



Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) – Classroom Management Strategies for Teachers

Introduction - What is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) ?

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder affecting learning and behaviour according to the American Psychiatric Association, the DSM-V. Researchers believe that the symptoms of ADHD are caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. An ADHD child is characterized by 3 traits : ***inattentive, impulsive and hyperactive.***

There are 3 sub-types, based on the diagnostic criteria :

1. ADHD with inattention as the primary characteristic,
2. ADHD with hyperactivity and impulsivity as primary characteristics
3. ADHD with the combined characteristics of hyperactivity, impulsivity, and inattention.

It is estimated by research in the US that ADHD affects about 5% of school-going children. That translates into an average of 2 such students in a class of 40 in Singapore's mainstream school context. The ratio of boys to girls is 4 : 1.

List of Problems typically faced by ADHD children :

- Poor attention in class, may fidget or play with things
- Poor classroom participation and failure to ask teachers for necessary help
- Poor understanding of material taught (unless they are "gifted" with high IQ)
- Poor study skills
- Poor organization skills (ie. does not know how to organize time and work)
- Often forgetful, careless and loses things
- Great difficulty in doing homework (slow to get started and carrying through)
- Failure to complete (and hand up) homework
- Academic under-achievement
- Sloppy or illegible handwriting
- Disrupting the classroom
- Getting into fights with peers (due to poor social skills)
- Low self esteem

Because of their different neuro-chemical make-up in their brain, ADHD children may not be able to handle simple day-to-day tasks that teachers expect, and other children take for granted. Yet they do have strengths; They are often creative, imaginative, energetic, spontaneous, sensitive and helpful. What they need is understanding and support to help them cope in class. The problems encountered with ADHD children can be managed. **The teacher plays a critical role in the life of the ADHD student.** An understanding and nurturing teacher not only helps ADHD students learn and cope with school, but goes a long way to building their self-esteem and developing their potential.

Strategies for Coping with the Inattentiveness Problem:

1. Seat the ADHD child near the teacher
2. Seat the ADHD child with good role model students
3. Provide separate section on the board for homework assignments
4. Enlist the help of student buddies and group leaders
5. Use colourful pictures, charts and diagrams
6. Break task down to bite-size chunks (divide and conquer the complicated activities)
7. Give attention breaks (e.g. drink water, go to toilet or stretching)
8. Use games, competition , puzzles and computer to capture their attention

Strategies for Coping with the Impulsiveness Problem:

1. Prepare the ADHD child for any transition
2. Set clear rules for class participation
3. Explain clearly the consequences if rules are violated, and apply them consistently

Strategies for Coping with the Hyperactivity Problem:

1. Suppressing the "hyperactivity itch" of a ADHD child through sheer authority & will-power is counter-productive
2. Learn to utilise the excess energy in ADHD children (help to carry some books, clean the board, run simple errands, etc.)
3. Allow the ADHD child to fidget if he is not disturbing others
4. Build interactive elements into your lessons to make learning fun

Strategies for Coping with the Disorganisation Problem:

1. Teach simple organisational skills (e.g. use of color codes - one colour for each subject)
2. Have a set routine to help the ADHD child conform (e.g. collect & assign homework at certain fixed time)
3. Set up "lost and found" stationery stock for loan
4. Assign a buddy to help the ADHD child in taking down instructions and handing up work etc.
5. Teach the ADHD child how to check his work and study skills

Strategies for Coping with the Hand-writing & Motor-Coordination Problem:

1. Focus on substance over form
2. Place less emphasis on neatness and penmanship (many doctors also have poor hand-writing)
3. Give them more physical space and more time to complete assignments

Supporting the ADHD Child:

1. You, as the teacher, can build the self-esteem of the ADHD child by the way you treat him (you are the role model and the class emulates you)
2. Believe in the ability of the ADHD child and he will show you the results (believe that he is a nuisance and he will live up to his name) - self-fulfilling prophecy
3. Choose your battles - Go for the big things and let the little things go
4. Reinforce Positive Behaviour. Catch him being good and describe the action that you like
5. Discipline with dignity. Punish the behaviour, but not humiliate the person
6. Build on the child's strength, Minor successes are stepping stones for bigger successes. Acknowledge every small progress.
7. Show other children how to accept and support the ADHD child
8. Dialog and provide feedback to parents on the child's behaviour in school

The ADHD child needs clear, well-defined structures to provide security, consistency and stability in his very confusing world. Yet within these boundaries, there must be SPACE for mistakes and individual differences, and plenty of stimulation to facilitate his response to your instructions. Remember that how you treat the ADHD child, he will treat society in a similar manner.

For more information, visit SPARK web-site at www.spark.org.sg, (a Singapore VWO championing ADHD awareness and providing parent support) and other useful websites :

www.ADDinschool.com (an ADHD resource website for teachers)

www.ADDresources.org

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