

Edward M. Hallowell, M.D.

ADHD FOR TEACHERS

10 Tips on the Classroom Management of ADHD

The following tips on classroom management of ADHD were presented in *Driven to Distraction*. They are revised, updated, and reprinted here because we have heard from many teachers that they have found them to be very helpful. These techniques will assist all students, whether they had ADHD or not, but they are especially helpful for students who have ADHD.

Teachers know what many professionals do not: that there is no one syndrome of ADHD, but many; that ADHD rarely occurs in "pure" form by itself, but rather usually shows up entangled with several other problems such as learning disabilities or mood problems; that the face of ADHD changes with the weather, inconstant and unpredictable; and that the treatment for ADHD, despite what may be serenely elucidated in various texts, remains a task of hard work and devotion.

There is no easy solution for the management of ADHD in the classroom, or at home for that matter. After all is said and done, the effectiveness of any treatment for this disorder at school depends upon the knowledge and the persistence of the school and the individual teacher.

If the teacher can master the following tips, teaching students with ADHD should become much easier and more effective. These students can transform over the school year. They can change from being your most frustrating students to your most rewarding.

These suggestions are intended for teachers of students of all ages. Some suggestions will be obviously more appropriate for younger students, others for older, but the unifying themes of structure, education, and encouragement pertain to all.

1. First of all, make sure what you are dealing with really is ADHD. It is definitely not up to the teacher to diagnose ADHD, but you can and should raise questions.

2. Ask the student what will help. This obvious step is almost always overlooked. We adults are usually so busy trying to figure out by ourselves what is best for these students, what we should be to or for them, that we forget to ask them what they think will help. These students are often very intuitive. They can tell you how they can learn best if you ask them. They are often too embarrassed to volunteer information because it can be rather eccentric. But try to sit down with the student individually and ask how he or she learns best. By far the best "expert" on the how the student learns best is the student himself or herself. It is amazing how often their opinions are ignored or not asked for. In ADDition, especially with older kids, make sure the student understands what ADHD is. This will help both of you a lot.

3. Remember that ADHD students need structure. They need their environment to structure externally what they can't structure internally on their own. Make lists. Students with ADHD benefit greatly from having a table or list to refer back to when they get lost in what they're doing. They need reminders. They need previews. They need repetition. They need direction. They need structure.

4. Make frequent eye contact. You can "bring back" an ADHD student with eye contact. Do it often. A glance can retrieve a student from a daydream or give permission to ask a question or just give silent reassurance.

5. Go for quality rather than quantity of homework. Students with ADHD often need a reduced load. As long as they are learning the concepts, they should be allowed this. They will put in the same amount of study time, just not get buried under more than they can handle.

6. Monitor progress often. Students with ADHD benefit greatly from frequent feedback. It helps keep them on track, lets them know what is expected of them and if they are meeting their goals, and can be very encouraging.

7. Seek out and underscore success as much as possible. These students live with so much failure; they need all the positive handling they can get. **This point cannot be overemphasized: these students need and benefit from praise.** They love encouragement. They drink it up and grow from it. And without it, they shrink and wither. Often the most devastating aspect of ADHD is not the ADHD itself, but the secondary damage done to self-esteem. So water these students well with encouragement and praise.

8. Suggest to the student that they write little notes to themselves to remind them of their questions about what is being taught. In essence, they can take notes not only on what is being said to them, but what they are thinking as well. This will help them listen more effectively.

9. Stress preparation prior to coming into class. The better idea the student has of what will be discussed on any given day, the more likely the material will be mastered in class.

10. Always be on the lookout for sparkling moments. These students are far more talented and gifted than they often seem. They are full of creativity, play, spontaneity, and good cheer. They tend to be resilient, always bouncing back. They tend to be generous of spirit, and glad to help out. They usually have a "special something" that enhances whatever setting they're in. Remember, there is a melody inside that cacophony, a symphony yet to be written.

Adapted from **Answers to Distraction**, Edward M. Hallowell, M.D. and John J. Ratey, M.D., Pantheon, New York, 1995