

What Every Teacher Should Know About ADHD: Reality, Suggestions and Strategies

ADHD is a complex neurobiological disorder. Researchers believe that people with ADHD have a few structures within the brain that are smaller and that their neurotransmitters-chemical messengers of the brain-do not work properly. This gives rise to very poor concentration, impulsive and/or hyperactive behaviour that significantly interferes with and impairs everyday life.

The purpose of classifying behaviour enables specialists to understand/help child and suggest strategies for those who live and work with them. Children with ADHD often test the limits of teachers and parents. In order to help the child you need to remain in control and respond positively, not allowing yourself to get drawn into a negative behavioural style.

- It is easy to make the mistake of treating children with ADHD like “little adults.”
- Use less talk and less emotion when disciplining children with ADHD

Focus on planning for a child with special needs:

School can be a hostile place for a child with ADHD.

- Be aware of problem situations
- Accommodate skills difficulties
- Acknowledge and note vulnerabilities
- Find out potential problems before the child enters the class so you can plan ahead and avoid possibility of a poor start.
- Assess situations with the ADHD child in mind. School trips or a school play are likely to make the child very excited. Establish one or two essential rules before the event and make sure the child knows the rules are and what will happen if she/he does or does not comply. May be necessary to plan for a parent or classroom assistant to be present at the event.
- Try to control the level of stimulation the ADHD child is exposed to. Child with ADHD is easily aroused.
- Give short, clear instructions, try not to flood the child with information as s/he will switch off.
- Tell the child what to do, rather than what not to do, eg, “please put your feet on the floor” rather than “take your feet off the table.” Giving positive rather than negative instructions are better for morale of teacher and child.

Rules, Rewards and Punishments

- Have only few rules in the classroom: make sure they are visible and child knows the rules and consequences of compliance or non-compliance. Rules should be phrased positively. Praise and reward appropriate behaviour and achievements-try and ignore minor behaviour. Enforce rules consistently and quickly: ADHD children cannot await rewards and forget why they are punished if there is a delay.

- Child may need help in appreciating rules, procedures of classroom and find them hard to remember.
- Reinforcement and meaningful rewards help and are more effective than punishment, as is a positive attitude, comment or smile.
- Set boundaries and limits for children in a classroom or playground.
- Make it clear it is the behaviour not the child that is unacceptable.
- Remember the threat of punishment has little effect on children with ADHD because of poor appreciation of cause and effect and consequences of actions.
- Use reward systems, giving opportunities to be rewarded frequently. Change reinforcers as ADHD children become bored very quickly. Use positive reinforcers but remember that ADHD children also need mild negative consequences. If punishments are too extreme, the child will give up trying to behave.
- Punish carefully-avoid lecturing, criticising, ridiculing, sarcasm etc.
- Work on one difficult behaviour at a time-remember you are teaching the child to behave just as you teach him to read.
- Remember the child has a disability and try to be kind to him/her and to yourself.
- Make sure the child knows it is his/her choice to be rewarded or punished.
- Remember the difficult child is not evil and that sanctions are put in place to help him.
- Don't presume that the child will behave well because of getting a reward.
- Try to avoid opportunities for the child with ADHD to retreat, like giving small jobs that are not used as a punishment.
- Whenever possible, try to give the child with ADHD opportunities to be responsible-don't resent doing so because he doesn't deserve it-think of him as being disabled.
- Make sure that the child is given a second chance to succeed as soon as s/he has failed.
- Teach the child problem solving skills so that s/he feels in control. Remember that feelings of helplessness are close to feelings of depression.

Appropriate Learning Environments

Create an organised educational environment:

- Have a quiet area that is available for all children
- Make sure the classroom is well-organised, tidy and calm
- Teach children how to organise their desk, time
- Establish and display a daily routine
- Develop a clear system for keeping track of completed/uncompleted work: provide due dates for assignments and make sure the child has copied them into his/her homework book.