



Strategies for Teaching Youth with ADD and ADHD

By: Thomas McIntyre (2004)

The research literature has identified classroom characteristics that promote success for students with ADD and ADHD. Predictability, structure, short working periods, a small teacher-to-pupil ratio, individualized instruction, an interesting curriculum, and lots of positive reinforcement are all important to student progress. Researchers have also identified optimal teacher characteristics. They include positive academic expectations, personal warmth, patience, humor, consistency, firmness, frequent monitoring of student work, and knowledge of behavior management strategies.

Below, you will find specific strategies for accomplishing different goals.

Behavior management strategies

- Develop good rapport with the student. ADD/ADHD youngsters are more likely to respond to emotional connections than contingent consequences.
- Ignore as much of the negative behavior as possible.
- If you get a lot of defiant or oppositional behavior, review how often you say negative things and give commands to the youngster. Kids who hear too many negatives and commands will shut off the person they come from. Get positive, encourage the youngster, focus on progress (however small), etc.
- Give your attention to appropriate behaviors.
- Prompt the correct behavior and verbally reinforce it frequently.
- Provide opportunities for physical movement (e.g., erasing the blackboard, running errands, distributing and collecting materials), and build physical activities into the daily schedule.
- Encourage parents to build physical activity into the youngster's out-of-school schedule.
If social rewards/reinforcement is insufficient to bring about the desired behavior, pair social recognition with earned activities or tangible reinforcers.
- Use progress charts and other visual records of behavior to encourage more appropriate behavior. Use colorful charts and cards to motivate the youngster and recognize effort.
- Move nearer to the student when s/he becomes restless. Offer verbal encouragement or touch. When misbehavior occurs (or threatens to occur), move closer and soften your voice.

- Assign a capable "study buddy" who can remind and assist the active or disorganized student.
- Assign duties that require self-control (e.g., line leader, materials distributor). Prepare the youngster for the duty, encourage him/her, and reinforce him/her during and after that activity/task.
- Implement differential reinforcement procedures (see Dr. Mac's home page).
- Teach self management of behavior (see Dr. Mac's home page).

Modifications to the classroom environment

- Assign the student to a seat that best allows him/her to observe you while avoiding distractions (e.g., away from doors, windows, pencil sharpeners).
- Eliminate excessive noise.
- Eliminate excessive visual stimuli and clutter that might distract the youngster.
- Employ study carrels or seat the student in the area of the classroom with the least distractions, and/or face the desk toward the wall. However, do not isolate the youngster for long periods of time as this practice stigmatizes him/her. Allow the student to engage in group work too.
- Keep directions and commentary short and to the point. Avoid "overloading" the student with too much verbiage.
- Provide an individualized written schedule to which the student can refer.
- Provide a bouncy inflatable seat cushion. The students will put there energy into squirming on it, but they'll stay in the seat.
- Provide a "kusch ball" or other squishy thing for the student to manipulate.
- Allow the student to chew gum to release energy and give the mouth something to do besides talk.

Starting your lesson

- Provide "do now" activities for other students while you focus the ADD/ADHD student.
- Be sure you have the pupil's attention before you start.
- Use alert cues to get the student's attention before giving directions.
- Use more than one modality when giving directions. Supplement verbal instructions with visual ones.
- Repeat and simplify the directions.
- Use pantomime to capture the attention of the student to give instructions.
- To gain the attention of younger kids, give directions through a puppet.

- Place instructions on an audio tape that can be replayed by the student as needed.
- To ensure understanding, have the student repeat the directions in his/her own words.
- Use color and highlighting to accentuate certain important words or phrases on worksheets.
- Have the student underline or highlight directions.

Keeping the student on task

- Reduce the length of assignments so that student does not lose interest.
- Present the assignment in parts (e.g., 5 math problems at a time).
Give reinforcement for each completed part before giving the next segment of the task, or have the youngster mark off his/her progress on a chart.
- Keep unstructured time to a minimum.
- Allow the student to use learning aides, computers, calculators (perhaps for different parts of the task).
- Allow the student to manipulate an object as long as s/he attends and is on task. Allow the pupil to doodle, squeeze a ball, bend a pipe cleaner or paper clip, or handle another non distracting item.
- In cooperation with the student, create a "secret signal" (e.g., tugging on your ear lobe, clicking your tongue, saying an odd word - - "snarzelpharf") that reminds him/her to attend.
- Make a tube that the student uses as a telescope, keeping you in view (and blocking out other distractions).
- To block out distractions on a page, create a "window" in a piece of card board that exposes only one or two lines of print.
- Provide some choice or variation in assignments to maintain the student's attention.
- Seat the student next to appropriate models.
- Assign another student to be a "support buddy" or "study buddy" who works with the distractible youngster, and provides one-to-one attention to assist in completing tasks.
- Motivate the youngster by having him/her "race against the clock" to finish the task (or part of it).
- Use a clock to remind the impatient youngster that the next activity must wait until a certain time.
- In a multi-part task, provide visual cues that are written on the student's desk or on the chalkboard for each part. The student then engages in that next step.

- Play soft background music without lyrics.
- Allow the student to stand or walk with a clipboard as long as s/he remains on task.
- Allow the student to change seats and places as long as s/he stays on task.

Making lessons more interesting

- Give a general overview first. Let the student(s) know what will be learned and why it is important in life.
- Devise interesting activities.
- Use examples that capitalize on the student's interests.
- Involve the student's interests in assignments.
- Ensure that your style of presentation is enthusiastic and interesting.
- Use game formats to teach and/or reinforce concepts and material.
- Use concrete objects to assist in keeping the student's attention.
- Incorporate movement into lessons.

Memory assistance (Boy, I could use some of this)

- Have the student progress through the following steps while learning: See it, say it, write it, do it.
- Teach memory techniques and study strategies.

Testing accommodations

- Use alternative methods of assessing the youngster's knowledge or skill level.
- Use oral testing if that format will keep the student's attention and better assess his/her knowledge.
- Use performance testing. Have the student do something or make something.
- Provide extended time to finish.
- Assign the test grade based on performance on different aspects of the assessment (i.e., organization, writing mechanics, pen(wo)manship, subject knowledge displayed).
- To increase reflection and concentration, have the student identify the correct answer AND cross out incorrect answers on multiple choice tests.
Inform the student that there may be more than one correct answer.

Transitions

- Set up routines that prepare the youngster for upcoming transitions.
- Set expectations for behavior BEFORE an activity or event.
- Provide a special "transition object" (e.g., puppet, small stuffed animal) that accompanies the student to other classrooms, providing a sense of consistency and support.

Homework

- Have another student place carbon paper under his/her paper while writing down homework assignments. Give the carbon copy to the ADD student to take home.
- Provide a laptop computer to students who lose papers (but not books!)
- Provide an adult to whom the student reports at the beginning and end of the day to organize his/her work, assure assignments are in-hand, etc.
- Provide a second set of textbooks for the forgetful student to use at home.

McIntyre, Ph.D., T(March 4, 2004). Strategies for Teaching Youth with ADD and ADHD. Retrieved February 14, 2007, from Dr. Mac's Amazing Behavior Management Advice web site: **www.behavioradvisor.com**

http://www.ldonline.org/article/Strategies_for_Teaching_Youth_with_ADD_and_ADHD?theme=print

©2008 WETA. All Rights Reserved.