

How to Teach a Child with Attention Deficit Disorder

Tips for Teachers and Parents

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2010

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ADHD, the disorder that tends to effect more boys than girls: is it over diagnosed as a result of poor parenting? Is the child who can't sit still in class simply disobedient or did he have too much sugar or other food additives?

Some teachers still believe that ADHD is a made-up disorder; an excuse for parents and teachers to use medication to manage discipline problems in the classroom. In fact, ADHD is a very real, very frustrating disorder that affects more students than we probably realize at this time.

*ADHD is a very real,
very frustrating
disorder*

Teaching a child with ADHD is difficult. Parenting that child is even more difficult and being that child is the most difficult. It is important to remember, first of all, that the child is not choosing to misbehave or be inattentive. In fact, the very act of focusing or attending to a task may be nearly impossible for the child.

A child with ADHD has trouble focusing. When told to go pack his backpack at the end of the day, he may get lost and find himself over by the pencil sharpener, not sure what he was supposed to do or where he was supposed to be going. This same child may have trouble writing down assignments, completing a simple task or following a class lesson while the girl behind him keeps tapping her pencil on her desk.

Ironically, this same child with ADHD probably does not have trouble focusing in some areas of life. Video games may hold his attention for hours on end without taking a break. This does not lessen the validity of his disability, though, as this is considered a high interest activity.

To jump into the mind of the child with ADHD a teacher has to attend to every sound around her at the same time. She has to also plan dinner, think about what she will do after dinner and day-dream about going for a walk in the woods at the same time. There is a lot going on in the head of a child with ADHD and the ability to shut out individual thoughts is simply not there.

Remembering this when working with a student who struggles with ADHD may help the teacher have little more patience.

Tips for Teaching a Student with ADHD

When a child with ADHD becomes over stimulated, he may become upset and will exhibit many of the classic symptoms associated with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Learning how to prepare activities, give directions and appropriately praise and correct students with ADHD will allow them to be successful in the classroom.

Preparing Activities for a Student with ADHD

Teach to all learning styles at once. Whenever possible, provide an activity that provides hands-on, audio and visual stimulation. This way, whether the child is an audio learner, visual learner or tactile learner, the child will still be learning. Focus on bringing out the child's strengths during these activities as well.

*Focus on bringing out
the child's strengths*

When the child becomes fidgety, won't stay in the chair or can't pay attention any longer, have a plan that you can put in place right away. Designate a "thinking space" or "hedgehog space". This can be where the child can retreat whenever needed. It is not a punishment place and should never be used as such – it a place to go to calm down. The child needs to choose to go to this

space and not be sent there.

Reducing unnecessary noise, movement and clutter in the classroom will help prevent over stimulation leading to the use of this space.

If the child is restless, let him stand to do his work. Purposefully transition the child between activities. Give a warning that the activity will be over in 5 minutes. Then allow for a quiet time such as reading a book or drawing before attempting another activity. This will allow the child to slow down some and prepare for a quiet activity that requires focus, and is especially helpful when transitioning from a more active period.

Teach organization. Show the child how to put things away and where things belong in the classroom. Label places if necessary. Color code binders and folders and consistently use the colors. Have the student keep an agenda to organize assignments and to communicate with the parent.

Giving Directions to a Student with ADHD

Make directions clear and short. You will most likely need to repeat them several times as well. An example of an appropriate direction: Put this paper in your book bag right now. Require and expect an immediate response to directions, and remain close to the student to immediately redirect any off task behavior.

Break a task up into small steps. For example: Bring me your book bag. Get out your binder. Get your completed homework out. Put the completed homework in the bin. Be ready to provide the next direction quickly.

Appropriate Praise and Correction for a Student with ADHD

Praise correct and appropriate responses. A child with ADHD is corrected over and over each day, so take time to specifically praise something he does. For example: instead of saying “good job” say “Yay! You followed all the directions!” Understand that the child will have difficult days and help him through each day as it comes.

Prompt often. Prompting refers to the gentle verbal reminders to start, continue or complete an assignment. Often a child with ADHD will need several prompts to accomplish any number of tasks throughout the day. When the child does become distracted, do not get angry, instead, redirect or prompt him back to task.

When working with a student who as ADHD, much thought should be put into the planning of activities to help maximize instructional time and minimize excess stimuli. Patience when giving appropriate directions, praise and correction will allow for a more successful school experience for the child.

Prepare Activities

- Teach to Learning Styles
- Have a plan for restlessness
- Plan calm-down activities
- Teach organization

Giving Directions

- Clear and short
- Repeat several times
- Break tasks up into smaller chunks

Praise and Correction

- Praise often
- Prompt often
- Realize bad days will happen

Tips for Working with Distractible Students

Every teacher has that child in class who is either diagnosed with ADHD or simply is distractible. Little changes can help provide an opportunity for this student to learn how to focus and complete his work in class. Do not lower your expectations for the distractible student, but understand that he may need a little additional support.

Provide Extra Structure

Students with ADHD do very well in a structured environment. They need to know what to expect, so keep to a routine. Try to avoid allowing the child to have a few more minutes before starting the next activity. Instead, patiently remind the student what the next activity is, and guide him to clean up what he is working on. Provide a reward for the student if he follows directions the first time he is told.

Little changes can help provide an opportunity for this student to learn how to focus and complete his work in class

Keep Your Voice Down

Instead of yelling at a student, which conveys a frustrated spirit, remain patient and gentle. If the child does not respond to instruction the first time or two, go to the student, and guide him to do what he was told. For example, if he was told to pack up his backpack, help him gather his books and place them in the back pack. Eventually the student will begin to hear and respond to commands the first time.

Special Classroom Considerations

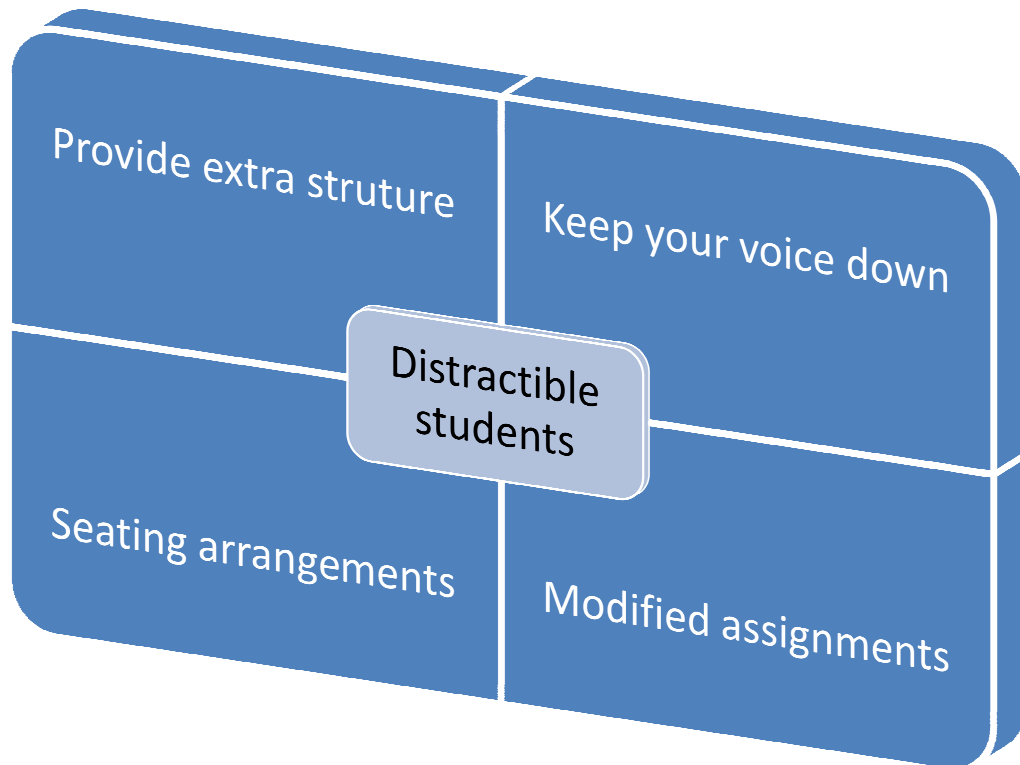
Distractible students should sit near the teacher, and the teacher should make an effort to stand near the student when giving directions. After directions have been explained, the teacher needs to ensure that the student understands what he is to do by having him repeat the direction back to the teacher. Often, written directions for students who are able to read can be a huge help as well.

Assignments can be shortened if necessary, and broken into short steps to help a student successfully complete the activity. Make sure that the student has turned in homework and other assignments, and that the appropriate items are in the book back to take home. Often it can be helpful to have a second set of text books at home to eliminate the need for the student to remember their books.

Set a timer for short chunks of time and provide a small reward for each time the student stays focused until the timer goes off. These rewards can be stickers, computer time, and other positive incentives. Having a focused, helpful student sit next to the child who is easily

distractible can be helpful as well, as one student can help direct the other to get started or clean up.

Focusing your efforts on the distractible students in your class will speak volumes to the rest of the students that you expect everyone to learn in your classroom. Keep your voice low and calm, provide extra structure and make some modifications to how you work with the student during class time. This will enable you to teach the student to respect you as well as enable the student to learn the content of the curriculum.

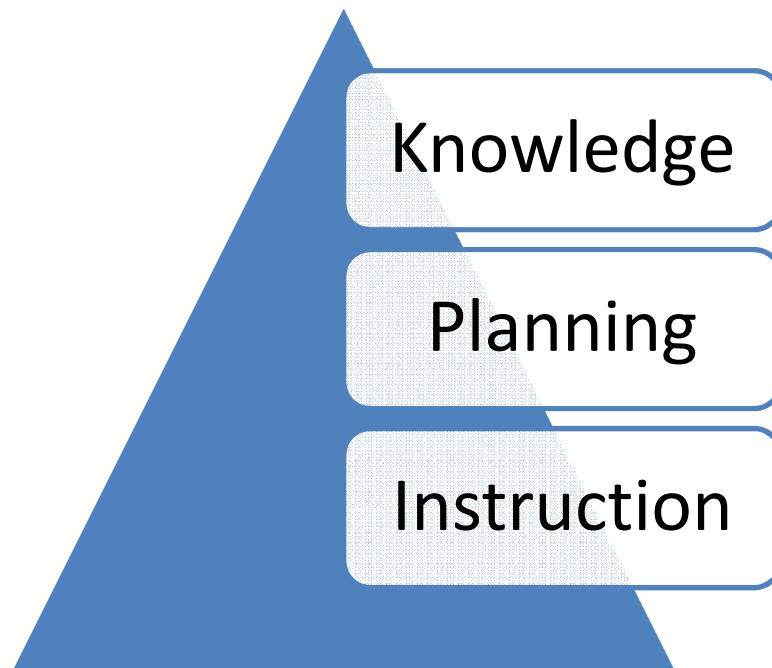


Meeting the Needs of Students in Inclusion Classes

Attending to the needs of each individual student in an inclusion classroom is one of the many challenges that teachers face on a daily basis. Depending on the range of disabilities present in the classroom, the size of the class and the amount of extra help, this job can be made easier or more difficult. Even so, there are some strategies that teachers can use to make their day a bit easier even when teaching in an inclusion classroom.

Understanding the Disabilities in an Inclusion Classroom

Understanding more about each disability present in an inclusion classroom can in fact help teachers better spread their attention among the students. Knowledge is the number one key to managing any disability in the classroom. Once knowledge is obtained, only then will the teacher be able to properly plan. Once proper plans have been made, appropriate and effective instruction can be given to students.



Using the Students to Help Meet Needs in an Inclusion Classroom

Many times students can be the teacher's biggest support in the classroom. Using students as partners for those who need additional assistance will not only free time up for the teacher, but will teach the students how to work well together. Look at some examples:

- A student with ADHD can have a buddy student help him remember to write down all the homework.
- A student with Autism can have a buddy student help him know how to participate appropriately in class.
- A student with a reading disability can have a buddy student help her read the questions on a worksheet.

While using other students to help may be inappropriate for some situations, many times they can be an invaluable resource for teachers. Help prepare students for their buddy roles through books like *The Friendship Puzzle*, by Julie Coe [Larstan Publishing, 2009].

Additional Options for Teachers in an Inclusion Classroom

The teacher may be able to ask the school for a paraprofessional or individual student aid, depending on the student's disabilities and needs. While this would be ideal for many situations, the school budget may not allow for the extra staff.

With a thorough understanding of the disabilities present in the inclusion class...the needs of all students can be met each day.

Changing the style of teaching may help as well. For example, the teacher can gear all lessons to a small group format and provide seat work or center work for the rest of the class. This would enable the teacher to focus on a small handful of students at one time but requires extra preparation and effective classroom management techniques.

Some teachers find themselves in a difficult situation where they must attend to the needs of a mixed ability group at the same time. With school budget cuts and class sizes increasing, this difficulty is becoming more common across more schools. With a thorough understanding of the disabilities present in the inclusion class as well as a bit of extra preparation and unique instructional delivery, the needs of all students can be met each day.

[A CO-TAUGHT CLASSROOM CAN PROVIDE STUDENTS NUMEROUS BENEFITS – IF DONE PROPERLY.]

Cooperative Teaching Model: When Two Teachers Share a Class

In a cooperative teaching model, one classroom is shared by two or more teachers. These teachers will share all responsibility including planning, instruction, and grading. Typically the co-teaching classroom is an inclusion class with both a regular education teacher and a special education teacher. These teachers must share a common goal, and believe that co-teaching is a better method of teaching for their students to see success.

Cooperative Teaching: a Common Goal

There should be an obvious cooperation in a classroom where two or more teachers share instructional responsibility. A common goal that both teachers are dedicated towards seeing to fruition will tie them together and enable them to work together towards that common end.

These co-teachers must work together, open and honest about their strengths and weaknesses in order to present lessons in the most beneficial way for all students. This model will not work if the teachers do not share the same end goal. As with any team, this must be the case or neither teacher will succeed.

Each teacher involved in a cooperative teaching model must believe that the model work, and indeed must work, in order to see their goals succeed.

Cooperative Teaching: a Personal Belief

Each teacher involved in a cooperative teaching model must believe that the model will work, and indeed must work, in order to see their goals succeed. If teachers believe in what they are doing, the model has a better chance at success than those teachers who are not completely convinced.

Teachers who believe in the cooperative teaching model will work together, play off each other in every day instruction, find necessary time to plan together, and be open to suggestions. This type of teaching model, when both teachers believe in making it work, will benefit all students. What better situation than to have two dedicated, trained teachers, each with her own specialty skill set, working with each individual student in the same classroom?

Teachers who do not fully believe in the cooperative teaching model, or who cannot find a way to work with their cooperating teacher, will see at most, limited success in their classroom. The pitfalls to co-teaching include a lack of respect for the other teacher, and to a degree, a resentment of someone else in your classroom or of teaching in an inclusion classroom.

Finding Success in the Co-Teaching Classroom

Many teachers are placed in a co-teaching position without their input. Many times a co-teaching relationship between teachers does not work, because one teacher or the other is not fully sold out to making the model work. These teachers must find a way to overcome these negative thoughts and resentments in order to find success in their classroom.

One of the most common problems between co-teachers is a lack of proper respect for the other teacher. Both teachers must be equals, neither reducing the other to the position of assistant or aid. Both teachers must respect the other's time, ideas and teaching style while at the same time accepting that neither is perfect.

Secondly, both teachers must realize that every student is their student – not just the students with an IEP or those without an IEP. If the regular education teacher views those students with disabilities as “those students” or “the special education teacher's students” the model will not work. Likewise, if the special education teacher views those students without an IEP as less important in any way, then the model will not work.

Communication is Key

When in a co-teaching situation, you need to be purposeful and open in your communication. With this type of communication, you will set the ground work for planning, teaching, disciplining and ultimately a successful year.

Discuss what you hope to accomplish through co-teaching. Review teaching styles and how you hope to work together in the classroom to create the optimal learning experience for every student. Discuss how you will together handle discipline problems, how you will handle paper work, parent teacher conferences and data collection. Make sure your expectations are clearly understood and are reasonable.

Important things to remember: both of you are highly trained. You both have enough experience to be considered equals in the eyes of your principal, and you both have different skill sets to bring to the classroom. You do not need to be best friends or share common after school and weekend activities, but you need to be able to work efficiently together in the classroom.

Common Planning Times

When co-teaching, it is very important to find a common time to plan together. Whether this time is before school, during your scheduled planning time, over lunch or after school, you need to both agree on the time, and stick to it.

One of the most common problems between co-teachers is a lack of proper respect for the other teacher

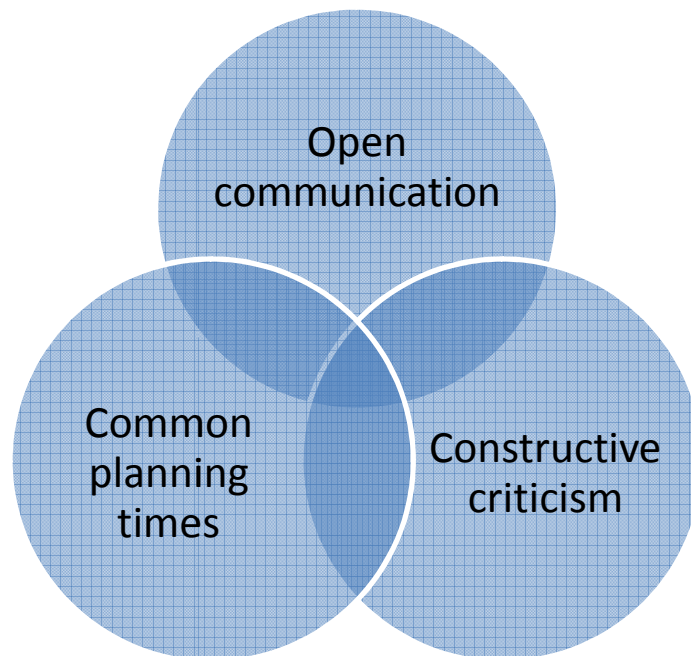
It is extremely important to plan together so that both highly trained teachers have input on the lessons, activities and time frame for teaching each concept. This time should also be used to discuss any problems you have seen among the students, and any changes made to student's Individual Education Plans. Once again, be sure to communicate purposefully and openly with each other for the benefit of your students.

Constructive Criticism

As a teacher, you should be constantly reevaluating your strengths and weaknesses in order to become better. Having supervisors observe teachers is another way to identify weaknesses in order to improve. When co-teaching, you have a valuable resource in the room with you, so be sure to utilize that!

Observe each other teach and when possible, offer and accept constructive criticism in order to improve your teaching abilities. This should not be considered negative, and should be communicated in a way that enables the students to find success in every area possible.

When open communication, common planning times and constructive criticism are all a part of a co-teaching classroom, the students and teachers will all benefit.



Inclusion Classroom Tips for New Teachers

The first year of teaching is a huge learning curve for every new teacher. An inclusion classroom only adds to that learning curve with the addition of learning disabilities, modified work and added behavioral challenges. Learning a few simple tips for teaching in an inclusion classroom will help a new teacher learn to love the extra challenge that students with special needs present.

Teaching Tips for an Inclusion Classroom Teacher

The most important thing for an inclusion classroom teacher to remember is that students with special needs require extra patience. It is important to take additional time to teach new concepts, teaching each concept in several ways to allow students greater understanding. Teachers should also allow extra wait time after asking a question to provide students with learning disabilities the ability to process the question and think of the answer.

*Students with special
needs require extra
patience*

It is important to realize that skills will need to be taught several times before a student masters them in many situations. Remembering that a student with a specific learning disability has certain limitations will help an inclusion teacher understand that a wrong answer is not a lack of focus or lack of attention.

Understanding How Academics are Effectuated by a Disability

Understanding the disabilities that are in the inclusion classroom will provide invaluable information for an inclusion teacher. Teachers need to not be afraid to ask the special education teacher to sit down and go over the various disabilities present in the classroom. Special education teachers should consider providing the inclusion teacher a single cheat sheet for each student with an IEP. This sheet should include the following information:

- The name of the student
- The specific disability the student has
- The required modifications
- Information on the student's strengths and weaknesses
- Basic information on the IEP goals

With this information, the inclusion teacher will be able to more effectively plan lessons and teach all the students in the class. Understanding the disability will help the teacher understand why the student struggles in class, while the modifications, strengths and weaknesses will help the teacher know how to help the student succeed. Providing basic information on the IEP goals

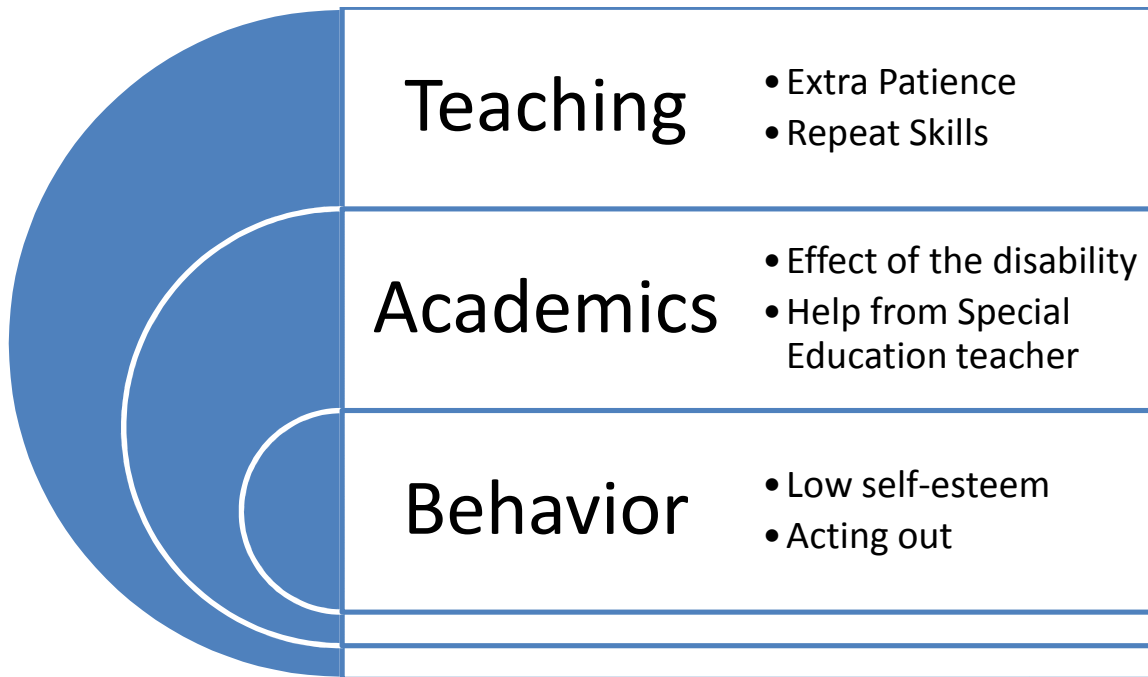
will provide the inclusion teacher a basic understanding of what information the special education teacher needs to collect for records.

Behavior Management in an Inclusion Classroom

Students who struggle to learn often develop behavior problems as they attempt to hide their weaknesses from their peers and cope with their low self-esteem. It is important for teachers to understand this and work carefully to build self-esteem and provide simple ways for students to get help without making a big deal about it to the class. Some ideas include:

- Mix simple questions into the lessons so that even those who have a learning disability will be able to participate in class discussions.
- Provide more wait time than you initially think is necessary.
- Assign a buddy student.
- Do not ask the student to attempt to do something in front of the class if it is the student's weak area.

Teaching in an inclusion classroom does provide an extra challenge to teachers. With some basic understanding of the disabilities in the class as well as the behavior and learning issues that will come up as a result, any teacher can have a successful year in an inclusion classroom.



Learn How to Identify and Teach to Each Learning Style

There are all kinds of learners: those who learn by seeing something written, those who learn by listening to something being said, and those who learn by actually doing something. These types of learners have the technical names of visual learners, audio learners, and kinesthetic learners. The best learning situation is one that includes a strong mixture of all three of these learning types. Use the following tips to help know which learning style is dominant and how to help that child learn most effectively.

The Visual Learner

The visual learner enjoys reading/looking at books and pictures. She will enjoy things being orderly so that she can find things easily. When discussing a book, she can easily find the page being discussed, because she pictures things in her head. She will often be quiet, and will enjoy working on puzzles.

Visual learners learn best through seeing

Tips for Teaching the Visual Learner: Clean up and take away visual distractions. Write directions down or give one step at a time, since multiple spoken directions will often confuse her. The optimal environment for the visual learner includes allowing her to see words written down when the teacher is talking, giving her a picture to illustrate something being described, and having her look at handouts or overheads when listening to a lecture. Whenever possible write things down and demonstrate how to do things. Using color to organize information will help her keep things in order and remember information better.

Additional simple things that a teacher can do to help a visual learner include using time lines to illustrate historical events, writing instructions on the board, using educational bulletin boards, using diagrams, charts, and maps to supplement the learning material.

The Audio Learner

Audio learners learn best through hearing

The auditory learner talks a *lot!* He will enjoy telling jokes and stories, and remembers things that are spoken to him. He can memorize things easily, including all the words to songs that he hears. He may read aloud or whisper read so that he can hear the words.

Tips for Teaching the Auditory Learner: The audio learner is likewise simple to teach. He will remember what he hears as well as what he says. He may be a challenge to teachers, as he will often be very expressive when excited about learning. He will probably be easily distracted by sound, yet at the same time find silence distracting and have difficulties working in quiet conditions for any length of time.

Find the auditory learner a quiet place to work. He should be encouraged to read and study out loud. Correct spelling of words is most easily taught using the “say-spell-say” method. For example: HOUSE – H-O-U-S-E – HOUSE. Whenever possible, encourage spoken answers to questions instead of written answers. Using a tape recorder may help him take more accurate notes and allow more thorough studying.

The teacher has a great asset with the audio learners, in that these students may be able to articulate a concept to another student who may be having difficulties. They will also enjoy and pay close attention during interesting lessons as well as music activities. One way to assist an audio learner who is taking tests or doing other activities is to put on soft classical music in the background. This may help the student to concentrate and to learn the material in a more effective manner.

The Kinesthetic Learner

The kinesthetic learner enjoys moving and likes to touch everything. She can easily take things apart *and* put them back together again. She will also be good at sports, and will enjoy activities that allow her to touch and manipulate things. This learning style is also referred to as the *tactile learning style*. She may also cause a disturbance when she gets excited over something because of a tendency to act out her excitement.

*Kinesthetic learners
learn best through
touch*

Tips for Teaching the Kinesthetic Learner: These tactile learners enjoy becoming physically involved in the subject that is being studied, whether that involves writing out spelling words or manipulating items to learn math. Utilize as many activities as possible that allow for movement while learning. The kinesthetic or tactile learner's memory seems to be attached to the hands, as these learners remember and understand things better after doing something.

Use a clock or timer to help cue her to how long any given task should take to keep her focused. As long as a task is being completed, allow for what may seem like excess movement. This may include standing at the desk or table to do homework, fiddling with a pencil, dancing in her seat, etc.

More strategies for teaching tactile learners include computer work, hands-on projects, and manipulative learning materials. The teacher may need to come up with physical activities to intersperse into each subject that they study during the day. Following an active time, have a “calm down” period of time before attempting to move on to another task.

Learning styles are simply the way a child learns best. Students will often have a dominant learning style and a secondary learning style although in some rare cases, a child will show equal preference for two learning styles. Learning how to work within each individual learning style will allow students to learn and retain more information.

It is important to understand each learning style and to integrate various activities into classroom lessons each day that focus on each style. There must be a balance among the three learning styles, and the effective teacher is one who can integrate visual, audio and tactile learning strategies effectively and productively.

Tips for Parents with Children with Attention Deficit Disorder

The child who suffers from Attention Deficit Disorder has a tough time focusing and following through on simple tasks even at home. This problem affects children at school, causing them to lose their homework and struggle to complete simple tasks.

These children's lives at home are just as disorganized, causing stress during homework time, difficulty completing chores and other simple tasks such as getting dressed or cleaning up a room. With a flexible schedule in place, parents can begin to regain control over their hectic lives and help their child succeed both at home and at school.

Homework Time for the Child with ADHD

Homework time for a child diagnosed with ADHD is often torture for both the child and the parent. It is important to set up a homework station in the home that can allow the child the best possible atmosphere for focusing and learning. This may be a desk in a separate room or the kitchen table, but it must be distraction free.

Some things to keep in mind when setting up a homework station:

1. Clear out the clutter. The space should be clean and clutter free in order to help minimize visual distractions. This means turning the TV off too, if the child can see it from the homework station.
2. Turn it off. The radio, TV, video games and the computer should be silent during homework time. Younger children should be encouraged to play outside or in another room where the noises will not be distracting.
3. Keep it short. Homework time may need to be split into two separate times if the child is unable to sit still long enough to complete all the assigned work. Having 10-20 minutes before dinner and 10-20 minutes after dinner devoted to homework time will help the child focus on each assignment.
4. Remain patient! The parent will most likely need to redirect the child's attention many times during homework time. Try to keep homework time low-key and up-beat so that the child does not get frustrated.

Clear out the clutter

Turn it off

Keep it short

Remain Patient

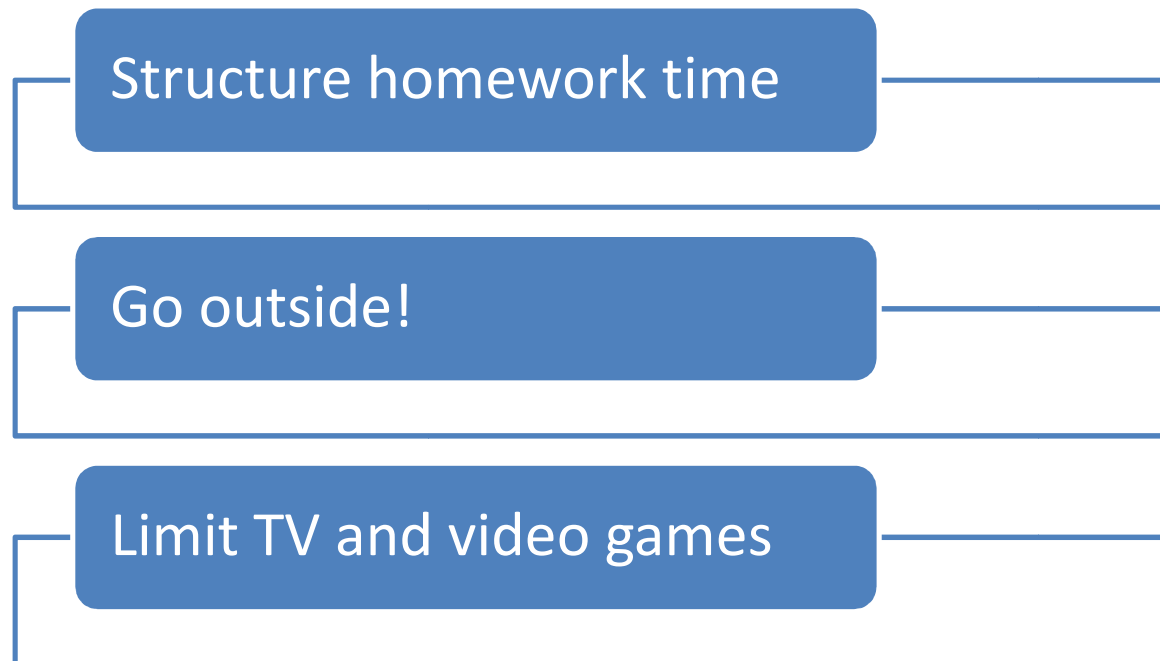
Playtime for the Child with ADHD

While it is important for all children to play outside every day, it is doubly important for the child with ADHD to spend time outdoors. Researchers Andrea Faber Taylor and Frances E. Kuo found that even 20 minutes of play outside in a park or other natural (green) setting has the potential to improve the ADHD symptoms in children. (Taylor, Andrea Faber and Kuo, Frances E. "Children With Attention Deficits Concentrate Better After Walk in the Park", *Journal of Attention Disorders*, August 2008)

Go outside!

Time spent watching the television and playing video games should be limited and replaced with interactive board games and time reading books when outdoor play is not possible. One way to determine if a child has too much TV or video game time is to take it away for a day. If that child becomes very upset, it is possible that time spent playing that video game or watching that TV show should be limited even more.

It is important to take steps to improve the quality of life for children with ADHD and bring more structure to activities. Reducing distractions will help homework time go more smoothly and playtime should include outdoor play each day whenever possible.



Having a child with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in the classroom or at home can be a challenge for any teacher or parent. It is important to understand how to work with the child to help him or her overcome the disability.

When working with a child with ADHD, it is important to remain patient and calm, and to remember that the lack of focus is not a choice that the child is making. Allow the student to stand while working if it helps and break tasks down into short, simple steps. Seating the child near the front of the classroom can help, as this reduces distractions. At home, parents should minimize distractions as well by turning the television off, minimizing noise and removing clutter.

Parents who have recently found out that their child has ADHD should speak to their child's teacher for suggestions for how to help their child at home. They can also look into a support group such as CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder), which has a chapter in the greater Baltimore area as well as other areas in Maryland.

In addition to finding support among others in a similar situation, parents may find it helpful to receive suggestions from the teacher on how to handle homework time. Teachers should emphasize the importance of reducing distractions, taking frequent breaks, and remaining calm and patient with the child.

Although a child with ADHD poses a challenge for both teachers and parents, it is possible to structure the classroom instruction and homework time at home in a way to help the child learn. Parents and teachers should work together to create a team to help the child excel despite his or her disability.