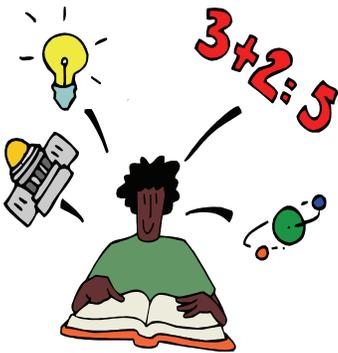


# 90 Ways to Help Students with ADHD

## What is ADHD?

Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) is a condition of the brain that makes it difficult for students to focus their attention in the ways that we would like them to in school. For some students, there may be attention deficit disorder only, with inattentiveness. For others, there will be hyperactivity and impulsivity as well. This brochure will use the term ADHD to include both. It is one of the most common chronic conditions of childhood. It affects 4% - 12% of school-aged children. About 3 times more boys than girls are diagnosed with ADHD. Symptoms that a student with ADHD may display include difficulty focusing, shifting or maintaining attention, hyperactivity and impulsivity. Left untreated, ADHD can lead to serious lifelong problems in school, relationships, and work.



Many students with ADHD have at least one coexisting condition:

- Oppositional Defiant Disorder or Conduct Disorder (up to 35%)
- Mood Disorders/Depression (up to 18%)
- Anxiety Disorders (up to 25%)
- Learning Disabilities
- Developmental Disabilities

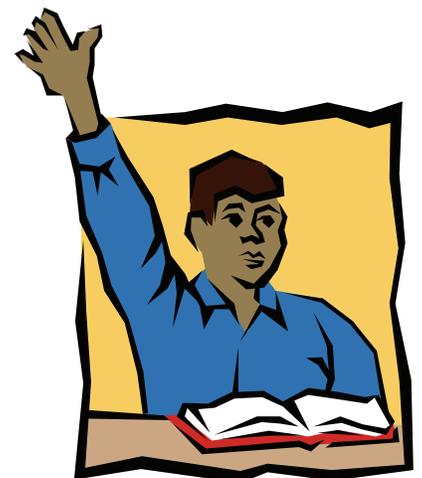
(Excerpted from the American Academy of Pediatrics, 37925 Eagle Way, Chicago, IL. 60678-1379, [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org), 2001)

## Characteristics of students with ADHD may include:

- Make careless mistakes in school
- Difficulty waiting in line
- Difficulty paying attention in class
- Misplace materials needed for school
- Poor organizational skills
- Fail to finish activities, homework
- Act first-think later
- Fidget in class
- Appear bored
- Difficulty taking turns & sharing
- Blurt out answers, excessive talking
- Shift from one unfinished activity to another
- Difficulty following instructions
- Have trouble making & keeping friends
- Daydream

## Positive characteristics!

- Creative, divergent thinker
- Strong visual skills
- See details other people miss
- Energetic and enthusiastic
- Ready to talk and participate
- Can do several things at once



## General Instructional Principles

These principles of effective instruction, which reflect what we know about how to educate all students, will especially **help a student with ADHD to stay focused on his/her assigned tasks** as s/he transitions from one lesson to another throughout the school day:

### Prior to the Lesson

- ✎ Review previous lessons.
- ✎ Set learning expectations.
- ✎ Describe behavioral expectations for students.
- ✎ State needed materials.
- ✎ Tell students how to obtain help if needed.

### During the Lesson

- ✎ Use a variety of audio-visual materials.
- ✎ Check individual student understanding.
- ✎ Allow students sufficient time to work out the answer to a question, rephrase question as needed.
- ✎ Watch for students who need additional assistance.
- ✎ Help students to identify and correct their own mistakes.
- ✎ Encourage and redirect students to focus and keep on task.
- ✎ Maintain appropriate noise level in the classroom.
- ✎ Use systematic instructional techniques such as “Reciprocal Teaching” to assist student in organization and comprehension.

### Concluding/Transitioning between Lessons

- ✎ Provide advance warning that a lesson is about to end.
- ✎ Check student assignments for ability to complete independently. If needed restate necessary steps.
- ✎ Announce next activity and instruct students how to begin preparing.
- ✎ Vary your tone of voice and model enthusiasm for the content.

## Individualized Instructional Practices

Effective teachers individualize their instructional practices based on the needs of their students. **Students with ADHD** may benefit from the following techniques:

### Strategies for Behavior

1. **Remind yourself and the student of his/her unique strengths** even when you’re having a “bad day”.
2. **Classroom rules and consequences** should be clearly stated and posted. Involve students with ADHD as part of the classroom group developing rules. Review rules frequently, giving examples and modeling as necessary.



3. **Praise** students for specific behaviors frequently and as soon as possible. Look for a behavior to praise before—not after—a student is off task.
4. If student appears to be starting to go “off task”, **promptly intervene with redirection, praise** for appropriate behavior, or **change stimulus** (e.g. new task, new location, errand, etc.).
5. **It is appropriate to request that a student change his or her behavior.** The most effective **directions** are brief and directed at the student’s behavior—not the student. Remind him/her of rewards and/or consequences. If giving a student a consequence, use a calm and respectful voice.
6. Carefully evaluate whether to intervene when a student misbehaves. In some instances, it is helpful to **ignore** the student’s inappropriate behavior, **particularly if a student is misbehaving to get your attention.**



7. Establish a simple, “**secret signal**” with the student to remind him/her to remain on task (an eye blink or finger tap, for example).

8. When talking to a student, move to where he/she is standing or sitting. Your **physical proximity** to the student will help the student to focus and pay attention to what you are saying.
9. Work together with the student to identify appropriate goals for a **behavior contract** such as completing homework assignments on time, raising hand to speak, staying seated, and obeying safety rules on the school playground. Take the time to ensure that the student agrees that his or her goals are important to master. Put contract in writing, develop a visual system (e.g. chart), and make sure rewards are achievable.
10. Have student participate in selection of desired **reinforcement**. These rewards can include **tangible rewards** such as stickers, small toys, or food items; **activity reinforcers** such as games, computer time, special time with teacher or peers; and **privileges** such as line leader, homework pass, office runner, etc. It may be helpful to consult with family and former teachers about motivational items for the student. For activity reinforcers, observe what s/he chooses to do during unstructured time.
11. A **token economy** can be used to provide a high rate of reinforcement to the student with ADHD for appropriate behaviors and others in the class who are **modeling** desired behaviors. Tokens can be used to “earn” any of the reinforcers above. Tokens can be used as a “raffle ticket” toward a desired outcome, accrued as points toward a reinforcer, or to earn a “whole class” reinforcement.
12. **Reward improvement** (not just perfection).
13. Give student **frequent breaks**. Have him/her get up and move around.
14. **Communicate with family** regularly (e-mail, fax, notebook) about how student is doing. Don’t forget to give good news!
15. Allow student to **work with younger students** on reading, spelling, etc.
16. Include behavior contract or other accommodations for student with ADHD in your **substitute folder**.
17. Don’t forget that behavior doesn’t change overnight, and remember to **praise yourself** for your efforts!

## Social Skills

18. **When conflicts arise**, conduct impromptu sessions with the group of involved students. Encourage students to resolve their problem by talking to each other, while you quietly monitor their interactions during the session.
19. Teach students with ADHD appropriate **social skills** using modeling, role plays, and simulations. Teach problem-solving techniques, helping student to consider options. (The SELPA has a resource of social skills curricula and materials for students with ADHD.)
20. Be confident that although teaching social skills may be frustrating, it may be **one of the most important things you do**. It will stay with students for a lifetime.
21. Keep in mind that students need **positive adult role models** to learn appropriate social skills.
22. Be aware that the teacher's **body language and tone of voice** are powerful communicators.

## Classroom Accommodations

23. **Ask student which accommodations** would help him/her to stay on task (including those used in the past) and teach him/her to respectfully request as needed.
24. **Give student notice** if there will be a change in the typical daily routine.
25. **Have a plan for flexible, alternate activities** when student with ADHD is having a "bad day."
26. **Be aware of classroom pace**. Students with ADHD may get confused, upset, or bored if too fast or too slow.
27. **Use computers with stimulating software** to engage a student with ADHD.
28. Consider **best seating assignment** for opportunities to monitor and reinforce behavior and social interactions.
29. **Seat student away from distractions** (door, window, traffic areas, overly stimulating visuals, colorful objects). Provide "study carrel" or private "office"



30. **Seat student near a peer role model** to provide opportunities for students to work cooperatively and learn from their peers in the class.
31. Use **secret signals for student with ADHD to communicate privately** with you. For example, a hand signal when s/he needs a break or other support.
32. Note for the students the time at which the lesson is starting and the time at which it will conclude. **Set a timer** to indicate to students how much time remains in the lesson and place it at the front of the classroom. The students can check the timer to see how much time remains. Interim prompts can be used as well. For instance, students can monitor their own progress during a 30-minute lesson if the timer is set for 10 minutes three times.



33. Turning the **classroom lights** "on and off" prompts students that the noise level in the room is too high and they should be quieter.
34. Play **music** to prompt students that they are too noisy. In addition, playing different types of music communicates to students what level of activity is appropriate for a particular lesson.
35. Allow student to use **headset** to muffle sound or with quiet music to help him/her focus.
36. **Provide clear and precise directions**, with **consistent eye contact** with the student with ADHD.
37. **"Chunk" directions into main steps**, giving time between chunks to allow student to understand.
38. After giving directions to the class as a whole, provide additional, **oral directions**, (using different words) for a student with ADHD.
39. **Provide follow-up directions in writing**. For example, write the page number for an assignment on the blackboard or on a "post it" note.
40. **Highlight key words** in the instructions on worksheets to help the student with ADHD focus on the directions.
41. Teach student to use a **pointer** to help visually **track written words** on a

page.

42. Teach student how to **adapt instructional worksheets**. For example, help a student fold his or her reading worksheet to reveal only one group of questions at a time.
43. **Shorten assignments**, while making sure not to decrease the value of the lesson.
44. Allow student to take **tests** in a quieter room.
45. **Provide foot rest and/or "wobble cushion"** to assist with postural stability and focus.
46. **Provide small textured items** (porcupine balls, Koosh balls, gel balls) to help student release energy and/or prepare for fine motor tasks.
47. **Provide novel materials** (e.g. highlighter and gel pens, textured and colored paper, etc.) for written work.

## Organizational Skills

48. Provide student with an **assignment notebook** to help organize homework and other seatwork.
49. Provide student with color-coded folders and materials to **help organize assignments** for different academic subjects (e.g. reading, mathematics, social studies, and science).
50. **Assign student a partner** to help record homework and other seatwork in the proper folders and assignment notebook.
51. Respectfully assist student to periodically sort through and **clean out his or her desk, backpack**, and other "special places" where written assignments are stored.

## Time Management

52. Teach the student how to use a **wristwatch and calendar to manage his or her time** when completing assigned work.
53. Provide student with supervised opportunities to **break down a long assignment** into a sequence of short, interrelated activities.
54. **Tape a schedule** of planned daily activities to the student's desk. Have child "check off"



## Study Skills

55. Provide the student with a **checklist that identifies categories of items needed for homework assignments** (e.g., books, pencils, and homework assignment sheets).
56. Teach student with ADHD how to **prepare an uncluttered** workspace to complete his/her assignments.
57. **Keep track of how well your student with ADHD completes homework.** Provide student and his/her parents with progress reports specifying good efforts and/or any specific missing assignments.

## Language Arts

### *Reading*

58. Ask the student to make **storyboards** that illustrate the sequence of main events in a story.
59. Schedule “**storytelling**” sessions in which the student can retell a story.
60. Schedule “**play-acting**” sessions in which the student can role play different characters in a favorite story.
61. Play **board games** that provide practice with target reading comprehension skills, sight vocabulary words, or phonetically irregular words.
62. Provide student with own personal copy of classroom **word wall** to reference when writing and reading.

### *Composition/Writing*

63. Use **graphic organizers/story mapping** to assist student in developing the major parts of a story (e.g., plot, main characters, setting, conflict, and resolution).
64. Establish a “**post office**” in the classroom and provide students with opportunities to write, mail, and receive letters. Give graphic organizers for letter writing and clear procedural/behavioral expectations.



66. Require that the student **proofread his/her work** before turning in written assignments. Provide the student with a list of items to check when proofreading his/her own work.
67. Allow the student to **dictate writing assignments** into a tape recorder.
68. Have the teacher or another student **write down a story** told by a student with ADHD.

### *Spelling*

69. Allow child to decorate and illustrate **personal dictionary** of misspelled words.
70. Have **spelling partners** quiz each other, checking off words when spelled correctly.
71. Use **manipulatives (cut out letters, Play-Dough, Wikki stix, etc.)** to spell out hard-to-learn words.
72. Teach student to **frame** hard-to-spell words.
73. Combine **movement activities** with spelling lessons (e.g., jump rope while spelling words out loud).

### *Handwriting*

74. Ask student to practice copying and erasing target words on a small, **individual dry erase board**. Two students can be paired to practice their target words together.
75. Provide special paper (e.g. colored lines, special lines for spacing) to assist with handwriting. **I like school**
76. Teach student to use his or her **finger to measure how much space** to leave between each word in a written assignment.
77. Provide **interesting visual marker** for student to place between words (e.g., “spaceman”).

78. Teach **handwriting skills** through a structured program such as Jan Olson’s *Handwriting Without Tears* program.

## Mathematics

### *General*

79. Teach student **rhythm and songs** to memorize basic math facts.

80. Provide student with naturally occurring, “real life” opportunities to practice **money skills**.

81. **Color code basic arithmetic symbols** such as +, -, and = to provide visual cues for students when they are computing whole numbers.

82. Allow student to use **calculator** to check work and perform basic functions for word problems.

83. Have student play **math games** to practice adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing whole numbers.

84. Use a **structured program** such as Innovative Learning Concepts’ *Touch Math* program.



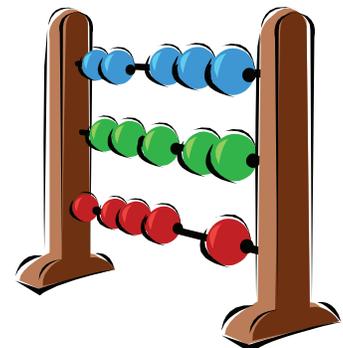
### *Word Problems*

85. Teach student to **read a word problem** and illustrate with symbols or stick figures before beginning to compute the answer.
86. Teach student to highlight or **underline “clue words”** that identify which operation to use when solving word problems.

87. Ask the student to **create and solve word problems** that provide practice with specific operations such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division.

### *Special Math Materials*

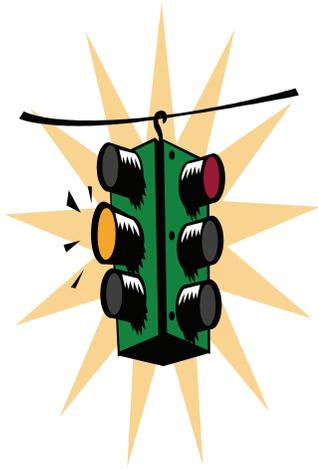
88. Provide a **number line** for student to use when computing whole numbers.
89. Use interesting **manipulatives** to help students gain **basic computation** skills when adding single-digit numbers.
90. Let student use **graph paper to help organize columns** when adding, subtracting, multiplying, or dividing whole numbers.





## What do I do if I suspect a student has ADHD?

1. It is important to record the child's behaviors and the teaching interventions you have provided. If necessary, refer to your school Student Study Team (SST). The SST will work with you in developing other classroom strategies. If the SST feels it is necessary, they will work with the family to initiate a special education assessment.
2. Share concerns with the family. Be careful to talk in terms of behaviors you are observing in school without attempting to diagnose. The family may choose to seek a physician's assistance. Most often the doctor will ask you to complete a behavior rating scale to assist with a possible diagnosis.



## What assessment strategies can be used in schools to diagnose students as having ADHD?

The assessment of attentional disorders in students is usually a multi-disciplinary, multi-step process that includes teacher observations, parent and teacher interviews, behavioral checklists and rating scales, as well as the use of psychometric assessment tools. It is very important to gather a variety of data from the child's environment since there are no single psychological, medical and/or neurological tests that reliably identify the presence of ADHD.



## What type of school programs are available?

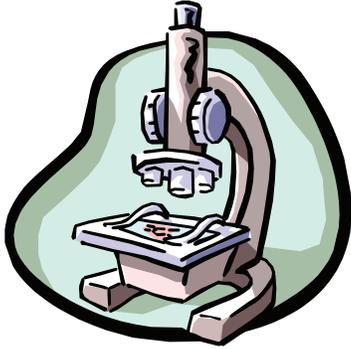
Most students with ADHD spend the majority of their school day in the general education classroom. Some may have a special plan to address their needs:

- **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act Plan (504 Plan).** For students who are not eligible for special education, a 504 Plan may be developed to list accommodations needed to assist the student in school.
- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Individualized Education Program (IEP).** For children who meet eligibility criteria for special education services (usually with "Other Health Impairments" or "Specific Learning Disabilities"), an IEP is developed. It may include special education services (such as Resource Specialist, counseling, or behavioral consultation) as well as accommodations the student needs in school.

**These federal laws require schools and teachers to provide the accommodations and services specified in the plans.**

---

# What about medications?



For many young people stimulant medications are a safe and effective way to relieve ADHD symptoms. Different types of stimulants are available in short-acting (immediate-release), intermediate-acting, and long-acting forms. Other medications are also being tried to treat ADHD. Activity levels, cognitive function, academic achievement, behavior/personality, mood, body physiological systems, and attention may be affected by medications.

Choosing to give a child medication is a very personal choice for families to make with their physician. There are many considerations for families. Some children may experience mild side effects, but some children experience significant side effects. Stimulants are contraindicated for children taking certain medications or who have certain medical conditions. Finding the right medication dosage and schedule can be difficult. As the child grows the medication may frequently require adjustment.

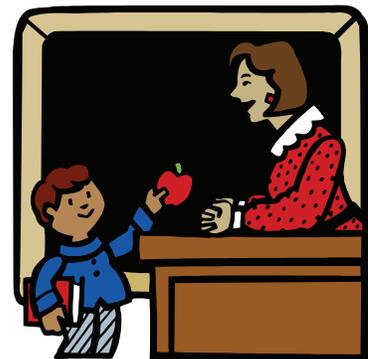
You may encourage a family to talk with their doctor if they have concerns about their child. Teachers should document and share information on the child's performance in school; however, a teacher MAY NOT in any way recommend, encourage or require that a family medicate their child.

If you have a child in your classroom for whom medication has been prescribed, it is important that you are aware of possible side effects. Finding the right medication at the right dose with the right timing can be a difficult process. Your regular communication with the family is important.

## Words of encouragement....

Remember... Rome wasn't built in a day. Learning more about ADHD is the foundation for helping your student. As you try various strategies, remember that the student needs your help and isn't doing this to you on purpose. Finding the right interventions will make educational life more successful and positive for both of you. Good days and bad days are bound to happen. Rejoice in the good, try to relax, and use your positive supports during the bad!

**We're on the Web!**  
**[www.venturacountyselpa.com](http://www.venturacountyselpa.com)**



Contact person: Fran Arner-Costello, Assistant Director  
Ventura County Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA)  
(805) 482-2353  
farnarco@vcss.k12.ca.us

### Contributing editors:

- Fran Arner-Costello, Ventura County SELPA
- Frida Friend, Santa Paula Elementary School District
- Evalene Townend, Santa Paula Elementary School District
- Laurie Jordan, Rainbow Connection Family Resource Center
- Heather Johnson, clerical staff