

Simple Strategies & Principles

BEFORE

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Jackson:

I am writing to let you know that Johnny continues to interrupt the class by talking with peers, blurting out answers without raising his hand, getting up constantly, and sharpening his pencil too much. In fact, he used up an entire pencil today because he kept sharpening it instead of doing his math worksheet. I have tried reminding him nicely about the rules, giving him time in the hallway to think about his actions, and making him sit away from his friends, but none of this seems to be working. I am at a loss about what to do.

Sincerely,
Ms. A [Johnny's third grade teacher]

Dear Ms. Paul:

Jenny continues to not finish her work during class. I often find her reading instead of doing her in-class assignments. Or, she is doodling. During some class lectures, Jenny simply seems to be in her own world daydreaming. I am not sure why she has so much trouble focusing and getting work done. I appreciate that she is not outwardly disruptive, but even so, I have to devote significant time to redirecting her. Even after doing so, Jenny will only work for short periods of time before being off task again. How can I best support her in the classroom?

Warmly,
Mr. Johnson [Jenny's fifth grade teacher]



Carey Heller, PsyD

HAVE YOU EVER WRITTEN OR RECEIVED EMAILS LIKE THESE? It can be difficult for teachers and other educators to know how to best support the kids with ADHD in their classroom. Helping these students to succeed can be particularly challenging, because there is only so much individualized attention that one teacher can give a student. Also, ADHD presents quite differently in each child who has it and can be paired with co-occurring issues (such as anxiety, depression, or stress), further complicating the teacher's understanding of how to assist the student.

Here are some simple strategies and basic principles that may be helpful in your classroom. Given its different manifestations, though, these tools may not be relevant for every student who has ADHD. Begin with these; you will find that there are many more available in CHADD's resources for educators and the *Attention* magazine archives.

1. Many tools and interventions you could use with students with ADHD may benefit the class as a whole. Therefore, rather than just doing certain things for one student, if everyone could benefit, why not use these tools for the whole class? It may help others significantly and could make the child with ADHD not feel singled out.
2. Incentive and reward systems can often work well for children with ADHD—and all students in general—if the expectations are clear in terms of what is needed to earn something. You can help reinforce student motivation by providing frequent feedback in terms of points

earned and giving incentives without long wait times. Making sure that students can earn points in a variety of ways helps to ensure that if a child with ADHD has trouble earning points, especially initially, they would not get discouraged. Many teachers find programs like Class Dojo helpful because points can easily be displayed. Also, parents can access it at home, which saves teachers time in communicating day-to-day issues to parents for more effective problem-solving.

3. Most students do better when they do not have to sit for long periods of time. Giving the whole class movement breaks, opportunities to sit in alternative seating (such as on a yoga ball chair or in a rocker), and similar options could benefit all students. Harnessing the use of acceptable forms of fidgeting can in turn improve focus. If you have a student who struggles with sitting still, giving them a way to channel that challenge in a constructive way (a wobble chair or a standing desk, for example) will keep them better engaged, and they will be less likely to be disruptive.
4. Be aware that children with ADHD usually do not intentionally act in disruptive ways and may have a strong desire to follow rules and do well in school. Therefore, avoid attributing a student's trouble with getting work done or misbehaving as implying that they do not care about school.
5. Find activities to include students, especially younger ones, in helping out in the classroom. For children with ADHD, being a line leader, helping to pass out papers, and performing other helpful tasks can give them a sense of responsibility—which can boost their self-esteem. This can also be a great way to reduce issues that may otherwise arise during transition times in the school day.
6. Just because a student has ADHD does not automatically mean that they should be on medication for it. If a student is being disruptive, it is important to focus on what tools and interventions could be used to help them. While it is often part of a child's ADHD treatment plan, medication alone does not usually solve all problems related to ADHD in the classroom or in general.
7. Find ways to get children interested in what they are learning. Even students with ADHD can focus fairly well if they are sufficiently interested in the class activity. Whether it means tying a lesson to specific hobbies they like or something else, figure out how to get them interested. To help keep kids with ADHD engaged during class—as well as those without it—keep classroom activities as interactive as possible and avoid staying on one task for too long.
8. Think outside the box and get creative with ways to liven things up during class. Pull out a puppet, start juggling, or do something else spontaneous if you really need to get a student's attention or re-engage them. **A**



Carey A. Heller, PsyD, is a licensed psychologist based in Maryland. He specializes in the evaluation and treatment of ADHD and executive function issues. Learn more at hellerpsychologygroup.com. The coordinator for the Montgomery County chapter of CHADD, Dr. Heller also serves as co-chair of the editorial advisory board for *Attention magazine*.

AFTER

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Jackson:

Johnny is doing much better in class. The Class Dojo reward system that I have implemented for the whole class is helping. While he does not always earn a huge amount of points, he seems motivated to try and continually earns more each day. In addition, giving him a wobble chair has decreased how often he gets up. Related to this, by having him keep pre-sharpened pencils in his desk I find he is no longer disruptive with excessive pencil sharpening. Furthermore, I have given Johnny opportunities to help around the classroom during transition times. Finally, when he does need to leave the classroom to regroup, we have a plan set up where he walks up and down the hallway four times and then returns to his seat in the classroom. Thank you for sending me that article from *Attention magazine*, as well as the other resources from CHADD that you provided me.

Sincerely,
Ms. A [Johnny's third grade teacher]

Dear Ms. Paul:

I am happy to report that Jenny is doing much better with getting her work done. We started using a timer where she works for eight minutes and then gets a three-minute break. During the break, she doodles. Jenny keeps the timer on her desk and uses it independently. In addition, when she seems to zone out during class lessons, I have a parrot puppet that I sometimes pull out, and he teaches a tiny part of the lesson. This sudden change gets the attention of most students, including Jenny so she refocuses in. Thank you for allowing me to consult with Jenny's therapist as well as providing me with the toolkit from CHADD.

Warmly,
Mr. Johnson [Jenny's fifth grade teacher]