

How Does ADHD Affect School Performance?



Source: [U.S. Department of Education](#)

The school experience can be challenging for students with ADHD. Students usually are identified only after consistently demonstrating a failure to understand or follow rules or to complete required tasks. Other common reasons for referral include frequent classroom disruptions and poor academic performance.

Studies found that students with ADHD, compared to students without ADHD, had persistent academic difficulties that resulted in the following: lower average marks, more failed grades, more expulsions, increased dropout rates, and a lower rate of college undergraduate completion (Weiss & Hechtman as cited in Johnston, 2002; Ingersoll, 1988). The disruptive behavior sometimes associated with the disorder may make students with ADHD more susceptible to suspensions and expulsions. A study by Barkley and colleagues (1990b) found that 46 percent of their student study group with ADHD had been suspended and 11 percent had been expelled.

ADHD's core symptoms—inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity—make meeting the daily rigors of school challenging (Zentall, 1993). Difficulty sustaining attention to a task may contribute to missing important details in assignments, daydreaming during lectures and other activities, and difficulty organizing assignments. Hyperactivity may be expressed in either verbal or physical disruptions in class. Impulsivity may lead to careless errors, responding to questions without fully formulating the best answers, and only attending to activities that are entertaining or novel. Overall, students with ADHD may experience more problems with school performance than their nondisabled peers.

Helpful Hints

This section highlights a few evidence-based hints for addressing the specific learning needs of children with ADHD. More detailed information about the effective strategies can be found in a companion guide, *Teaching Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Instructional Strategies and Practices*. Information regarding the complete set of materials is available on page 21.

Numerous studies have found that positive results occur when the major stakeholders in a student's education collaborate to address a child's ADHD (Blazer, 1999; Bos, 1999; Bos, Nahmias, & Urban, 1999; Nahmias, 1995; Williams & Cartledge, 1997). Effective collaboration and communication between home and school provide structure across the two major settings in the child's life. Common rewards, reinforcement strategies, and language help to promote consistency across settings.

Bos et al. (1999) reported that collaborative partnerships between home and school were especially important during the initial assessment of the child's disability and educational needs, the development of behavior modification plans, the evaluations of medication, and the coordination of assignments. Parents and teachers can share information with one another if they work together to plan behavioral and academic strategies for the student. Parents can offer information about the child—including the

child's medical history, hobbies and interests, effective reinforcers, and behavior in other settings-that may inform the decisions made by the teacher and other members of the IEP team. The teacher can keep parents informed about their child's progress, performance, and behavior in school. If the child is taking medication, the teacher can offer feedback to parents regarding how the medication affects the student's performance and the duration of the medicine's effectiveness. This information also can be used to help medical professionals make more informed decisions about the child with ADHD.

If a child exhibits patterns of disruptive or aggressive behavior, best practice research indicates that the child may benefit from a positive behavioral intervention plan that clearly delineates expectations and includes positive supports. The process to develop an effective plan should be collaborative and involve the parents and those other individuals who are most familiar with the child.

Students also can take some of the responsibility for their educational and behavioral adaptations.

Blazer (1999) reported that students as young as 5 years old can communicate ways to make their school experience more pleasurable and learning easier. Student input also helps to promote a sense of ownership and responsibility for the new strategies and adaptations.

The following are some suggestions for practices that may be helpful for parents and teachers working with a child with ADHD.

Tips for Home

Caring for children with ADHD may be challenging, but it is important to remember that these children can learn successfully. It is critical that parents remember that some of their child's disruptive behavior is a manifestation of the disability and that the challenge is finding ways to help their child change the inappropriate behavior. Key to this is remembering to focus on the need for structure and routine for your child's daily schedule and thereby reinforcing the importance of learning self-control and self-regulation. The following are suggestions for parents:

- Focus on discrete rewards and consequences for appropriate and inappropriate behavior:
 - Tangible rewards and treats;
 - Movie night for a good week at school;
 - Removal of privileges; and
 - Time-out from reinforcing activities: the child is essentially removed from situations that foster inappropriate behavior.
- Set a daily routine and stick to it. Bedtime and preparation for school are much easier if there is a structure already in place.
- Have tangible reminders:
 - A big clock in the bedroom;
 - Charts for chores;
 - Assignment pad to record homework and a specific folder to put work in upon completion; and
 - Gain the child's attention before speaking to him or her. Have the child repeat back directions for things that are really important.
- Avoid the following:

- Repeating patterns of inappropriate behavior followed by ineffective punishment;
- Administering consequences without prior warning or without the child understanding why he or she is receiving them; and
- Responding inconsistently to inappropriate behaviors.

Tips for School

A student with ADHD can present unique challenges in the classroom. Inattention, hyperactivity, or impulsivity can be the source of frustration, but there are ways teachers can help students with ADHD to improve the educational experience and control the symptoms of the disorder. It is important for teachers to be aware of coexisting conditions such as learning disabilities, as well as reinforcing the importance of classroom and instructional structure.

The following are tips for teachers:

- Work on the most difficult concepts early in the day;
- Give directions to one assignment at a time instead of directions to multiple tasks all at once;
- Vary the pace and type of activity to maximize the student's attention; and
- Structure the student's environment to accommodate his or her special needs. For example, the student can be seated away from potentially distracting areas (such as doors, windows, and computers) or seated near another student who is working on a shared assignment.

This guide is the first in a series of three publications that address issues related to the instruction of children with ADHD. The two additional guides are *A Resource Directory for ADHD and Teaching Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Instructional Strategies and Practices*. Teachers and others are encouraged to consult these publications and to use them in conjunction with *Identifying and Treating Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: A Resource for School and Home*. As the documents become available, they will be listed on the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs Web site (www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osep/index.html).

© Copyright 2006-2008 Education.com All Rights Reserved.

http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_How_Does_ADHD_Affect/