiplication Tables (www.TeaChildmath.com), Mathpad and Mathpad Plus software, Singaporemath.com. I like Simple Math, Memory Joggers for learning math facts using mnemonic techniques, and there are lots more.

mgibeau-griffin: How can you balance the necessity to teach your child to take responsibility for his/her things and assignments without being overly penalizing while at the same time providing support for his/her issues of forgetting and helping them to be more organized?

Sandra Rief: It's important to remember and let teachers know that students with AD/HD have executive functioning weaknesses affecting organization and time management and are approximately 30 percent developmentally delayed in this area.

So, if a child is 15 years old, he/she is really at the level of a 10-11 year old in these organization/time awareness and self management skills. They need adult support longer and more intensively than others that age/grade.

It is important to start at any age to build specific organizational skills (e.g., with use of checklists, structural tools like assignment sheets/planners, color coding materials and the environment), but adult support and modeling will be required for kids with AD/HD.

shellsof7: How can we help our ADHD child focus on her strengths and not what she perceives as weaknesses. She has many challenges with focus and distractibility. She sees the reminders as criticisms. When she is redirected she views this as the person disliking her. How so we/teachers direct her in a way that makes her feel confident.

Sandra Rief: I think that as long as the focus and effort of teachers and you as parents is on her strengths and radar on what she does right is key. Noticing the positive and calling attention at those times is really important. For example, saying things frequently like: "I noticed the good effort you put

into that assignment. You must be proud of yourself," "Thank you for the self-control you just demonstrated," "Good choice/well done."

Adults need to try giving at least 3-4 times more positive feedback and comments than the negative feedback and redirection. And of course, anything that can be done to build those areas of strength and interests will help compensate for the self-esteem issues that arise from always feeling corrected by others.

Moderator 1: This will be our final question. Thank you to everyone for the great questions and a wonderful chat!

Jonfmarin: What basic modifications should teachers make at the elementary level to help students with ADHD and perhaps related comorbid conditions?

Sandra Rief: The basic modifications are in ways to increase engagement and attention (various tools, supports, and instructional structures help do that), putting into place strategies that minimize the triggers to misbehavior (e.g., reducing distractions in environment), testing accommodations (e.g., in alternative location, at different time of day, reading directions to student), providing reading/writing/math accommodations and alternative techniques as needed. There are countless ways to help children with ADHD, LD, and other coexisting conditions.

It has been a pleasure to get to chat with you all today. Thank you so much and feel free to contact me through my website www.sandrarief.com.

Moderator 1: Thank you Sandra for all your Tricks and Treats! Your advice will help parents and teachers teach their students how to face the obstacles of ADHD symptoms in the classroom, which will surely carry over to not only increasing their performance but also their self-esteem. Thank you for sharing your invaluable knowledge with our CHADD community today.

If you have a question that was not answered today, please contact us online (National Resource Center's Web site at www.help4adhd.org) or by phone (800-233-4050) between 9AM and 5PM EST and one of our health information specialists will respond.

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