

ADHD in the Classroom: Helping Children Succeed in School

Children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) experience more obstacles in their path to success than the average student. The symptoms of ADHD, such as inability to pay attention, difficulty sitting still, and difficulty controlling impulses, can make it hard for children with this diagnosis to do well in school.

To meet the needs of children with ADHD, schools may offer

- ADHD treatments, such as behavioral classroom management or organizational training;
- Special education services; or
- Accommodations to lessen the effect of ADHD on their learning.

Classroom Treatment Strategies for ADHD Students

There are some school-based management strategies shown to be effective for ADHD students: behavioral classroom management and organizational training.¹

Did you know?

Parents report that only about 1 in 3 children with ADHD receive behavioral classroom management.²

The **behavioral classroom management** approach encourages a student's positive behaviors in the classroom, through a reward systems or a daily report card, and discourages their negative behaviors. This teacher-led approach has been shown to influence student behavior in a constructive manner, increasing academic engagement. Although tested mostly in elementary schools, behavioral classroom management has been shown to work students of all ages.¹

Organizational training teaches children time management, planning skills, and ways to keep school materials organized in order to optimize student learning and reduce distractions. This management strategy has been tested with children and adolescents.¹

These two management strategies require trained staff—including teachers, counselors, or school psychologists—follow a specific plan to teach and support positive behavior.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that the school environment, program, or placement is a part of any ADHD treatment plan. AAP also recommends teacher-administered behavior therapy as a treatment for school-aged children with ADHD. You can talk to your child's healthcare provider and teachers about working together to support your child.

Special Education Services and Accommodations

Most children with ADHD receive some school services, such as special education services and accommodations. There are two laws that govern special services and accommodations for children with disabilities:

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- **Section 504** of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

The support a child with ADHD receives at school will depend on if they meet the eligibility requirements for one of two federal plans funded by IDEA and Section 504: an individualized education program (IEP) or a 504 Plan.

What are the main differences between the two Plans?

IEPs provide *individualized special education services* to meet the unique needs of the child.

A 504 Plan provides services and changes *to the learning environment* to meet the needs of the child as adequately as other students.³

Accommodations

IEP and 504 Plans can offer accommodations for students to help them manage their ADHD, including:

- Extra time on tests;
- Instruction and assignments tailored to the child;
- Positive reinforcement and feedback;
- Using technology to assist with tasks;

- Allowing breaks or time to move around;
- Changes to the environment to limit distraction; and
- Extra help with staying organized.

Did you know?

Parents of children with ADHD report receiving more services through an IEP than through a 504 plan.²

There is limited information about which types of accommodations are effective for children with ADHD.³ However, there is evidence that setting clear expectations, providing immediate positive feedback, and communicating daily with parents through a daily report card can help.⁴

What Teachers Can Do To Help

For teachers, helping children manage their ADHD symptoms can present a challenge. Most children with ADHD are not enrolled in special education classes, but do need extra assistance on a daily basis. [The National Resource Center on ADHD provides information for teachers from experts on how to help students with ADHD.](#)

Here are some tips for classroom success.

Communication

- Give frequent feedback and attention to positive behavior;
- Be sensitive to the influence of ADHD on emotions, such as self-esteem issues or difficulty regulating feelings;
- Provide extra warnings before transitions and changes in routines; and
- Understand that children with ADHD may become deeply absorbed in activities that interest them (hyper-focus) and may need extra assistance shifting their attention.

Assignments and Tasks

- Make assignments clear—check with the student to see if they understand what they need to do;
- Provide choices to show mastery (for example, let the student choose among written essay, oral report, online quiz, or hands-on project;

- Make sure assignments are not long and repetitive. Shorter assignments that provide a little challenge without being too hard may work well;
- Allow breaks—for children with ADHD, paying attention takes extra effort and can be very tiring;
- Allow time to move and exercise;
- Minimize distractions in the classroom; and
- Use organizational tools, such as a homework folder, to limit the number of things the child has to track.

Develop a Plan That Fits the Child

- Observe and talk with the student about what helps or distracts them (for example, fidget tools, limiting eye contact when listening, background music, or moving while learning can be beneficial or distracting depending on the child);
- Communicate with parents on a regular basis; and
- Involve the school counselor or psychologist.

Close collaboration between the school, parents, and healthcare providers will help ensure the child gets the right support.

Parent Education and Support



CDC funds the National Resource Center on ADHD (NRC), a program of Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD). The NRC provides resources, information, and advice for parents on how to help their child.

How to best advocate for your child

- Understand your child's diagnosis, how it impacts their education, and what can be done at home to help.
- Understand your child's IEP. If you have questions, don't be afraid to ask.
- Speak with your child's teacher.
- When possible, obtain written documentation from teachers, administrators, or other professionals working with your child.
- Know your rights.
- Play an active role in preparing your child's IEP or 504 Plan.
- Keep careful records, including written documentation, communication between home and school, progress reports, and evaluations.
- Try to maintain a good working relationship with the school while being a strong advocate for your child.
- Communicate any concerns you may have about your child's progress or IEP or 504 Plan.
- Encourage your child every day, and devise a system to help with homework and other school projects.⁵

What every parent should know

- School support and services are regulated by laws. The U.S. Department of Education has developed [a "Know your rights" letter for parents](#) and a [resource guide for educators](#) to help educators, families, students, and other interested groups better understand how these laws apply to students with ADHD so that they can get the services and education they need to be successful.
- Healthcare providers play an important part in collaborating with schools to help children get the special services they need. [Read more about the role of healthcare providers in assisting children with special needs.](#)

Reference

1. Evans S, Owens J, Bunford N. Evidence-based psychosocial treatments for children and adolescents with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology* 2014;43(4):527-551
2. DuPaul GJ, Chronis-Tuscano A, Danielson ML, Visser SN. **Predictors of receipt of school services in a national sample of youth with ADHD.** *Journal of Attention Disorders* Published online December 10, 2018.

3. Harrison JR, Bunford N, Evans SW, Owens JS. Educational accommodations for students with behavioral challenges: A systematic review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research* 2013;83(4):551-97.
4. Moore DA, Russell AE, Matthews J, Ford TJ, Rogers M, Ukoumunne OC, et al. School-based interventions for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder: A systematic review with multiple synthesis methods. *Review of Education*. Published online October 18, 2018.
5. <https://chadd.org/for-parents/individuals-with-disabilities-education-act/>
- 6.

Page last reviewed: September 3, 2020

Content source: [National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities](#)