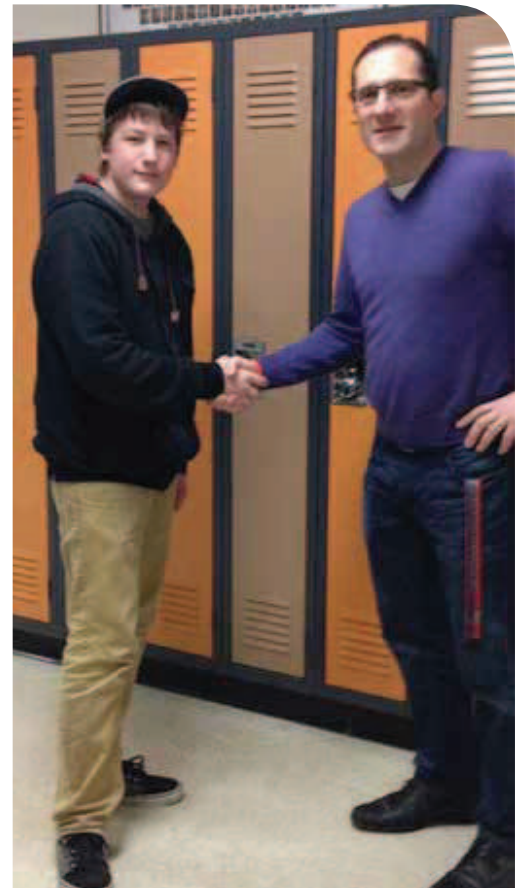


Why I Wrote My Own Behavior Plan

BY JEFF RASMUSSEN

FINDING
COMMON
GROUND



The author and his principal agree to work together.

MOST OF MY LIFE, adults have been mad at me. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't make my teachers, coaches, and even my parents happy. I'm sure I was trying harder than the other kids in my class to do my work but nothing seemed to get done. Every day I would forget to bring home my homework and on the days I did bring it home, I would forget to do it. Or I wouldn't be able to focus long enough to actually get it done. I knew the next day I would have to soldier up and face the angry teacher and look like a fool in front of the other kids.

In kindergarten, I think I was the only four-year-old who was put out in the hall for not doing my work. By grade five, my teacher was taking away my recess and lunch and making me sit on the bench in gym class. Either I didn't do my work or I was bothering someone. I was sad, lonely, frustrated, and sometimes depressed. School was like going to jail, where the guards yelled at me and there was no escape.

By middle school I started to seriously rebel. After twenty-one trips to the principal's office in less than two months, I completely lost it. I was through with being humiliated. My parents rescued me, homeschooling me for the rest of the year and talking to doctors about what was happening. That was the year I learned I had ADHD.

The diagnosis was a huge relief. It meant that I was not bad, I had a condition, it had a name, lots of other people had it, and I was going to be okay.

But when high school started, things looked like they were only going to get worse. I was suspended because I had trouble "regulating" my emotions. I did things I'm not proud of. After my second suspension, my parents started looking for another "new" school.

The first to really listen

Fortunately for me, my high school principal is a forward-thinking man who preferred to work things out rather than throw me away to be someone else's problem. He was the first to really listen to me and understand my side of the story. Together with my parents, we spent three hours working on a plan to both keep me in school AND make it so that I felt safe and calm in the classroom. He knew I was a good kid and considered my ADHD even if the teachers didn't know how to deal with it yet.

My principal asked me what I needed, waited patiently, and listened intently to my answers.

"Jeff, I talked to your teachers. They say you don't even open up your books. What am I supposed to tell them?" I explained that I need transition time, time to get into the room. I need the teachers to ask me to open my books and if I don't, to ask me one more time a few minutes later, calmly and without judging me. That usually worked.

Then he asked me, "What should they do when you're disrupting the class? They say it happens often." I responded that I need the teachers to ask me to stop and tell me what I was doing, because most the time I wouldn't even realize I was out of line. Ask me calmly, like it's no big deal. "Jeff, it's time to stop talking now so I can start the lesson." This is the part when teachers usually start getting angry and then I get angry, everything gets out of hand and no one wins.

The principal then asked a tough question: "Let's say the teachers follow this plan, what do you want to happen if you don't start your work or stop being a distraction in class?"

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I actually loved this question. I knew he was right because sometimes I can't settle. Last year we had a tragic death in the family and I was a mess for a long time after losing my cousin. I said, ask me if I am willing and able to participate in class today, if the answer is yes I'll get to work. If the answer is no then I would like a safe escape route so that I can regroup. From that conversation, I was able to arrange with my parents and the counseling office that I could come home with no questions asked on bad days. Now before you freak out, it doesn't mean I get to skip school when I feel like it, it just means I have some much-needed control over my world. Bottom line in this whole plan is to "ask" me what I need not "tell" me what your agenda for me is.

What I want the teachers to know is that we are standing on common ground. I want to graduate and be successful in life and I think you want that for me too. I know I can be annoying, and I also know that I can't make my ADHD go away just to make you happy. What we can do is come up with a plan, not your plan for me, but a plan that will work for both of us. A plan that will help me reach my full potential, just like the other kids.

We need a voice

Since putting my own behavior plan in place and working with the school on my side, I have barely missed any school. Last May, I started doing some of my courses online to reduce the time I need to spend sitting in a classroom. I'm happy to report that I have successfully completed all of grade ten and most of grade eleven this year and I'm on track to graduate a full year early.

I've long understood that I showed up in the world in a way that parents and teachers didn't always like. My question used to be, with this constant behavior war in my life, how would I ever graduate, hold a job, buy a house, and support a family? (Yes, fifteen-year-old boys think about these things.) By working things out with the school, the doctors, and my parents, I feel that I will be able to build this future after all.

Kids with ADHD need a voice. My whole life I've been told what I'm doing wrong. I've got that. Instead, consider asking kids who are struggling what they want and what they need, then work with them to make it happen. We are worth it! 🗣️

Fifteen-year-old Jeff Rasmussen is the author and publisher of ADHD Kids Rock (www.adhdkidsrock.com), a website and online forum for all things supporting kids with ADHD. He shares strategies and stories for kids, parents, teachers, adults, and others on the topic of living peacefully with ADHD.



Behaviour Plan

ASSUMPTIONS

At each step, student will respond positively most of the time, please follow the steps below if he does not.

GOALS

To focus on positive behaviours as much as possible, to help student find success.

If:
Example:
Student doesn't have their books and materials out on their desk.

Teacher says:
Example:
Please take your books (pencil, paper, etc.) out.

Example: If student does NOT do this after a few minutes

Teacher says:
Example:
Are you going to participate in this class?

Example: If student says "NO" or doesn't participate.

Outcome:
Example:
Student will go to the counselling office who will call for them to go home

If:
Add student name and disruptive behaviour here

Teacher says:
Add the first response from the teacher here

If...Add student behaviour here

Teacher says:
Add the second response from the teacher here

If...Add student behaviour here

Outcome:
Add final outcome here

If:
Add student name and disruptive behaviour here

Teacher says:
Add the first response from the teacher here

If...Add student behaviour here

Teacher says:
Add the second response from the teacher here

If...Add student behaviour here

Outcome:
Add final outcome here