

Learn practical, easy-to-implement ideas for dealing with ADD students.

Six Tips to Help Students with Attention Deficit Disorder

As all good teachers know, every student has unique interests, abilities, and learning styles. In a successful classroom, this individuality is respected. In fact, teachers use what they know about each individual to help students learn. This same care and respect can help the growing number of students with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) overcome some of the educational challenges that they face.

Distinguishing ADD from the normal range of childhood activity is difficult and requires the help of a trained professional. There is no cure for ADD. However, you can use strategies like the six below to help students with ADD find success in your classroom.

1. Establish a calm, structured classroom

Set up regular routines and clear, consistent rules. While this classroom structure need not come at the expense of creativity or excitement, students with ADD are usually most comfortable in classrooms where procedures, expectations, and limits are explicit.

Provide a "stimuli-reduced study area" in a quiet, low-traffic area of the classroom. Encourage students to use it. To learn more about setting up this study space, go to Understood.org.

Seat students with ADD away from distractions and close to you. Younger students who have trouble staying in their own spaces can benefit from clear physical boundaries, such as their own table or a box marked on the floor with colored tape.

2. Always be clear and concise when giving instructions

Repeat yourself! Students with ADD flourish in classrooms where reminders and previews are the norm. Be sure that students know what to expect, and give them frequent updates.

Maintain eye contact when giving verbal instructions and make sure that students understand the instructions before they begin the task. You may want to have students repeat directions back to you.

Simplify complex instructions, and break large tasks into a series of smaller, more manageable parts. Provide older students with written instructions for multistep projects. Review these instructions orally to be sure that students understand.

Use non-verbal cues to communicate with the students; for example, quiet the class by raising your hand or blinking the lights. Give private cues when students are off-task, like

sending a signal to re-focus by placing your hand on the shoulder of a chatting or distracted student. If a student is struggling with written instructions, print simple, easy-to-understand icons in the margins of the page in order to draw attention to key points.

3. Help students to become better organized

Provide students with an easy-to-use assignment log. In this log, clearly list the day's assignments on a clear, standardized homework schedule. Be sure to include a checklist of all books and supplies that students will need to complete the assignments. If possible, older students should make these homework schedules on their own. Remind all students to consult this notebook at the end of each day and to make sure they understand the assignments.

1. Take advantage of technology

Encourage students to do writing assignments on computers or word processors that have a spell-checking feature. Students can also use hand-held, computerized spellers. Of course, these aids should not replace good, comprehensive training in these basic skills. However, for projects that emphasize content mastery, technology can be a very valuable tool! Students who can demonstrate their knowledge without worrying about spelling or handwriting can feel pride in their accomplishment and enjoy a great boost in self-esteem.

2. Give frequent and specific praise

Be sure to tell students how much you value them. Praise all good behavior and outstanding academic performance or improvement in front of classmates or in private. Be specific ☑ tell students exactly what they accomplished!

For example:

- "Great job, Leila! You raised your hand before you answered the question!"
- "Thank you for washing your paintbrush and putting it back where it belongs, Juan. You really listened to my directions!"
- "What a clean desk! You are very organized today, Matt."

Reward success in the classroom by:

- Distributing small prizes, like stickers.
- Adding checkmarks or stars to a prominently displayed chart.
- Giving successful students firm handshakes and bright smiles.
- Telling students that you are proud of them!

3. Share good news with family members

Tell family members about their children's accomplishments. Don't limit home-school communication to difficult periods or crisis situations.

Give younger students a daily home-school "report card." Encourage them to keep cards in their assignment logs and to share them with their parents. Use this report card to describe students' achievements and to ask for information or assistance.

There are no easy solutions to ADD, but a classroom environment that is rich in structure, support, and encouragement can nurture success in all students.