

50 Tips for Managing ADD/ADHD in the Classroom

If anyone ever tells you dealing with a child with special needs is easy then take little notice of anything they tell you. Dealing with children who present complex learning patterns or challenging behaviour will stretch you to your very limits personally and professionally. When treating a child with ADHD/ADD in the classroom it is persistence that will prove to be your greatest asset.

The ideas and strategies suggested below are for all age groups and specific age groups. Use your own judgement to decide on the suitability of an intervention technique for the child and age group you are working with.

1. Be sure you are dealing with ADHD/ADD. It is definitely not the role of a teacher or parent to diagnose, but it is your role to pick up on a likelihood/possibility that this condition may be causal in the child's difficulties and refer on to medical personnel who are in a position to diagnose and medicate if appropriate.
2. Have you had the child's hearing and vision checked out?
3. Access to support systems is crucial. Do you know a colleague who has successfully dealt with an ADD/ADHD child? Do you have someone who you can talk to about your frustrations and celebrate your successes with? You will also need access to knowledge. This can come in the form of a person or an information source such as the INTERNET. You could also check on this site at www.adders.org for contacts of a local Support Group in your area as they would be able to give you local information. Also on adders.org you will find many resources which may help. You can also use any of the information on here to give to parents who may want to find out a lot more for their child.
4. Accept the child for who they are, recognise their qualities and their good points as well as those which are disruptive behaviours and irritating points. Trust is a 2 way thing - the child needs to learn to trust the teacher and when they do they will give so much back to that teacher it is quite amazing. Remember these child get used to being told they are wrong or that they are being naughty, this has a major effect on their sense of self worth and well being. A lot of these children end up expecting to be told off or criticised and often will not want to tell the truth as they know from past experience that they will not be believed - other children are also very quick to point the finger of blame as they know that the child is normally held responsible for things which go wrong so try to build up trust between yourself and the child and let them know that you do believe what they are saying and you are going to be fair in any sanctions which may have to be given out. They often have a great sense of injustice when they are the ones to have sanctions imposed on them and they see other children doing things at the same time or at other times who are not even spoken to about these. The ADHD Child will then learn that no matter what they say they will get the blame for things so they may as well do these things anyway!
5. You will need the parents to be on side with you. Encourage them to be open with you and to exchange information with you, sometimes parents have strategies which often work at home which can be applied to the classroom situation. This is also a 2 way thing and be open with the parents and work to build up trust between yourself and the parents to be able to work together for the good of the child.
6. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Teachers are too often willing to soldier on without asking for help. This does not do you any good in the long term. Sick and worn out teachers are a loss to children. So speak up. Say when you need help and advice.
7. Use the child as a resource. Ask what lesson do they recall as being the best they have ever been in. What was there worst ever lesson. How were the two lessons different? Try and unpack the child's learning style with their help.
8. Does the child know what ADD/ADHD is? Can they explain it to you? Can the child suggest ways that their difficulty might be made more manageable within the school setting?
9. ADD/ADHD kids need structure. Lists help. Such as lists of the process they are involved in such as writing an essay. Lists like how to behave when being told off can be of great help.

10. It is crucial that the child is caught being good. Many of the reactions to situations will be impulsive. We tend to notice the impulsive reactions that are overt and noticeable because they break a rule or code of behaviour. However, if you observe the child you will notice a vast array of reactions not all of which are outside accepted behavioural conventions. When an acceptable behaviour is presented. Praise and reward
11. Having clear behavioural expectations in places the child can see them can help. For instance a sign saying please sit still and listen could be posted behind the place where the teacher often talks. The teacher may then point to the poster as a first reminder to come back on task.
12. ADD/ADHD means that the child has a problem with concentration. Therefore when you have an expectation that a series of instructions will be followed they will need to be presented more than once and in more than one way. They will also need to be presented so that the child can refer back to them as need be.
13. If the child is off task it is often a good idea to get them to move around for a couple of minutes, when they then go back to the task they are more likely to settle back to the actual task than if they are just told to get on with their work. It is often difficult to allow individual children to get up and walk around when the others are all working - it is therefore a good idea to have something set up with another teacher where you can get the child to take a note to the other teacher and bring a message back - this does not have to be very much in fact the note could even just say what are you having for dinner tonight - as long as you and the other member of staff have sorted this out in advance they will be able to realise that this is helping the child to be less disruptive in your class. Another idea is to ask them to come and wipe the board for you. Once they have been able to move around for a couple of minutes they will be able to go back and focus on the work in hand and will probably get much more accomplished than normal.
14. Eye contact is a good way of bringing a child back to task.
15. Seat the ADD child near to your desk and make sure that the child is within your line of sight most of the time. This will help the child stay on task.
16. Don't fall into the trap of getting into discussions where the child is acting as a barrack room lawyer. These are not meaningful to the child and they only serve to wear you out. If the child needs stimulation then the child needs to be encouraged to say so in an assertive way. They need to then engage in an activity that they have found settling in the past. For a short period and with permission.
17. Make the day's schedule predictable and visible. Post the schedule where the child will be able to see it and will see it. For instance on their desk or on the board. Tell the child if any changes to the regular schedule are going to happen. Tell the child well ahead of time about a change of activity and keep on warning them until the transition has taken place.
18. Work toward the child drawing up the schedule for their out of school time.
19. Timed tests are not good measures of knowledge for a child with ADHD/ADD. Therefore they have little if any educational value for these children. It would be best to eliminate them and choose an alternative method of testing for knowledge retention and application.
20. Use alternative methods of recording if the child finds them useful. Remember what matters is that the child processes the information you wish to impart. The method of processing can make a difference to the child. Pen and paper is very simple and convenient for the teacher but if it doesn't work for the child then an alternative needs to be found.
21. Frequent feedback helps keep the ADD/ADHD child on task; it is also very useful in letting them know what is expected of them and if they are achieving expectations. Naturally the resultant praise will be very encouraging.
22. One of the most crucial teaching techniques for children with ADD is to break down large tasks into small tasks. This ensures that the child does not feel overwhelmed. As the child learns they can bite of more and more they will need the chunks to be larger. Increasing and managing the way information and task are presented does take time and is a highly skilled business. However, this will

be extremely helpful in avoiding tantrums born of frustration with small children and with older children it can help them avoid the defeatist attitude that so often gets in their way.

23. Novelty and fun are good ways to gain attention. ADD/ADHD children will respond to it with enthusiasm.

24. Try your very best to catch the child being good. Many of their responses are impulsive. We tend to notice the socially inappropriate responses and miss the many acts of generosity and apparent maturity that may also be the impulsive response. Of the real problem with ADD/ADHD children is not the condition but the hostility that has arisen due to the persistent imposition of punishment.

25. Teach the child how to draw up mind maps. Encourage the use of this technique in lessons, it will give the child a greater sense of being in control of what is going on.

26. Many ADD/ADHD children have a tendency toward being visual learners. Therefore some form of visual cue allied with your verbal explanation will probably aid comprehension of the task being set and the expectations you have for the piece of work being set. They also very often have things which they are very interested in - if a child has a passion for cars then most subjects can incorporate cars - English - write about a car, Maths - count cars - Art - draw, paint, model a car, History - of the motor car, Geography - travel / journeys by car. Most things can be incorporated with a little imagination.

27. Keep every thing as simple as possible. Make things fun so that they will attract the child's attention thus increasing the chances that the message will be absorbed.

28. Use difficult situations and moments in the Child's day as opportunities to teach the child and give feedback. Averagely children with ADD/ADHD are quite poor at comprehending how they come over to others. Therefore a piece of silly behaviour can be dealt with by asking the child how it affected others. How it affected the way others will see the child etc.

29. Make your and the schools expectations very clear.

30. Give some thought to the use of a points based reward system as part of a behavioural modification program younger children. Children with ADD respond well to rewards and incentives.

31. If the child appears to have difficulty with social skills and appropriate behaviours. It would be very useful to analyse just what skills are lacking and then teach or coach the child in these skills. There are some very good resources about specific ADHD coaching on adders.org

32. Make a game out of things. Motivation improves ADD.

33. Pay particular attention to who sits next to who.

34. Your life will be much easier if you can keep the child engaged and motivated. Time spent planning activities to make them as engaging as possible will be repaid many times over.

35. Give as much responsibility as possible to the child.

36. Try a home-to-school-to-home positive contact book.

37. The development of self-assessment and self-reporting is crucial to the development of internal limit setting. For instance the use of daily reporting sheets can be very effective. More effective still if the child sets the behaviours to be monitored. The child decides if they have achieved the set behaves. Usually I ask the child to get the teacher to initial if they agree or disagree with the child's perception of their own behaviour. This should be done in a clinical fashion if the teacher disagrees but with lots of praise if the child has achieved targets and is correct in their perceptions.

38. Suddenly given these children unstructured time can be a recipe for disharmony. Let them know well in advance when unstructured time will be so they can plan out what to do and how to fill the time.

39. Give as much praise as you are humanly able.

40. Develop active listening skills by encouraging children to take notes of not only what they hear but the ideas they have and their thinking around an issue.
41. Give serious consideration to the use of alternative methods of recording.
42. Get the full attention of the class before starting to teach.
43. Try and arrange for students to have a study partner or be part of a study group. Get the children in the group to exchange telephone numbers and other contact information. This will enable the child to clarify points that they may have missed quickly and easily. It will also allow other members of the group to benefit from their energy and enthusiasm.
44. Explain and normalize the treatment the child receives to avoid stigma. Be prepared to sit down with the whole class and explain in language they understand about how people are all different and that a lot of children have problems of one sort or another and then explain about how ADHD symptoms can show in a child and how the rest of the class can help that child to fully integrate with their peers. Peer relationships are often very difficult so it is essential for the child's self esteem and general well being to help them to fit in with their peers and for them to be accepted by their class mates.
45. Review with parents often. Avoid the pattern of just meeting around problems or crises, celebrate success. It is very nice on occasions for parent to receive a phone call from school to let them know when their child has had a good day. They often sit at home or work dreading that phone call to say that their child is in trouble again at school. This is also very good for the child and their self esteem as when they get home the parents can give spontaneous praise and tell them how wonderful it was that their teacher had phoned them today to tell them how well the child has done.
46. Read aloud at home and in class as much as possible. Use story telling. To help the child build up a sense of sequence. Help the child build the skill of staying on one task.
47. Repeat, repeat, repeat.
48. Vigorous exercise helps work off excess energy, it helps focus attention, it stimulates certain hormones and neurochemicals that are beneficial, and it is fun. Make sure the exercise is fun, so the child will continue to do it for the rest of his or her life.
49. With older children, their learning will be enhanced considerably if they have a good idea of what will be learnt that day.
50. Be on the lookout for things to enjoy about the child. The energy and dynamism they have can be very beneficial to their group/class. Try and pick up on their talents and nurture these. As they have taken many of life's knocks they tend to be resilient, always bouncing back because of this they can be generous of spirit, and glad to help out.

For more information visit www.adders.org