

ADHD in schools

'Supporting strategies for teachers'

Brenton Prosser

While there are plenty of big issues to consider about ADHD and school, we cannot ignore the fact that teachers and parents are desperate for help in the here and now. If teachers are to help students with ADHD they need behavioural strategies to create the time, and learning strategies to make the space for big-picture progress.

If all of one's energy and time is lost on behaviour management, there is little left for finding ways of teaching and learning that suit individual student needs. While some educators claim that relevant and rigorous learning captures a student's attention so that behavioural problems disappear, in my experience I've found that things work best with practical strategies to support both behaviour and learning.

In his book Brenton Prosser has compiled a list of 100 helpful hints for teaching students with ADHD. A selection are presented here ¹

Seating

- Set up desks with space around each and try to avoid seating plans where the student is looking directly at others.
- Provide the student with space where they can work but still move (e.g. work at a desk standing up).
- Occasionally give students the opportunity to rest or 'veg' *on the condition that they do not disturb others [emphasis added]*.

Behaviour

- Develop secret code words with the ADHD student to signal that behaviour is escalating into an unhelpful cycle, without the rest of the class knowing.
- Watch your students' eyes and facial expressions closely - they can often be indicators for when they are getting 'wound up'. Try to have an errand or two up your sleeve to get them out of the classroom for a purposeful break.
- If a student has had a really bad day, let them work off some of the logical consequences of their actions by making positive contributions to the class (e.g. cleaning up, making something for the class, a formal apology, etc).

Lesson planning

- Use a similar pattern to start each lesson and help students settle into the lesson.
- Try to do activities that require more attention in the morning.
- Have a teacher buddy nearby who is informed of what you are doing in class and to whom you can send the student to work, if all else fails in your class.

Lesson delivery

- Get a student's attention back through an unrelated question that interests them before asking a question about their work.
- If a student asks for assistance (and you are with another student) give the student a set time by which you will get to them (and make sure you do so).

Student work

- Have a book in which a student can draw or doodle while listening in class.
- Break down questions/tasks into steps (don't assume that what has to be done is self-evident).
- During reading or whole-class work, move around the class and subtly point to the place on the page that the class is up to.

Organisation skills

- Set aside space on the board to record homework, class rules and calendar items; do not move it and refer to it explicitly in class.
- Use colour coding for subjects and give out new materials pre-punched for folders.
- Provide partially complete lesson overviews and conclude the lesson with the students filling in the gaps.

Resources

- Vary the mediums used in a lesson (e.g. DVD, pictures, music, computers).
- Try to use textbooks that have a clear flow of ideas, use the actual textbooks (not photocopies of sections) and try not to jump around in the book.
- If you have the option of a CD-ROM or DVD for a text, use it by getting the student with ADHD and a buddy to work online.

Communication with home

- Maintain frequent contact with home to provide positive feedback and check that school messages are getting through.
- Produce a term overview of when assignments are due and make sure it gets home to parents.

Social skills/Self-esteem needs

- Avoid 'put-down' humour or sarcasm: at best, students with poor social skills will act as though they understand (but just get hurt); at worst, they will imitate it because everyone laughed (and get in even more trouble).
- Model good conflict resolution and democratic decision-making in class and through group activities.
- Give students specific responsibilities for the class and publicly encourage them for completing these responsibilities. Set the student up with an older student tutor to help them in your subject area.

Many of these strategies will not be new to teachers, yet as experienced teachers will recognise, it is very difficult to get them all right at the same time. The pressure of teacher work, class sizes and behaviour management issues see teachers fall away from using these strategies at times. It is easy to say that if we can engage students, behaviour management will not be a problem; it is much harder to make this a reality. A renewed effort to use these strategies (which will benefit all students) can make a difference for the students with ADHD in your classroom.

1 This is an extract from *ADHD: Who's failing who?* by Brenton Prosser. Published by Finch and is available from UK bookshops or direct from Deep Books Ltd on 0208 693 0234. Permission to reprint the extracts above was given by the author and Finch Publishing. NSW. Australia