





School Days

or School Daze?

BY TERRY ILLES, PH.D.

As an avid baseball fan, each April I am renewed with excitement and hope by the promise of the upcoming baseball season. Unfortunately, fate has claimed me as a Cubs fan, and by May my high expectations have been replaced by the somber reality of another disappointing and frustrating season. I believe that September and the onset of the new school year convey a similar anticipation for new beginnings and fresh starts. As a parent, you have greater influence over the outcome of your child's school year than I do over the Cubs' achieving a winning season. It is no secret that school presents a difficult challenge for children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) and that it can create significant conflict and frustration both for the children and their parents. One of the keys to the best experience possible for your child is to make sure that the school year starts off on the right foot. Here are several strategies for a successful school year.

SCHOOL DAYS



Conference Notes

Terry Illes, Ph.D., will discuss *School Daze, School Haze: Clearing the Path to Your Child's Success in Elementary School* during CHADD's annual conference in Chicago, Ill., Oct. 25–28, 2006. Visit www.chadd.org for more information.

Share information

Provide information regarding your child's diagnoses, past classroom concerns, medication and other treatments. Concealing information creates distrust and may lead the teacher to make false assumptions about your child.

Facilitate communication

Make frequent communication with the teacher a priority; do not assume that "no news is good news." Provide complete contact information, including your e-mail address and phone numbers (home, cell and business). Arrange a regular communication schedule, and make sure to attend parent-teacher conferences, IEP meetings, etc. By making communication easier for the teacher, you not only ensure that you receive important information about your child's progress, but you convey a shared responsibility for your child's classroom success.

Be a resource

Classroom teachers are frequently overwhelmed by demands for time, energy and material resources. You can compensate for the high demands your child places on available teacher resources by asking for suggestions on how you might be of assistance. Offer resources for your child, such as digital timers, organizational aids (planners, folders, etc.) and incentives. Consider providing a toolkit for your teacher (*see sidebar*) that includes information about your child and about teacher resources. If you have time, ask to serve as a parent volunteer.

Express appreciation

Parents often complain that they receive phone calls from the teacher only to report bad news. The same also is true of teachers. A thank you card, a complimentary phone call to the principal or district administration or an inexpensive gift expresses your appreciation for the

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teacher's efforts to help your child. These gestures inform teachers that their efforts are not unnoticed. A teacher who feels genuinely appreciated is more likely to sustain these efforts throughout the long school year.

Demonstrate support for goals

Develop home behaviors that reinforce important classroom skills. For example, a child who is disorganized at school is probably disorganized at home. Children with messy desks who frequently misplace classroom materials generally have messy bedrooms and often lose their toys. Let the teacher know that you are making organization at home a priority to help alleviate the problem at school.

Be open to criticism

Defensive parents may block effective communication about their children's struggles. Acknowledge past problems at school and use humor to discuss problems at home. Make sure that the teacher understands that you accept your child's limitations and that you understand that it will sometimes be frustrating and challenging to teach your child.

Don't go over the teacher's head

If you have a concern about a classroom issue, speak directly with the teacher about the problem. If necessary, include school support personnel such as the school psychologist, counselor or special education teacher in the conversation. Contact administrative personnel only if the teacher communication fails to produce results. This will spare the teacher unnecessary embarrassment and resentment.

Be your child's advocate

It is essential that you understand school law as it applies to children with AD/HD. Know the rights of your child and your rights as a parent. Research information about special education procedures and support programs for your child. Excellent resources on this topic include *Making the System Work for Your Child with AD/HD* by Peter Jensen (reviewed in the Octo-



The Teacher Toolkit

I recommend that parents create a toolkit for the teacher at the start of the school year. A three-ringed binder with plastic zippered pouches works well. The following items should be included:

- **An introductory letter about your child. The letter should include information about your child's personal strengths, deficits and treatment history. Briefly describe successful strategies that have been used in the past to address potential behavior problems.**
- **Brief information about AD/HD such as CHADD *What We Know* information sheets (www.help4adhd.org).**
- **A digital timer that can be used to time work completion.**
- **Extra classroom materials (pencils, erasers, paper, etc.).**
- **Behavior and reward charts.**
- **Contact information.**
- **Coupons that can be earned at school and traded in at home for a reward.**
- **Organizational materials (planner, daily calendar, folders).**

ber 2004 issue of *Attention!*[®]) and the upcoming publication of CHADD's *Educational Resource Manual*. ■

Terry Illes, Ph.D., has been employed as a school psychologist with the Jordan School District in the Salt Lake City, Utah, area for over 20 years. Dr. Illes conducts numerous workshops and classes on AD/HD and is currently working as part of a collaborative team on improving the quality of care for children with AD/HD within the community. He is a member of CHADD's national board of directors and Attention![®] magazine's editorial advisory board.