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Positively supporting a child with ADHD in the classroom

A short guide on supporting children with ADHD in the classroom.

The school environment can be a challenging place for a child with ADHD. The very behaviours that we ask of in school (all day long) are the ones that a child with ADHD will struggle with - sitting still, listening quietly, concentrating. It is important to remember that most children with ADHD want to learn and behave like their peers, so the question for us as teachers is how can we support children with ADHD to engage positively with school and achieve their potential?

It is important that your student knows you are working with them: use phrases such as "let's look together at how we can support you to get your work done." Inclusive language will let the child know they are valued, listened to and you are helping them. Too often children with ADHD receive negative behaviour towards them which causes them to experience low self-esteem, disengage with education and miss opportunities.

In school, we can support a child in three key ways:

- **Where:** Consider the environment for the child and the symptoms they experience
- **What:** Consider what teaching methods you will use to promote and support inclusion
- **How:** What interventions do you have in place to support the child?

Where: the environment

- Ensure the student is not seated by windows or a door
- If it is not a distraction for them, have their desk in front of yours.
- Provide a quiet area in the classroom where the student can go if they need to have a "quiz" or test.

What: teaching methods

- When giving instructions for a task give information in bite sized chunks, ensuring the student has completed one task before you explain the next. Always support information given orally with written, preferably in bold font. To help support the child's understanding use visuals, charts, pictures and colour coding.
- When testing, create tests with fewer questions and tasks if possible. Reduce tests into segments, for example you might compartmentalise a 1-hour test into four sections over a period of days.
- Try to focus on giving the student the more difficult/complicated tasks at the beginning of the day rather than towards the end.
- Accept late work and give partial credit for partial work.

How: Interventions

1. The School Day

Starting the day

- Use a cue to start the day so your student has a clear visual sign that the school day is about to start such as an egg timer.
- Establish eye contact with the student.
- Use physical games to encourage the children to take their seat, listen and engage with the day.
- Explain to the class what the activities are for the day, encouraging the children to participate in displaying the activities on a "timeline"/ "day line" for the day. Ensure the tasks are written and in pictorial form too. Give times for activities and use a timer on the wall so the children can see how long the activity will take. An idea might be to make a cardboard clock which the children can set with the time the activity finishes and put this next to the clock on the classroom wall. You can explain "It is now 9 o'clock", we will be doing maths until 10 o'clock (showing 10 o'clock on the cardboard clock). [Click here for a clock template](#)

Lessons

- Keep instructions simple and structured, give instructions in interesting ways to encourage attention and promote understanding such as visual aids, props, colour coding
- Vary activities and pace- incorporate physical movement

- Use cues with the student to encourage them to stay on task such as a “secret language/ cue” or placing a sticky note on their desk.
- Support the student to have access to an unobtrusive fidget toy
- Give the student the opportunity to move around and take regularly breaks.

Ending the day

- Be clear with the student that it is the end of the day. Physical cross off or turn over the activity card for the last activity.
- Summarise the key points of the session with the class in a fun way for example using a song, games, a quiz and ensure the key points are displayed on the board and written down for the student.
- Give the student time and support to pack away his/her things at the end of the day.

Tips for managing ADHD symptoms at school

Before you look at strategies to support a child with ADHD it is important to get to know the child and understand their symptoms, for example;

- Are they easily distracted?
- Do they find it difficult to follow rules?
- Do they find it difficult to sit still?

The initial meeting with their family/ carers and child will give a good foundation to this. It is essential you plan strategies with the parents/ carers so this can be supported at home and the child has consistency. A good partnership with the family is essential for a positive outcome for the child.

Once you have an understanding of the needs of the child and the symptoms, they experience you can identify which strategy would support them best. Check out <https://www.adhdkidsrock.com> for more information about how you can support children with ADHD in class.

Click here for a template [Behaviour Plan](#).

Managing distractibility

Students with ADHD can become easily distracted by noise, this can include passers-by, outside noise or even their own thoughts so tasks that require sustained concentration can prove difficult such listening to instructions for a task or listening to a story.

To support children who are easily distracted it is important to integrate increased opportunities for movement and segmenting long pieces of work into manageable chunks. You will gain a sense from your meetings with their parents/ carers and through observing the child what the capacity of their attention span is, this will guide you on the time frame you can apply to a task.

Here's a few suggestions of how to positively support a child who experiences distractibility in class:

- Seat the child with ADHD away from doors and windows.
- When lesson planning, alternate seated activities with those that allow the child to move their body around the room. This will benefit the whole class too. Whenever possible, incorporate physical movement into lessons.
- When giving information to the class, ensure students with ADHD receive it written down ensuring they can easily read and reference it. You will need to remind the student where the information is located.
- Divide big tasks into smaller ones and allow children frequent breaks.

Reducing interrupting

Children with ADHD often speak out of turn as they struggle to control impulses so may call out an answer to a question before you have finished speaking, interrupt to share an idea when others are having a conversation. Whilst these may come across as rude or aggressive, it is really important as a teacher to remain calm and although the behaviour may cause a disruption in class, not to alienate the child by pointing the issue out as this can dramatically impact on their self-esteem and mental well-being leading to additional difficulties for the child in engaging and succeeding in school. Supporting a child with ADHD to understand appropriate behaviour should be done so sensitively. You could create a “secret language” using discreet gestures or words you have previously agreed upon to let the child know they are interrupting. When a child with ADHD manages not to interrupt, praise them.

Managing impulsivity

Children with ADHD may act before they think which can create disruption in the classroom. They may appear to be “out of control” or aggressive. There are four ways you can support a child in your class to manage their impulsivity.

1. **Behaviour plan** - Develop a behaviour plan in partnership with the child and their parents/ carers ensuring the parents/ carers have a copy too. The behaviour plan should be accessible to the child at school and presented in an accessible way for them.
2. **Consequences to actions** - Explain to the child that there are consequences to actions and ensure consequences immediately follow misbehaviour. When speaking to your student after the misbehaviour, be very clear on what they did, how they misbehaved, what is going to happen and give a timeframe.
3. **Praise** – When your student shows good behaviour ensure you recognise this out loud and your student knows what they did correctly.
4. **Supporting the child to feel in control of their day** – Create a schedule for the day. This can prove helpful for all students so display it where all the class can see it. Ensure you have a way of showing when each task is completed such as turning over the card, crossing it out. Children with ADHD often feel calmer when they know what to expect.

You can offer students additional support by offering a “Chill out” area in the classroom where they can go to and take 5. The area should be painted in calm colours, give the child access to somewhere to sit with soft furnishings such as pillows, books, fidget type toys and have tips/ support strategies that can enable them to regain control and then return to the class activity. You can add posters to the area with helpful tips such as (It always works well to add pictures to illustrate what you are trying to say):

- I can calm myself down
- Take a deep breath
- Count to ten
- Think about what I am trying to say
- Keep hands and feet to myself

Managing fidgeting and hyperactivity

Children with ADHD may appear to struggle to sit in their seats as they display constant physical activity. Their actions can appear unpredictable and aggressive such as jumping, kicking, fidgeting, twisting. A child with ADHD needs to be given the opportunity to be physically active but as a teacher you can support them to develop the ability to move in appropriate ways at appropriate times.

- Working with the child’s parents/ carers identify sports opportunities both at school and externally so the child can access sports daily, ideally before and after school.
- Try to ensure the child never misses PE at school.
- In class, give your student a discreet “toy” such as a stress ball that they can fiddle with. Fiddling with the fidget toy will enable the child to engage with you.

- Integrate activities in class that require movement.

Following directions

Most children with ADHD will find it difficult to follow directions. As a teacher you might observe your student appearing to understand your instructions and writing them down but will then struggle to follow them for example you may find the student hands in incomplete work or completely misunderstands a task.

You can support children with ADHD to understand and follow instructions by keeping them brief, allowing them to complete one step before explaining the next step. If they become distracted sensitively give them a calm reminder. Make sure instructions are written as well as verbalised, using a bold marker so it stands out will help.

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