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ADHD Secrets Your Child's Teacher Should Know

9 ways teachers can bring out your child's best in the classroom.

by Josh and Melinda Boring

Learning Is a Collaboration

Success in the classroom is a two-way street. To learn, students must show up prepared and excited for class. But teachers have to prepare as well. Understanding an ADHD student's unique challenges will help teacher and student become a winning team. Here are valuable tips from an ADHD student to clue teachers in to how ADDers learn best.

Grab My Attention

It can be hard to tell by looking at me sometimes. I don't always make eye contact, sit upright, or even sit still, but that doesn't mean I'm not listening. If you're not sure, ask me what you just said rather than constantly asking if I'm paying attention. If I respond correctly, then I am. If I can't repeat the information back, try to gain my attention before repeating it again.

Get All of Me Involved

It is a challenge for me to learn passively for extended periods of time. Sometimes all I need is repetition, once you have my attention, to learn. Get me as involved as possible because my brain does better with interactive learning. The more of my senses you address, the more engaged I will be. Don't just tell me what to do, show me how, and then have me show you I understand.

I Can Be Distracted, or Not Distracted Enough

Sometimes I don't pay attention because I'm distracted. Sometimes, I need a distraction. A totally still environment can cause my ears and eyes to strain to find out where distractions went. If I have something subtle to occupy me—two quarters to rub together or a small fidget toy—I am neither distracted nor seeking out the distractions. I am relaxed and alert.

I Need Stimulation

Don't take it personally if I seem bored. I have a hard time motivating myself to do tasks that are not highly interesting to me. My brain craves stimulation, so even listening to soft background music through headphones helps keep part of my brain busy. Give me incentives, too. Small rewards help encourage me, so that I can pull my attention back to the work you want me to complete.

I Need to Move

My attention span is tied to my energy levels. I know I'm supposed to get school tasks done while I'm sitting at a table or desk. But how am I supposed to go forward if my brain is always in neutral? If I cannot move while I think, my engine will stall.

If a shutdown occurs, let me stand, move, or shift gears before returning to the subject. Sometimes a movement

break—a few jumping jacks—can jump-start my progress. This works better for me than suggesting I buckle down to complete a task.

Lead the Way for Me to Learn

What I have learned in school is not always apparent, even to me. I need you to help me show what I have learned. When I have to answer a question, make the answer be a goal that I want to reach and will be proud of when I succeed. I need to feel like you're guiding me toward finding the answer.

Don't Interrogate Me

If you tell me I'm not trying hard enough or not cooperating, my motivation and mindset become that of a prisoner locked in a room. When stress clamps down on my mind, I drag around the mental and emotional chains of judgment — that I should know this, but I'm just not smart enough. Being interrogated, especially in front of my classmates, does not motivate me, but discourages me from wanting to try.

Encourage, Don't Shame, Me

Sometimes I draw attention to myself without meaning to, like when I am fidgeting and don't know it, or when I'm staring off into space because my mind has wandered. I need your patient encouragement, not shaming or derogatory remarks. In fact, I need more positive reinforcement than my classmates, but I get much less than they do because of my struggles.

I Want What You Want: Success

I want to succeed. I am not acting this way to annoy you or to be disrespectful. My brain works differently, but it does work. I can tell when adults don't seem to like me. I may miss out on a lot of subtle cues, but if you like me and are on my side, I will know it and will work a lot harder than if you are just putting up with me.