

Those A-M-A-Z-I-N-G Preschoolers With AD/HD  
By Mary N. Wonderlick, M.A.

I remember AJ, who successfully played with programs at three different computers while he interacted with friends in the block area and other friends working on a floor puzzle! Like an electric train circling a track, he made his rounds, paying attention to everything with fairly equal amounts of intensity and fervor. Then there was Lana, who actually didn't hear the words from the record because the instruments playing in the background got her attention. And has Jaime been a member of your class? You remember him because it appears that he paid attention to nothing. What was on his mind when you were enticing him to story time or a center activity? Cyrus is always leaving circle time to sit in the block area ... during center time or free play, Wanda strolls, seemingly aimlessly, around the room .... at story time Douglas asked questions faster than any adult could or cared to answer ... Emily's fist makes contact with Wendy without a thought of 'using her words' instead ... Rodney's only speed is run ... in her haste to get her drink at snack, Hannah not only overpours, she dumps the cup ... and Tommy and Tina don't transition well.

These are some of the children about whom you might use descriptors such as inattentive, impulsive, short or no attention span, distractible or hyperactive.

As you react, respond, worry and strategize about what is happening and how you are going to intercede, please don't overlook development and maturation. We adults have stop buttons to govern much of what we don't do and don't say. Because preschoolers' stop buttons are under construction while their brains mature and they develop language, skills and concepts through their experiences, they often operate this way: Ready..FIRE..Aim..Oops!!! Such behaviors are not intentional. As the thought starts to form, the words blurt out and the action occurs.

### Try This

Use your ABCs to analyze whatever is driving you to the brink (that's brink, not drink).  
A=Antecedent. From the child's point of view what caused 'it' to happen. (Don't be one of those adults who says, 'Emily did it for no reason at all.' There is always a reason. You may not agree with the reason and you may not understand it, but it exists nonetheless.)

B=Behavior. 'It.'

C=Consequence. What happened after? What did you try and how did it work? Have a realistic expectation for each child; it isn't fair to expect more than a child can deliver. Does he have the skills to meet your expectation? When it is time to put the blocks away, does she really know where they belong and how to stack them so that they'll fit? Does he know which container holds those tabletop toys and where it belongs? Make sure he knows where to go, how to do and what to do. And does Emily even know the words? She may need to learn the script to fit these situations. If she is upset, she may not be capable of calming and retrieving words.

Attention. Every being requires attention. It is so important that they'll take what they

can get, both positive and negative. Actions getting your reaction are repeated to garner attention/reaction from you. You say Sonja is copying that behavior? What she's actually copying is what she saw it took to get attention. The solution to ending this cycle is simply to stop. Ignore if there is no gore. You say, 'But when I ignored it didn't stop; it continued and was more intense (frequent).' Yes. The child is thinking: 'What's wrong? Every other time I did that I got attention. I must not have done it hard enough (loud enough, enough enough) so I have to try harder.' Escalation before de-escalation.

Don't forget to catch 'em bein' good. Children are born people pleasers. Train yourself to give a quick, specific compliment the very moment you see her start to do what you expected. In the time it takes for you to think, 'She finally did it!' it's over; you have lost your opportunity to reinforce. As Wanda approaches the blocks, ask what she intends to do there or make a suggestion. That gives her reason to stay.

Keep the child's view and perspective in mind. Put your eyes where theirs would be to make sure there is a clear view of what you want them to see. Watch your audience to ascertain who is tuned in. Many children need to see the pictures all the time, not just when you pass the page by. I finally learned to read upside down so that the book is always facing the children.

Rodney runs. Create opportunities for him to run with permission and create opportunities for him to move. 'Honey, would you please get ... would you please put .... would you please go ask or go tell ....' Keep a busy boy busy with purpose. Let Douglas know that he will have an opportunity to ask his questions and get answers. He should be admired for his interest and curiosity. What an opportunity to pique the interest of other children. Surely you can create a way to satisfy his insatiable intellectual curiosity.

Not tuned in all the time? Use the child's name first. 'Jaime, Lana, it's time to sing the weather song. Everybody, let's start ...' Add a visual signal like putting up one, then two, then three fingers as a start cue. The more you do together, the more they do with you.

So Cyrus leaves the circle. Notice if he tunes in (attends) while in the other area. Some youngsters are distracted by the nearness of the others; the visual and the auditory don't work well together for others. You'll probably find that Cyrus is listening to the story. So that it doesn't appear that he is breaking a rule by his leaving, you can quietly tell him that it is time for him to go to the other area. We all want the appearance and sound of children following directions. I have learned that the other children aren't as interested in what Cyrus is doing as much as they care that he is doing what you told him to do.

Say what you want children to do. This will get you further than saying 'don't do that.' Tell a tapper to stop tapping and tapping may be replaced with clapping or snapping. Well, you said 'Stop that tapping.' Be creative and flexible to replace the behavior. The tapper needs something to do or to have something in her hands. Let her. Holding a small quiet object may be what she needs to remain still and focused. The same may work for twisters and twiddlers.

Transitions require warnings and preparation. Some children require more than

others. Some children need a reason to make the transition. Some need something to do during the transition. Let's not train children to tune us out. Listen as you say and say and say and tell, ever increasing the volume and pitch of your voice until the stress you are feeling is quite apparent and you shriek, 'Sam, put the truck on the shelf.' And Sam does. He has learned that you don't really mean it until you yell. He's learned he doesn't need to listen until later. My advice: the second time you are saying something, move toward the child giving a physical or visual start prompt. Provide consistency. If you say it, mean it.

Fair vs. Equal. 'If I let so-and-so do that then I'll have to allow him or her the same.' Actually not. Equal is giving eyeglasses to every child when one or two need them. Fair is allowing those who need the glasses. Got it? How about this? When Aimee needs a bandage, do you put one on every child? Children do not always have the same needs nor do they need at the same time. Equal is when all is the same; fair is giving or doing when there is a need.

Songs and chants. A great aid, they are 'developmentally appropriate,' meaning that the lyric fits the developmental level of the child for whom it is intended. A couple of my favorites are: 'watch the scissor cutting, cutting up the paper' or 'cutting on the line' or 'watch the crayon color, coloring the ...' Children sing as they do, which helps with focus and sustaining attention. I create short songs as cues for almost everything.

KISS ' Keep It Simple, Sweetie. Can't fix everything at one time; take it one irritation at a time. There are no quick fixes; there are no simple fixes. It is hard work. Fortunately, there are strategies to help or ameliorate behaviors, but there are no cures, magic or miracles. Same time next year?

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