

Developing Strategies To Address Attentional Issues

ADD (Attentional Deficit Disorder) and ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) are characterized by the inability to sustain focused attention. Its core symptoms include developmentally inappropriate levels of attention, concentration, and activity, with distractibility and impulsivity. Children with ADD/ADHD usually have functional impairments across multiple settings including home, school and peer relationships.

The teacher can support the child with ADD/ADHD by providing:

Structured classrooms with predictable routines and minimal distraction

Consistency enables the student to perform some tasks automatically, demanding less in terms of attention for routine tasks.

Preferential seating to minimize distraction and enable teacher to enhance focusing

Seating could be near the teacher, away from windows, and near classmates who are focused, organized and understanding.

Verbal, visual and tactile cues to help student maintain focus on the task at hand

These might include a tactful verbal reminder, a predetermined "secret signal" to the student such as a raised hand or a gentle touch on the shoulder.

A formal behavior modification program with rewards for meeting pre-established goals and consequences for not meeting reasonable responsibilities

This provides a framework for explicit and frequent feedback that is often helpful for students who have trouble relating immediate behavior to long term goals and delaying gratification.

Specific organizational support by suggesting specific approaches to the class routine as well as academic demands

This includes tools such as pocket organizers, lists, and assignment books. It can also include direct help in the form of a check-in at the start and end of the day to be sure the student has the necessary materials and knows the schedule.

Information presented in small chunks and concise sentences

Novelty in class presentations

Students with attentional problems have more trouble than most attending to repetitive, boring tasks. Varying teaching with new presentations or different applications can enhance focused attention.

The teacher can accommodate the child with ADD/ADHD by:

Allowing frequent opportunities to move around and release energy

These might include classroom chores such as passing out papers, doing errands, or allowing the student to squeeze a hand toy while doing seated work

Offering instruction in smaller groups, with a reduced teacher to student ratio

This might be necessary to enable the teacher to help the student focus and to monitor comprehension. A resource room or other small setting should be used as needed.

Identifying co-existing learning problems and establishing appropriate support and accommodation

If student cannot succeed in regular classroom despite comprehensive services in the form of behavioral support and pharmacologic treatment, placement in small, specialized classroom should be considered.

ADD/ADHD Website: More information can be found at the website for CHADD, a national organization for the support of Children and Adults with ADD: www.chadd.org