# **INSTRUCTING STUDENTS WITH AD/HD**

# Eight Best Teaching Practices

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### ALTHOUGH IT IS AMONG THE MOST NOBLE AND OFTEN MOST SATISFYING

professions, teaching can be an overwhelming job. In most general education classrooms, the teacher has a broad spectrum of learners. Educators are responsible for analyzing, knowing, and understanding each individual student's strengths, interests, and needs. They are responsible for knowing their school system's and individual school's policies and procedures, national standards, curriculum demands and requirements, educational theory, assorted instructional strategies, resources and materials, psychology, and child development. When teachers have students with ADHD in their classrooms, they are further responsible for knowing and understanding the 2004 reauthorization of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504, and the Responsiveness to Intervention (RTI) approach, used by some schools to evaluate students with learning disabilities, because they can and do affect school practices.

The majority of individuals with ADHD experience problems with school performance. As many as 30%–50% of students with ADHD are retained in their school grade at least once; 25%–36% never complete high school. In the face of all of these challenges, excellent teachers learn and practice strategies that help students with ADHD become successful learners. The following sections provide best practices that have been proven to work successfully in classrooms that include children with ADHD (many of these also work well with

students who do not have ADHD). Parents can use these best practices as a guide to helping them understand their child's education and work with his or her teacher to ensure that the instructor has all of the

information and support needed to help the child succeed. It is important that all of the stakeholders—parents, teachers, other professionals, and the students themselves—keep up with current research in order to know about the most effective strategies and techniques available.

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### **Best Practice 1**

### **Knowledge Is Power!**

Gathering data about a child is imperative. The more a teacher knows and understands about a student, the better able she is to plan, prepare, and practice strategies that will work best for each student. Written records and staff input, including from teachers in the arts and specialists, help to create a more complete student profile. In this respect it is very important to accurately keep and maintain records. Index cards are helpful for doing so, and teachers should be prepared to document the strengths and needs of their students, especially those with ADHD and other disabilities. Such documentation only aids future teachers in providing accommodations students need. Parents also should maintain orderly and accurate records, keeping copies of letters and other materials (including report cards and progress reports) sent home. By law, parents are eligible to receive copies of student records held by school districts. Parents may wish to periodically request copies of student records for their personal files. If the educator does not have accurate information from the student's previous teachers, he or she may wish to contact the parents, advocate, or case manager to learn as much about a child as possible.

### **Best Practice 2**

### Create an Environment of Mutual Respect, Acceptance, Organization, Flexibility, and High Expectations

At the beginning of the school year, the teacher sets the climate for collaboration, caring, respect, and negotiation for the year. Good classrooms become places where risk-taking is encouraged and making mistakes is the way one grows and learns. The environment in such classrooms is not competitive, but rather a place where students measure their progress internally, and receive a sense of worth and accomplishment from within. Student strengths are recognized and rewarded early and regularly. The teacher models a sense of unconditional acceptance and responsibility.

Classroom rules should be established by the students in a spirit of fairness and an appreciation and valuing of individual differences. The rules should be posted in a prominent place and always referred to when problems arise. Problem-solving processes need to be formally taught and practiced throughout the year, and students should be expected to apply them as needed. Students should use these skills in their relationships in school, as well as be able to

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recognize when these skills are used in literature, history, and social studies. These skills have real-world applications and consequences. Many successful classrooms have a suggestion box where students are encouraged to share ideas to improve the sense of community in the classroom.

Classroom organization must be flexible, yet structured with opportunities for collaborative goal setting, significant peer interactions, and cooperative learning. Students should be immersed in a climate that promotes self-efficacy and a solid sense of self-sufficiency while being provided with instruction that demands the use of their abilities. By maintaining high expectations and standards in an atmosphere of support, humor, and comfort, teachers help students grow academically and love learning.

### **Best Practice 3**

# Provide Strength-Based Instruction

Research and a review of successful programs indicate that the most important component of the education of these students is providing instruction in the student's area of strength. Working through a child's strengths puts a positive spin on learning, especially for a student who has had continued difficulty in school. In addition, encouraging a student's strengths

builds self-confidence in his or her ability to learn material. For example, an assignment that asks a student to build a Web page on the difference between frogs and toads in lieu of a traditional report could connect a student's strength in technology with new material being taught in the classroom, in this case, amphibians. Teachers also can implement a student's strengths in a particular area by allowing him or her to serve as an expert on the topic or method. Some students delight in being given new responsibilities connected to their strengths, especially if they previously were given instruction that only addressed their weaknesses. Such emphasis on strengths can be accomplished by differentiating instruction, a classroom tool recommended for use with all students and described in the next section.

# Ways to Differentiate Instruction (Best Practice 4)

The following are examples of specific ways to differentiate instruction in each of the three categories:

### Content

Use multiple texts
Use varied resources
Compact curriculum
Provide learning contracts

#### Process

Use interactive journals Use tiered assignments Create interest centers Create learning centers

#### **Product**

Provide varied modes of expression, materials, technologies

Implement advanced assignments that require higher order thinking skills

Provide authentic assessment

Use self- and peer-evaluations

### **Best Practice 4**

### **Differentiate Instruction**

When differentiated, instruction better matches an individual's abilities, styles, and needs. Differentiation is a way of thinking about and planning instruction in order to meet the diverse needs of students based on their characteristics. Teachers differentiate content, process, and product according to students' readiness, interest, and learning profiles through a range of instructional and management strategies.

Content is the subject matter prescribed by the state or district program of studies. For example, in social studies, students may be asked to write a research paper on the Civil War. Process is the internalization of information. Following the steps for the paper from notes, to outline, to draft illustrates a process a student follows when dealing with the content material. Some children with ADHD may need to break the tasks into smaller parts and have check-in points with the teacher. Product is the outcome of the application of the process to the content. The finished research paper is the product. Providing differentiation for these students, a variety of resources could be used to study the Civil War (content); organizational software and assisted note-taking may aid in internalizing information (process); and the student may demonstrate his or her understanding through a model,

dramatization, or PowerPoint presentation (product). See the sidebar.

### **Best Practice 5**

# Provide Appropriate Interventions, Adaptations, and Accommodations

When it is suspected that a student has ADHD, it is crucial that the adults who are involved come together with the student to analyze the student's strengths and needs and then jointly create an appropriate intervention plan. Next, the current program should be evaluated to see how well it is nurturing and developing the student's strengths, while adapting and accommodating for the weaknesses. Finally, recommendations should be made for program changes that will result in the appropriate level of challenge and the instruction and support that will develop the student's strengths and strengthen his weaknesses.

Once a student's abilities and challenges have been explored, educators should take a close look at the current program to see how well it is addressing both the identified strengths and challenges and examine what rigorous programming already is in place to address the student's strengths. Next, teachers can explore the variety of supports, interventions, and instruction that are in place to both circumvent weaknesses and provide opportunities for strengthening them. They should analyze the adaptations and accommodations that are currently in place and look at the special instruction in which the student is partici-

pating. We also recommend that educators look at the special behavior management plans and counAfter completing a thorough analysis of the student's strengths and weaknesses and the current instruction and interventions that are in place, recommendations can be made for adjustments in the student's program. These recommendations become the intervention plan that helps each student reach his or her potential. The intervention plan includes recommendations for the special instruction, behavioral/attention plans, and counseling support that the student needs. The intervention plan specifies who is responsible for the case management and ensures that all staff and parents are functioning as a team to successfully implement the intervention plan. Finally, the intervention plan specifies how things will be implemented and who is responsible for implementation.

Many accommodations allow students with learning challenges to demonstrate their knowledge without being handicapped by the effects of their difficulties. In planning, it is crucial that the teacher consider instructional methods and strategies that either circumvent the student's difficulties or build in the necessary scaffolding to empower students to be successful with the demands of the assignment.

When advocating for adaptations and accommodations, it is essential for educators, parents, and students to first understand the differences between an adaptation and an accommodation. These definitions will help:

- **Accommodation:** Procedure or enhancement that empowers a person with a disability to complete a task that he or she would otherwise be unable to complete because of his or her disability (Maryland State Department of Education, 1999).
- Adaptation: Modification to the delivery of instruction or materials used rather than modification in content, as that can affect the fulfillment of curriculum goals (Lenz & Schumaker, Adapting Language Arts, social studies, and science materials for the inclusive classroom, 1999).

The decisions regarding adaptations must be individualized for each student. The accommodations that are used in assessments must parallel those that are used in instruction and must be based on student strengths. The accommodations and assessments must provide an equal opportunity for students to demonstrate their knowledge. And, lastly, accommodations must be evaluated often and only those that are effective should be continued.

When considering adaptations and accommodations, the overarching principle is to move students, over time, from dependence to independence. With that in mind, an accommodation that is appropriate at a given point in time may be replaced at a later time with another accommodation that helps the student to be more independent.

Although parents and students must have input into the process, the professionals must make the final decisions as to what is appropriate. There must be ongoing communication between parents and all staff who are implementing these plans.

Students who are determined to have learning disabilities may qualify for an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) or a 504 Plan. However, students with ADHD may not qualify for either. Nevertheless, teachers and other professionals who recognize attentional issues in their students can effectively use interventions in the classroom to help address the problems that impact student learning.

# Strategies that Support and Empower Students with ADHD

(Best Practice 6)

The following list of categories and strategies can be helpful as a structure for the educator's storehouse of information:

### **Classroom Environment**

Mutually respectful

Accepting

**Exciting** 

Flexible

Organized materials

Additional classroom supplies available

Student placement away from distractions

Permission for student to move freely

Student choices

Positive reinforcement

### **Classroom Management**

Post rules in room

Post routines and schedules in room

Teacher gives verbal and visual cues and prompts

Clear directions are repeated and directions are simplified

### **Technology**

Computers
Spell checkers
Calculators

### Social/Emotional

Positive reinforcement Promote student awareness Use contracts Teach social skills

#### **Behavior Management**

Develop good rapport with student

Implement a plan or develop a functional behavioral analysis and behavioral intervention plan with the school team

Reinforce positive behavior

Selectively ignore inappropriate behavior

Develop a token or reward system

Assign responsibilities that require self-control

### **Academics**

Strength-based instruction Differentiation

Modify pace

Alternative products

Ongoing evaluation

Peer tutoring

### Adaptations/ Accommodations (IEP/504 Plan)

Extended time

Task modification

Break tasks into segments

Frequent breaks

Strategy training

Interim deadlines

Highlight key points, words, directions

**Preferential seating** 

Student assignment sheet/pad/notebook

Allow "fidget toys"

Additional textbooks for home

FOR MORE INFO

Visit **chadd.org** for references and additional resources from the book.

### **Best Practice 6**

## Learn, Teach, Practice, and Model Strategies That Support and Empower Students Who Have Difficulties Related to ADHD

It is of the utmost importance that teachers keep abreast of the advancements in current research related to this student population so that the activities and materials used in the classroom are most effective. (See the sidebar on page 13).

In addition, many resources for teachers detail appropriate adaptations and accommodations that address students' disabilities, allowing them to understand and present mastery of the material in a manner appropriate to their strengths. An eclectic collection of "what works" is necessary for a teacher to have in order to meet the specific needs of students with ADHD. Once the teacher has acquired information, the teacher can then plan and model the best practices.

### **Best Practice 7**

### **Teach Students Self-Advocacy Skills**

Students need to be empowered, not enabled, as they become involved in their learning. Once they are provided with tools, strategies, and skills for learning, students can successfully develop and use their intellect. Students have responsibilities as learners. In order to be successful, they must recognize and accept both their strengths and needs, and gain an understanding of how they learn (metacognition). Once they are aware of their specific issues, students can become active in learning and practicing strategies for thinking, organization, communication, problem solving, and the use of technology. They are expected to complete assignments, become self-directed, and seek help and support as needed. Learning and practicing strategies for developing self-efficacy



(the belief in self) and selfadvocacy (the ability to tell others what one needs) make it possible for these students to become risk-takers and lifelong learners. Over time, students develop the skills and maturity that allow them to become partners in making decisions regarding their Individualized Educational Programs. For students with

ADHD, self-control and self-management may be particularly challenging and, for this reason, the emphasis on taking responsibility for their learning, where possible, is doubly effective.

The social-emotional needs of these students are as important as the educational ones. With few exceptions, social-emotional issues contribute to the lack of achievement. It is important to see whether negative behaviors and attitudes are the result of an inadequate program or personal issues. For some students, placement in an appropriate program that attends to their gifts and offers support for their learning needs will result in a positive turnaround in behavior and attitude. The development of skills and competencies in the social-emotional realm contribute and complement the other best practices that promote success. Social-emotional health matters inside the classroom and beyond. Students need tools and practice to develop self-efficacy, or the ability to know and to believe in one's self. They need to learn how to say, "I can do this." They need tools and practice for becoming self-advocates, or the ability to know one's self and represent one's self with others. For example, they have to learn to tell an instructor about their needs (e.g., "I am really listen-

ing, but I have trouble sitting still. May I get up and quietly walk to the back of the room and then return to my seat?").

The goal is that students see themselves as successful learners by knowing who they are, what they need, which tools work for them, and how to get what they need to succeed. Self-confidence is a critical asset in school success for students with ADHD.

### **Best Practice 8**

## Communicate Openly With Parents and Others

The general educator keeps the lines of communication open between students, staff, and parents/guardians. When all parties work respectfully to establish open and direct communication, a lasting partnership is possible. Parents should not hesitate to contact their child's teacher with concerns and also should be willing to provide praise when they recognize that a teacher is working effectively with their child. The same goes for teachers: Parents need to know about the problems, concerns, and worries regarding their child *and* the good things teachers see the child doing. Discussing the child's strengths or progress with parents in a positive manner can build student self-confidence, leading to more academic success.