

# ADHD: Tips for Teachers

If you're a teacher, you probably have several students with ADHD—and you may have more questions than answers. This handout explains what ADHD is and provides helpful guidelines and tips.

## What is ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)?

ADHD is a biological disorder caused by underactivity in certain portions of the brain. This underactivity causes the three main behaviors of ADHD: hyperactivity, inattention, and impulsivity.

At school, a child with ADHD may have trouble paying attention, sitting still, or regulating behavior. His or her desk will often be messy, papers will be lost, and assignments will sometimes be finished but not turned in. These problems will come and go, depending on how stimulating the activity is to the child on that particular day. **All children can have behaviors in common with ADHD at times.** However, ADHD is a chronic condition that interferes with daily life, causing trouble at school and at home. If left untreated, it can inhibit or slow the normal social, emotional, and academic progress of the child.

## Types and symptoms of ADHD

ADHD symptoms are often identified at school. ADHD is classified into 3 types, based on patterns of behavior:

- **Hyperactive-impulsive type**
  - Fidgets or squirms, seems or feels restless
  - Has trouble being quiet
  - Has trouble taking turns or waiting in line
  - Interrupts or blurts out answers before hearing the whole question
  - Runs about or climbs too much, seems “driven by a motor”
- **Inattentive type**
  - Is often distracted and makes careless mistakes
  - Has trouble focusing and organizing
  - Can seem apathetic or “lazy”
  - Doesn't follow through
  - Often forgets and loses things
- **Combined type:** People with this type of ADHD show symptoms from both categories above. This type is the most common: 50% to 75% of people with ADHD have the combined type.

### What if I notice a student has ADHD-like behaviors?

The classroom requires self-control and attention, so symptoms that might indicate ADHD often emerge at school. It's important to take appropriate action when they do:

- 1 If you notice ADHD-like behaviors before a parent expresses concern, begin by using teaching techniques** to help manage behavior (page 2).
- 2 If the behavior continues, follow your school's protocol and Utah state guidelines** for identifying, evaluating, and discussing ADHD (page 3). This includes cooperating with school-based evaluation.
- 3 If a student is diagnosed with ADHD, work with parents** to on a behavior modification plan, accommodations (if appropriate), and ongoing communication (page 4).

“ .....



**I like my teacher!  
But I can't listen  
sometimes.**

There are so many other things to watch and do. She said she told me three times to sit down, but I only heard her once.

—*Elliot,*  
Second grade student

.....”

“ .....



**I have a student  
with ADHD-like  
behaviors.**

I'd like to know what I can do for him within my role. Elliot's a great kid — he's capable of a lot more.

—*Ruth,*  
Second grade teacher

.....”



## Strategies for managing ADHD-like behaviors

Many of the strategies in this section can be used for the whole class — not just for a student diagnosed with ADHD. (As you know, not every active, excitable child has ADHD.)

As you use each strategy, keep a record of what works and doesn't work. A student's teachers from the previous year may also be able to shed light on which strategies were successful.

### Structuring the environment

- Seat the student in the least distracting area of the classroom. Avoid seats near hallways, doors, windows, or high traffic areas.
- Seat the student close to you, if possible, or surround him with positive role models.
- Set clear rules and display them in plain view, along with logical consequences and rewards.
- Facilitate peer tutoring. Include chances for the student to help a struggling peer.

### Structuring time

- Schedule activities that demand more attention in the morning.
- Post a daily schedule in the classroom and refer to it often. On days when you will change the schedule, announce the change in advance and give ample reminders.
- Allow several minutes each day for students to organize their desks, gather assignments, and make a plan for completing homework.

### Structuring tests

- Give frequent, short quizzes instead of longer tests. Provide practice tests.
- Try to avoid timed tests if possible, allow extra time for the student, or consider allowing the student to give oral answers.

### Organizing assignments

- Consider giving the student shorter assignments or break assignments into smaller units.
- Avoid putting too much information on each page. Use borders, colors, or highlighting to emphasize key directions or important points.
- Consider using a daily assignment notebook to make sure the student has recorded assignments correctly. Parents can sign it to indicate the student has completed assignments.
- Help students remember to turn in homework (it often really IS in the backpack).

### Focusing attention

- Use prearranged verbal or visual cues to correct behavior. Make frequent eye contact.
- Consider allowing the student to use headphones with soft music to block auditory distractions during individual work.

### Planning appropriate movement

- Alternate physical and mental activities, or design lessons that involve movement as part of learning.
- Involve the student in distributing papers, watering plants, or sharpening pencils.

### Presenting information and directions

- Give students a lesson outline ahead of time, with key concepts and vocabulary identified.
- Make lessons brief, or break them into short segments. During lessons, give students opportunities to respond in a variety of ways.
- If presenting information on a board, use color to emphasize key points.
- Make directions clear and simple. Give them one step at a time, and ask students to rephrase in their own words. Reinforce verbal directions by displaying or distributing them in print.

### Rewarding appropriate behavior

- Develop a classroom behavior management system that rewards students for appropriate behavior and completion of work. Seek out and reward success as much as possible.
- Use activity as a reward instead of prizes. Always pair rewards with praise.



## Following your school protocol and Utah state guidelines

Each school has its own protocol for evaluating and discussing ADHD — follow your school’s protocol. You should also understand Utah guidelines — what they limit, what they allow, and what they require.

### Utah guidelines on evaluating and discussing ADHD

Utah legislation (HB202, passed in 2007) includes specific guidelines on how Utah school personnel should evaluate students for ADHD and other behavioral health conditions, and how they should communicate with families. These guidelines are designed to ensure that parents control their children’s healthcare management without undue influence from the school. Yet they also recognize the important role that teachers and school counselors play in working with families to evaluate and manage a student’s behavioral health symptoms. The guidelines below are based on your role (see right).

#### *Roles within the school: definitions from HB202*

- **School personnel:** ANY school staff member, including licensed or unlicensed, part-time or full-time, employee or contract
- **Mental health professionals:** includes school counselors, school psychologists, social workers; professional therapists, counselors or psychologists, and advanced practice RNs who specialize in psychiatric nursing

<b>BOTH school personnel and mental health professionals MAY:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete a behavioral health evaluation form if requested by the parent</li> <li>• Inform parents about a student’s progress, health, behavior, or about situations that threaten his well-being</li> <li>• Communicate with other school personnel about a student</li> <li>• Refer a student to a school counselor or other mental health professional working with the school</li> <li>• Consult or use appropriate healthcare professionals in emergencies, following the school’s established emergency plan</li> </ul>
<b>ONLY mental health professionals MAY:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommend (but not require) behavioral health evaluation or treatment for a child</li> <li>• Conduct a behavioral health evaluation or screening, with prior written parental consent</li> <li>• Recommend healthcare professionals or providers (if requested by the parent), by providing a list of three or more providers</li> </ul>
<b>NO ONE at the school may:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Require a student to take psychotropic medication</li> <li>• Report suspected child abuse only because a parent refuses to allow behavioral health assessment or treatment, UNLESS this refusal poses a “serious, imminent risk” to the safety of the child or others</li> <li>• Communicate directly with a student’s doctor in a non-emergency situation, without the parent’s written permission</li> </ul>

### *Evaluating a student for ADHD within the school setting*

As you can see from the guidelines above, if teachers notice ADHD-like behaviors they should refer students to in-school resources, such as a school counselor or other behavioral professional who works for the school. If appropriate, **the behavioral professional may recommend to the parent that the child be evaluated for ADHD.**

A student may be evaluated for ADHD at the school. **Whether evaluation is recommended by a behavioral professional or requested by the parent, a parent’s written request is required.** The school should then evaluate the student for ADHD in one or both of these ways:

- **Filling out behavioral health evaluation forms.** This task may be best suited for the teacher who spends the most time with the child.
- **Conducting a behavioral health evaluation.** Only mental health professionals can conduct these evaluations, and your school is likely to have an established process for doing so.

## If a student is diagnosed with ADHD

For students diagnosed with ADHD, success is based on an effective partnership between teachers and parents or caregivers. Use these tips:

- **If appropriate, work with the parents or caregivers to create a behavior modification plan.** Think ahead about behavior modification plans that are workable in your classroom. If you're prepared with practical ideas, planning with parents will go more smoothly. In the plan, include a reward system to use at both school and home.
- **If appropriate, set up special accommodations** for the student. See the description at right.
- **Work with parents on systems** for 3 basic needs:
  - **Sharing assignment information.** Consider assignment sheets, a notebook that stays in the student's backpack, or a homework blog/website.
  - **Making sure homework is turned in.** A homework folder with the assignment sheet attached to the front is helpful. Parents can check to make sure the folder contains the student's completed homework, and you know where to look in the student's backpack.
  - **Communicating progress.** One helpful method is a daily or weekly report card with 2 or 3 behavior goals, weekly brief phone calls or emails, or a progress journal.
- **Meet regularly with parents to review goals, plans, and progress.** Before parent-family conferences for a student with ADHD, consider spending extra time preparing to describe strengths. When describing problem behaviors, be as specific and objective as possible.
- **Avoid stigma and be sensitive to confidentiality.** Understandably, families sometimes want to keep the ADHD diagnosis confidential. Be sensitive to this issue — don't share information unless you have permission. And recognize that identifying and treating ADHD can actually help avoid stigma for a child.
- **Recognize and deal with stress.** Teaching a child with ADHD can be stressful. Acknowledge this stress, get support, and use the techniques you find effective in reducing it. Remember that parents are under stress too and need support. Celebrate small successes together.

## Special accommodations

Students with ADHD may be eligible for **accommodations in the regular education classroom or special-education services** based on 2 federal laws:

- **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973** protects qualified individuals from discrimination based on their disability. Students with ADHD **MAY qualify** for accommodations in the regular education classroom based on this law. The key is whether their symptoms substantially limit their ability to learn. **Section 504-based accommodations for a student who qualifies** are unique to the needs of that student. Examples include seating arrangements, peer tutoring, technology, study skills training, extra time to complete tasks, reduced homework, open-book exams, and extended-time or untimed exams.
- **The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** guarantees the right to a free and appropriate education to students with disabilities. Students with ADHD **MAY be covered** by this law. The key is whether their symptoms adversely affect their educational performance.

An individualized education plan (IEP) can be established for a student, based on IDEA qualification. An IEP sets up measurable learning goals that are unique to the child's needs, and a plan to meet those goals.

## Resources

- National Resource Center on ADHD: [help4adhd.org](http://help4adhd.org)
- Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: [chaddofutah.com](http://chaddofutah.com)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness: [namiut.org](http://namiut.org)
- Utah Parent Center: [utahparentcenter.org](http://utahparentcenter.org)
- Utah State Office of Education: 801.538.7587
- *The ADD/ADHD Checklist: A Practical Reference for Parents and Teachers.* Sandra Reif, Jossey-Bass, 2008.
- *ADHD in the Classroom: Strategies for Teachers* (DVD). Russell Barkley, Guilford Press, 2006.



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