

Help for the Classroom Teacher by Rita Buchoff

One of the many challenges facing classroom teachers is understanding and effectively managing the child with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). In the past, teacher training programs have failed to address the issue of ADD with elementary education majors, believing; instead that the topic belonged in the field of exceptional education. The majority of children diagnosed and being treated for ADD, however, is enrolled in elementary classrooms, where educators are inadequately prepared to deal with this unique group of children. Classroom teachers must develop a better understanding of this complex disorder before they can meet the needs of ADD children. The longer teachers ignore these children at-risk... the more unreachable and unteachable they will become.

What is Attention Deficit Disorder?

ADD is characterized by behavioural features that result in a child being difficult to manage. Previously called hyperactivity, this disorder was renamed by the American Psychiatric Association (1987, 50-53) when new research indicated that ADD could occur with or without hyperactivity. Although ADD is acknowledged by this organisation, there is research that challenges the very existence of the disorder (O'Brien & Obrzut, 1986). Reasons include the imprecise language associated with the definition of ADD (Laylor, 1988), as well as the lack of objective criteria that can unequivocally lead to the diagnosis of this disorder (Simms, 1985). Despite this controversy, a substantial amount of well-planned research confirms the existence of ADD.

In a classroom, children who have ADD can display the following symptoms: difficulty remaining seated, calling out information without being asked, interrupting others and talking excessively. ADD children are easily distracted; they are often disorganized, deficient in fine motor skills, likely to shift from one 'uncompleted activity to another and have limited attention spans (Barkley, 1981). Once these children actually focus on a task, however, they may become so involved in the activity that it becomes hard to direct their attention to something else. Although they want to be liked and accepted by teachers and classmates, ADD children have difficulty establishing and maintaining friendships because they lack the ability to control their behaviour, which may cause problems with social relationships (Parker, 1988).

Children diagnosed with ADD possess their own individual combinations of these behaviours. Understandably, any combination of these characteristics is likely to exhaust teachers, disrupt a classroom and impede the learning process for ADD children as well as their classmates.

The cause of ADD is still unknown, though many professionals attribute it to a biochemical abnormality in the brain (Ingersoll, 1988). Statistics indicate that 3 to 5 percent of school-age children have ADD. Boys are six to nine times more likely to be affected than girls. Even though 60 to 70 percent of ADD children show symptoms of the disorder during infancy, it is commonly not recognised until the child starts school (Barkely, 1981). The classroom teacher plays an integral role with parents and medical

personnel in making an accurate diagnosis of ADD, and then monitors behaviour in the classroom once treatment is begun.

Contrary to previous speculation, the ADD child does not outgrow this chronic disorder, which commonly persists into adulthood (Wender, 1987). Children and teachers alike must learn to cope with ADD through drug intervention, classroom management techniques and adjustments in the learning environment.

Medical Treatment of ADD

While not all children take medication for ADD, the use of drug therapy can play an important role in the overall treatment of this disorder. When stimulant medications such as Ritalin or Dex are used to treat ADD, research has shown that approximately 75% of the children become calmer and less active, develop longer attention spans and better organizational skills are less impulsive and show improved motor control (Barkly, 1981; Morgan, 1988). Since they become more sensitive to the feelings of others, social interactions improve. Teachers should monitor for the ADD child who is taking stimulant medications and report to parents any significant changes in behaviour or side effects of the drug, including headaches, stomachaches, lethargy, agitation, moodiness or loss of appetite (Martin, Welsh, McKay & Barcither, 1984). These observations would be used by the child's physician in determining appropriate treatment.

Although controversial the use of medication provided ADD children with more control over their behaviour (Friedman & Doyal, 1987), As a result, , friendships are more easily established, teachers have more opportunities to praise the students, and the children develop more positive feelings about themselves, others and their environment. While medication significantly reduces the symptoms, it alone does not control all of the problems associated with ADD. Even with medication, the disorder is still present, but to a lesser extent.

Getting the Child Organised

Students with ADD are constantly dropping, losing or misplacing their materials. They are described as children who are never at the right place at the right time and certainly not with the appropriate supplies. Since ADD students cannot organise themselves they require constant assistance from the classroom teacher. The following ideas may be helpful:

- Invite the child to sit near the teacher's desk, but away from distracting sounds such as air conditioning units, fans, windows and doorways, Surround the child with classmates who will serve as good role models.

- Encourage the child to eliminate all extraneous materials from the work area. Limit the number of school supplies for the child to manage. Instead of a box of 48 crayons, suggest that the child bring a box of 8 crayons. The more items the children handles, the more likely they are to become disorganized.
- Assist the child in understanding what is required when entering the classroom each morning and in preparation for dismissal each afternoon. Allow the child to design charts that list reminders to sharpen pencils, gather materials: stack chairs, as well as other directions that are helpful in promoting responsible behaviour.
- Help ADD children establish a routine and organize their time by asking them to post a classroom schedule on their notebook, the side of their desk or as part of a permanent classroom display. Since ADD children have great difficulty dealing with any changes in routine, notify them in advance whenever possible of modifications in the schedule.
- Request that the child bring an inexpensive folder that will be used to record daily assignments and transport papers to and from school. If the children are old enough, give them the responsibility for writing the word that was assigned that day on a "task sheet" stapled within the folder. Younger students with limited writing skills may require the teacher's assistance to record the daily work. When the work is complete, the student initials the entry on the task sheet. Subsequently, the teacher initials which assignments must be completed at home. Points that can be exchanged for privileges can be awarded for remembering to take the folder to and from school or deducted for work not returned. This system informs parents on a daily basis about the work that has been done in the classroom. .

Giving Effective Directions

The ability to follow verbal directions is essential for success in school. Support the ADD child in becoming an effective listener by using these simple methods:

- Have the child make eye contact with you before giving directions. If eye contact is not achieved, gently turn the child's face towards you before speaking. Many ADD children in highly distractible situations benefit from having the physical contact of the teacher's hand resting on their shoulder while verbal instructions are given.
- Help children become more effective listeners by setting a purpose for listening. Tell the children what to listen for. For example, "Listen while I give you directions for your spelling paper", or "listen while I review three phonics rules with you".
- Make directions clear and simple. Since ADD children have difficulty processing a series of auditory commands, the students should hear one direction at a time. Instead of saying, "Put away your Math book and open your language arts book to page 40," say, " Put away your math book (pause), now take out your language arts book (pause). Turn to page 63."

- Try collaborative listening in your classroom. After you have given the directions to an assignment, ask the children to divide into pairs. Have the children designate within each pair a listener and a speaker. Set a time limit and allow the speakers in turn each group to restate the directions aloud to the partner by saying, "What the teacher wants us to do is..." Then allow the listener in each group time to clarify, restate or expand their information. This allows ADD children an opportunity to test their listening skills with classmates.

Classroom Management

Perhaps the single most disturbing behavioural feature of ADD children is the problem they have obeying classroom rules. Usually possessing a low frustration level. ADD children behave impulsively without considering the consequences of their actions. The lack of self-control displayed by these children can cause the most patient teacher to feel helpless. In addition to an effective classroom management system, consider these suggestions in working with ADD students.

- Assist the child in establishing specific classroom rules, rather than saying, "Be good," say, "Stay in your seat." Ask the child to post the rules and make sure the behaviours that are expected and the consequences for misbehavior are clearly understood. Follow the rules consistently and do not deviate from them.
- Teach the children to watch for non-verbal cues to help them stay on task and display appropriate behaviour. Tell the students that each time you look at them and touch your ear; it is a signal that they are not doing their work or following a classroom rule. This creates minimal disruption of the teaching process and at the same time places the responsibility on the children for correcting the misbehavior.
- If nonverbal cues are ineffective, try a procedure called "silent correction." Stand within a few inches of the child face-to-face. Speaking in a whisper so only the child can hear, make the necessary correction. Research has shown that loudly reprimanding ADD children so classmates can hear actually increases misbehavior. (Griffith, 1989)
- When a rule is broken, do not respond to the child with ridicule or anger. Although the misbehavior cannot be excused, realizing that it comes from the disorder is important. Quietly ask the child which rule was broken and if necessary restate the rule and the punishment. If the punishment is to be effective for the ADD child, it must be administered immediately.
- Establish an incentive program where points or symbols {such as happy faces for young learners} can be earned for specific behaviours and recorded on a simple daily reporting device. At the end of each week, the student can exchange the points for games, toys or privileges. Teachers find that the points become valuable when children participate in selecting the rewards and listing the cost of each reward on a

chart prior to beginning the incentive program. With older students, points can also be deducted for disruptive behaviour or for failing to return the reporting device with the parents' signature.

Developing Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is formed on the basis of how others respond to us. We learn through social interactions to see ourselves as cooperative and intelligent or disliked and inadequate. Because of their non-compliant behaviour and unfulfilling interactions with others, ADD students are prone to develop negative attitudes about themselves. Situations need to be structured within the classroom to allow the children to experience good feeling about their capabilities.

- Build students' level of confidence by helping them structure the learning environment so they can attain success rather than failure, even if this means temporarily adjusting the academic load. Work with the child to set the attainable daily goals and give positive feedback when the goals have been achieved.
- Acknowledge the children's achievements with both verbal and written feedback. Use a highlighter to emphasize exemplary portions of their work. When the paper is returned, the child's attention is focused on the positive aspects of the work rather than the negative.
- Recommend that the child start a "pride" folder to save papers and anecdotal records of classroom events that affirm the child's accomplishments both socially and academically. Encourage the child to share the folder with other school personnel and parents. This is the way of saying to the child, "I am so proud of what you are doing that I want to share it with others." (Borda, 1989)
- Initiate friendly conversation with the students at least once a day. Notice new articles of clothing or discuss interests or events outside of the school. Let the children know you are sincerely concerned about them by giving smiles, nods of approval, hugs or by simply saying, "I am so glad you are in my class." Students behave better for teachers they believe like and care about them.
- Have the children keep daily journals. At the end of each school day request that the children write or draw one event that occurred during the day that made them feel good about themselves. Additionally, include a teacher's page in each journal to write positive statements about the student.
- Recognize accomplishments with badges, certificates. A cutout handprint pinned on the child's shoulder, representing a "pat on the back", allows the child to share this accomplishment with both peers and parents.

- Suggest that children select classroom jobs they enjoy and perform well. Encourage parents to do the same. To build self-esteem, make the children feel that their contributions in the classroom are important.
- Along with positive reinforcement you give, train students to internally praise themselves through a technique called "self-talk." Say to the children, "Tell yourselves you did a great job on this assignment," or "Your math paper is so neatly done. How does that make you feel?" This encourages children to think about themselves in positive ways that lead to self-esteem.

Parent - Teacher Partnership

It is clear that ADD affects not only the child diagnosed with the disorder, but parents and teachers as well. Strides to help ADD children reach their potential can best be accomplished through a cooperative parent- teacher relationship.

- Establish an alliance of communication regularly with parents. Daily reporting devices that require little use of the teacher's time, periodic notes or telephone calls keep parents abreast of classroom behaviour. Invite the parents to school for a formal conference at least every six to nine weeks.
- Be sensitive to the feelings of parents who have the difficult task of raising the ADD children. A belligerent or defensive attitude often masks a feeling of helplessness or frustration.
- Many parents of ADD children feel they are in some way responsible for the child's failures. They also internalize and become more excited than the average parent with their child's successes, however small. Keep in mind that the positive comments written on a child's paper or verbalised in a conference have a direct impact on the parents' morale. Help parents feel proud of their child. Find positive things to share with them on a frequent basis.
- During a conference, do not preach or moralise. The information shared during this meeting is often forgotten, but the mood of the meeting is what teachers and parents remember. Each conference should be based on common understanding, mutual trust and hopefulness.

In conclusion, the future of ADD children is strongly influenced by the attitude, awareness and effort of the classroom teacher. These children need continuous personal encouragement and care. Creative opportunities are important for them to develop social skills. They must be involved in an academic program where they can experience success. Insightful teachers who work ADD children acquire the positive attitudes and skills that will last them a lifetime.