

Change Your Perspective to Help Your ADD/ADHD Student

by Dr. Edward Hallowell

I have ADHD. My daughter and one of my sons have ADHD. I think that people with ADHD represent some of the most fascinating, fun, and fulfilling of all the people I meet. However, words such as structure, supervision, reminders, and persistence don't even begin to describe the magnitude of the task people with ADHD have to tackle every day, especially kids.

Children need educators to understand their difficulties, and teach them to overcome those challenges. As educators, the best way to help your student is to start by changing your own thinking about ADHD.

Barriers Educators Face

By far, the biggest barriers for educators are denial, ignorance, and a refusal to learn. Educators can dig in and simply refuse to listen to facts or reason. If this goes on too long, students can suffer severe damage. The stakes are high, not only for the child, but the whole school. There is no easy solution for educators, but with the persistent and consistent application of the steps outlined below, and with the cooperation of the rest of the school faculty, parents and the student, you can see frustration evolve, step by step, into mastery and success.

Steps for Educators to Change Your Perspective

1. Look for that special spark: In my daily practice, I see and treat kids with ADHD. Just being with them usually makes me smile. They invariably have a special something, a spark, a delightful quirk – which they sometimes try to hide, but which I usually can find. Then they relax, brighten up, and make me laugh and learn.

Look for that special something and help your student feel good about who s/he is. Identify his/her talents, strengths, interests and dreams. Teach him/her to see and believe in what s/he **can do**, and avoid the tendency to focus on what s/he can't do. When you believe in your student, it makes it easier for him/her to believe, too.

2. Promote the positives.

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.** If your student feels optimistic about who s/he is and about what life has to offer, s/he will do far better than if s/he does not. I see the condition of ADHD not so much as a disorder, but as a trait. Certainly it can lead to very bad outcomes (the prisons are full of people with undiagnosed and/or untreated ADHD), but it can also lead to huge success, joy and fulfillment in life.

ADD/ADHD is as much a marker of talent as it is a potential problem. The problems can be taken care of. Personally, I am thrilled that my kids can think outside the box, are intuitive, persistent, and creative. They have huge hearts and a desire to march to the beat of their own drums. All these positives are what make people with ADHD so interesting and potentially successful.

Once they get a handle on what's going on, people with ADHD tend to contribute to the world in a very positive way. Having ADHD is like having a race car engine for a brain with weak brakes. Once you strengthen your brakes, you're ready to win races!

3. Reframe Challenges in terms of Mirror Traits: Remind yourself of the positive sides of the negative symptoms associated with ADD. By recognizing the mirror traits, you avoid the ravages of shame and fear.

Negative Trait Associated with ADD	→	Positive Trait Associated with ADD
Hyperactive, restless	→	Energetic
Intrusive	→	Eager
Can't stay on point	→	Sees connections others don't
Forgetful	→	Gets totally into what s/he is doing
Disorganized	→	Spontaneous
Stubborn	→	Persistent, won't give up
Inconsistent	→	Shows flashes of brilliance
Moody	→	Sensitive
Impulsive	→	Creative

Conclusion: As an educator, how you approach ADHD will set the tone for how your students manages it his or herself. When you show students compassion and understanding, you teach them to love themselves and see their strengths. That will help them find the motivation they need to take control of their ADHD, one strategy at a time.

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