

Tip Sheets from the Northern Virginia



ADHD Partnership



ADHD TIP SHEET #1

Relationships and Characteristics of Teachers

What characteristics make an effective teacher for students with ADHD?

Effective teachers create a calm and safe environment by adopting strategies with flexible accommodations and maintaining a structured learning environment with firm rules and boundaries that promote learning success for each student. These skills are dependent on the teachers' knowledge base and understanding of the learning process for children with ADHD. The teachers' philosophy effects how they create, adapt, and implement strategies in the classroom for educational and behavioral differences in students.

Planning, creating and implementing effective strategies and accommodations in the classroom.

- ✓ A clear and knowledgeable base of information on instructional and behavioral needs of ADHD learners is necessary. There needs to be current and clear information about the medical nature of this disorder so that teachers will respond to the learners' needs with compassion and understanding to help them become more responsible learners.
- ✓ The understanding of the underlying neurobiological nature of this disorder will provide teachers with the insight to use more effective positive remediation strategies.
- ✓ The teachers' philosophy and approach will be negative if they do not understand the involuntary aspects of ADHD and resultant characteristics. However, this is not an excuse or justification but rather an explanation to shape the need for an educational plan. If a teacher's mind set is negative, it will not be a positive year for either child or teacher.

Essential components for classroom support to enable teachers to reach and teach effectively are as follows:

- ✓ Support from administration to explore and implement varied strategies and accommodations is necessary to build positive expectations and attitudes about diverse learners and differentiated instruction.
- ✓ Support from school district and administration is needed to provide on-going in-services and other education opportunities on ADHD-related topics for both teachers and parents.
- ✓ Collaboration is crucial among peer teachers and specialists as a TEAM to communicate experiences and ideas in order to plan and develop strategies for success in the classroom.

Note: These interventions will improve teachers' attitudes about diverse learners and increase their competencies/skills. Teachers need to feel empowered to meet this goal of being an effective teacher. Knowledge is power.

Key tips for effective teachers:

- ✓ Respect for each student to establish a positive rapport. Humor and sincere caring are essential.
- ✓ Positive focus on each child's abilities and assets with provision of a strength-based instructional program. Differentiated instruction and compassionate communication with other professionals are crucial. Recognize and accept that each child has uniquely different abilities and needs.
- ✓ High expectations for each student in order to create a positive learning environment. Behavioral theory encourages the use of praise and support to build self esteem and promote effective social relationships with adults and peers.
- ✓ Parent involvement and open communication with the teaching team in order to be effective. In-services and programs for parents are needed.

Note: Student-teacher dynamics are shaped by the above and are essential for engaging students in this learning process. Students need to feel empowered for effective learning to occur. Building their self-esteem (which may already be fragile based on their prior experiences) is an integral part of their education which is needed to feel safe and accepted by others. If students are actively engaged in their education, they can learn to be self advocates.

Parents need to feel empowered in order to maximize their participation and support. They can be allies of the teacher/school as well as advocates for their child if they trust that their child is learning.

In 1992, a dedicated group of community and school professionals joined with parents from CHADD of Northern Virginia to form an “ADHD Partnership.” They began working together to design materials that could be used to train school staff and parents to meet the academic and emotional needs of students with ADHD. Their pioneering efforts proved very successful in Fairfax County, Virginia, and today, their teen video workshop is being used to train secondary school staff in other parts of the United States.

CHADD designated the Northern Virginia ADHD Partnership the Innovative Program of the Year in 2010. For more information about the partnership, visit their website at adhdpartnership.com or refer to the following *Attention* articles: “Joining Forces” (Promising Practices, February 2010) and “Identifying Your School Advocates” (October 2010).

The Northern Virginia ADHD Partnership generously offered their ADHD Tip Sheets for inclusion in *Attention*’s annual education issue. We hope you will find these tip sheets helpful as your children and adolescents start the new school year. Please feel free to share them with teachers, schools, and other parents.



ADHD TIP SHEET #2

Involvement of Parents

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these
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and keep
them handy

Parents are important partners with the schools in the academic life of students with ADHD. Schools play a crucial role in helping parents as well as students to be successful. Ongoing communication is necessary, and a positive and respectful relationship will benefit the child, the parent, and the school. Parents share a history with a child and have valuable information for the teacher about which methods have worked in the past. The following will help you to have successful parents:

- ✓ **Parents need to educate themselves about ADHD.**
Some parents are very educated about ADHD while others know very little about it. Parents need to be educated about parenting a child with ADHD, common characteristics of ADHD, social skills issues, and educational methods that work best with these children so that they can participate in educational planning for their child.
- ✓ **Encourage parents to join a support group or meet other parents who have children with ADHD.**
Parenting a child with ADHD can be very baffling. Strategies that work well with other children may not work with the child with ADHD. Parents can be a huge support to each other. Organizations like CHADD (chadd.org) are very helpful. Many books are available on ADHD but frequent meetings with other parents, lectures, or attending workshops and conferences are more effective in helping them.
- ✓ **Referral to knowledgeable professionals and procedures for accurate diagnosis.**
It is very important that children be referred to professionals who have expertise in ADHD. A thorough evaluation needs to be done in several areas: medical, social, psychological, and educational.
- ✓ **Ongoing communication is vital among student, teacher, and parent.**
It is helpful for parent and teacher to meet prior to the beginning of the school year and maintain contact on a regular basis. Choice of teacher for students with ADHD is crucial for success. A positive relationship between teacher and parent yields positive results. Self-advocacy should also be fostered with the students.
- ✓ **Structures may need to be in place at home to foster organization of school assignments and homework.**
Parents can help their children with their homework by having needed materials at home and a structured and quiet time to do the work. A second set of books at home has proved beneficial. Long-term assignments can be organized into smaller pieces with due dates. Homework binders can help students not to lose work between home and school. It is not recommended that missed work from the school day be assigned to parents at night. Tutors also may be helpful for difficult subjects. Students respond more positively when there is a united approach to expectations both at school and at home, and when parents advocate on their behalf with understanding and dignity.

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ADHD TIPS SHEET #3

Organizational Skills

Children with ADHD find organizational skills a challenge. Parents and teachers may find the following hints a starting point in helping them.

1. Give the student a copy of class notes to ensure that the student does not miss important oral details due to attention, memory, or handwriting difficulties.
2. With the elementary level student, consider scheduling time for reorganization of desks and book bags, etc.
3. Use assignment notebooks and planners. Check to make sure correct books/materials are packed to go home. Consider allowing the student to keep a separate set of books at home to use for homework assignments. Use checklist to help remember.
4. Consider pairing the student with a peer to assist with assignment notebook.
5. If teachers post on Blackboard or other classroom websites, the assignments can provide consistent communications between students and parents regarding assignment due dates and expectations. Avoid overextending time limits and opportunities for procrastination. Consider breaking long-term projects into smaller segments with separate due dates.
6. Develop a system for submitting completed assignments and maintain consistency for that system (i.e., create a concise routine for turning in assignments). Use colored folders with specific location for completed assignments. Provide frequent reminders and notebook reviews. Use a binder notebook with dividers to avoid loose floating papers. Utilize weekly progress reports. Communicate to parents about missing assignments.
7. For secondary students, schedule an appointment with the student to initially set up and assist with organizing the student's notebook. Schedule additional appointments to evaluate the maintenance of the notebook and assist with reorganizing the notebook as necessary.

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ADHD TIP SHEET #4

Sustained Attention and On-Task Behavior

Providing multisensory instruction/lesson presentation, utilizing auditory, visual, and tactical-kinesthetic techniques improves the ability of students with ADHD to sustain attention and maintain on-task behavior. Below are some tips that help:

Auditory Prompts

- ✓ Ask student to repeat directions or share with a partner before beginning tasks.

Motor Prompts

- ✓ Use a timer and rewards, such as points or tokens, to motivate and reinforce working productivity for a short term interval.
- ✓ Use active learning and high response strategies and opportunities: think-pair-share, total physical response, unison response to signals, or recording answers on dry erase board, Smart Boards or other interactive technology devices.
- ✓ Students' participation in daily aerobic or physical exercise helps mental alertness.

Visual Prompts

- ✓ Use visual prompts. There is a need to cue and redirect to task frequently.
- ✓ Provide written or pictorial directions (and task card) to accompany oral directions.
- ✓ Use tools or aids to compensate for memory difficulties: multiplication charts, vocabulary or word walls, or graphic organizers.
- ✓ Label, highlight, underline, and add color to important parts of task.
- ✓ Sit inattentive students in the front area in each academic class. There is a social pressure to pay attention and there are fewer distractions.

Other Classroom Strategies

- ✓ Provide differentiated instruction to boost interest and motivation: varied formats grouping, choices of activities, or questioning strategies.
- ✓ Use novel, engaging, high interest activities and strategies to get and maintain students' attention.
- ✓ Provide environmental adaptations, such as: preferential seating to avoid distractions, and organize work areas to optimize attention to task and work production.
- ✓ Increase the use of partners or buddies to help focus attention to task, clarify directions, assist with recording of assignments in planner, and practice or review material.
- ✓ Consultation with student's physician regarding student's progress is important when medication is needed. Feedback on work production is a good measure of the effectiveness of the medication regime.
- ✓ Smaller classes with increased supervision and support can minimize the negative impact of attention difficulties. Whatever the class size, though, placement with teachers who tend to run organized, structured, but non-rigid classrooms is beneficial.

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ADHD TIP SHEET #5

Accommodations for Memory Problems

Students with ADHD experience a great many neurologically based memory problems that are misunderstood. It can be hard for the student with ADHD to retain information recently read or previously studied. Help with memory problems can be aided by the following:

- ✓ The student should be encouraged to use a tape recorder in classes that are lecture-based, particularly as the student approaches middle school and high school. Having the class lecture on tape can help the student complete gaps he/she may have in his/her notes as a result of either slowed processing speed or poor oral comprehension and auditory processing.
- ✓ When learning new facts or information, it is helpful to present information in a high known-to-unknown ratio. For example, pretest the student on subset of math facts or spelling words. Separate "known" from "unknown" and then present the "knowns" with one or two "unknowns" each day, until all are "knowns." Review of previously learned information can be handled in this manner as well. Add no more than four new concepts/facts/words at a time.
- ✓ A number of memory strategies can be used to strengthen skills in this area. The student should be asked to paraphrase instructions or repeat directions to insure that those presented were understood correctly. Teachers should attempt to provide visual aids combined with verbal instructions whenever possible. This could include writing key words on the board when giving oral directions, providing a copy of information presented on the overhead, and highlighting in books or other written material during discussion of critical information. The student should be taught specific memory strategies and techniques that will improve immediate recall, such as the use of verbal rehearsal, grouping or "chunking" of information, making visual images, and mnemonics.
- ✓ Connect new information to previously learned information or experience. This will assist the student in the mental organization of the information which will enable him to access the information more readily.
- ✓ Draw the student's attention to key phrases and critical information by repeating important points, calling the student by name to discuss the point, and clearly identifying that the information is important to remember.
- ✓ Teach the student information-gathering skills (e.g., listen carefully, write down terms and points listed on board, wait until all directions are given before beginning, etc.).
- ✓ Teach the student to rely on resources in the environment to recall information (e.g., notes, textbooks, pictures, etc.).
- ✓ Teach mnemonic devices, association strategies, melody, rhythm or other memory strategies to assist in recall of information. A mnemonic intervention, CogMed, is now available in the local area. CogMed www.cogmed.com is a helpful training program for some individuals with functional working memory/attention problems. Participation in such programs may be appropriate for some students.



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