

Helping Classroom Teachers

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Be Supportive. Although classroom teachers want to help every child, it is difficult for them to balance classroom objectives with individual student needs. Increasing class sizes and curriculum demands make it hard for teachers to make the accommodations that ADHD children find useful. Often, schools lack the financial and staff resources to meet the needs of individual students within the classroom. While teachers may support IEP or PEP goals, it may be difficult for them to follow through. Fortunately, there are several things that parents can do to support the classroom teacher and school team.

Offer Library Materials. There are several books, video tapes and curriculum materials that teachers would find useful (see the Bibliography). Having a good library makes it easier for teachers to learn about ADHD and it makes it easier to offer information to parents who are wanting to learn more.

Write a Summary. Teachers find a summary outlining a student's strengths and weaknesses, interests and passions, learning style, etc. very helpful. Although there may be an expansive student file for the teacher to review, pages and pages of material can be overwhelming and inconvenient for the teacher to refer to. A one- or two-page description is much more practical.

Provide Clinician Resources. It is very important that teachers have the opportunity to talk with a child's physician or therapist. Teachers often have questions, need advice, or want feedback from clinicians. Sometimes teachers find it helpful to have a meeting with parents and therapist to discuss goals and strategies. Teachers need to feel part of the team.

Facilitate Access. Although parent-teacher communication is very important, it can be time consuming for a teacher who may need to contact three or four parents in an afternoon. Do your best to be accessible through a message machine, voice mailbox, e-mail address, pager, cellular phone, etc. Offer stamped, self-addressed post cards that teachers mail to you.

Contribute a "Phone." In a number of schools, parents have contributed to provide extra phone lines, internet e-mail access and even a cellular phone for the teacher to use from the classroom. Some parents have helped to fund a message line which allows teachers (and student helpers) to leave messages about the day's classroom activities or homework.

Provide Technology. Parents can work together to provide additional lap top computers, dictaphones, cameras, pocket schedulers, etc. This equipment can be invaluable for children who have trouble with written output and/or organization.

Check with Parent Helpers. Although children may behave differently when their parents help in the classroom, check with other parents who are helping. They can give you some feedback about how your son or daughter is doing.

Use a "Buddy" Phone System. Parents and students need someone from the classroom that they can check in with about assignments, class schedules, upcoming projects, etc. It is easier if a parent can call another parent, than if they must always contact the teacher or rely on their child. Students who need extra help or need clarification on an assignment can call someone from their classroom instead of needing the teacher's help.

Post a Window Flier. A teacher or student helper can post a flier in the window (facing out) that describes the day's activities and the homework assignments. Students that don't bring home their homework can return to school with their mother and father and see (sometimes with a flashlight) what was due.

Use Peer Helpers. Instead of the teacher signing off on dozens of assignment sheets, try and find another student who can check your child's assignment list against their own and sign off on it. A helpful classmate is usually more than willing to remind an ADHD student about turning in homework or bringing materials home after school (particularly if there is some shared incentive for doing so). Many students are happy to share their notes, particularly if the ADHD student does something to help in return.

Go Through the Notebook or Desk. Many teachers do not have the time to check students' notebooks or desks to see if there are any completed assignments to be turned in or work to be finished. Going through the notebook daily helps teach organizational skills and keeps us more informed on what is being done at school. "Visiting" your child's desk periodically helps too.

Parent Help. Most teachers appreciate the help they get from parents. Talk to the teacher about what you can do to help save them time or make their job easier.

Arrange Additional Resources. Students sometimes need more help and attention than the teacher can provide. Parents can help by arranging for after-school tutoring or individual counseling. They can meet with the school team to clarify educational needs and determine whether additional services or accommodations are necessary. In some instances, parents have advocated for someone to help the teacher in the classroom or for a reduction in class size. Work with the school team to consider a range of options that might help your child and support the teacher.

Practice at Home. Almost every classroom behavior plan should include a home practice component. Students who talk out in class can practice raising their hand before talking at home. Children who have trouble lining up can practice with their family after school. A student can imagine and role play turning in homework the next day. They can rehearse with their parents or therapist how to handle problems that occur on the playground. The home practice component should be a critical element of any classroom plan.

Prepare Ahead. Parents can help teachers by preparing their children ahead of time. If there is good communication, a parent can work on an assignment *with their child before it is presented in class*. It is much better for a student to enter the class understanding the assignment and having some of it completed than it is to be confused and need help in finishing the work later. If parents know that a topic is going to be discussed, then they can expose their child to information that will help him/her feel more knowledgeable and be more confident.

Assist With Modifications. For some ADHD children, particularly those with learning disabilities or fine motor problems, specific assignments need to be modified. You can help the teacher make these modifications. Spelling assignments, for example, can be modified by reducing the number of words on the list or by making the spelling test multiple choice. Writing assignments can be reduced in length or made easier by using a word processor or parent transcriber. An alternative project such as drawing a book cover or building a scale model can supplement a shortened book report or term paper.

Teach the Child About Modifications. Over time, ADHD children must learn about their own style, and they must be able to play a central role in managing their behavior and their learning. They must know when shortening an assignment is reasonable and allowable and when it is not. If they know their learning style, they can gradually learn to advocate for certain types of projects and even certain classes. Most teachers are responsive to student requests for modifications, *if the requests are genuine and not simply an attempt to get out of schoolwork*.

Build Student Responsibility. ADHD children need to understand that school accommodations are a 2-way street. They should not expect an extra set of books or a copy of classroom notes or an extension on late assignments. If copies of notes are provided, then the student should help in the office to "pay" for the copies. If a teacher takes time to provide daily feedback home, then the child can do something for the teacher while the form is being filled out. An extra set of books warrants some sort of donation from the child to the school. This 2-way street philosophy builds a sense of responsibility that is greatly appreciated by others.

Proper Rest and Nutrition. Even the best teachers struggle when children don't get the proper sleep or food. Make sure that your child has a balanced breakfast (with a protein food source, not just carbohydrates). Develop a bedtime schedule that provides enough rest (see *Going to Bed/Falling Asleep*).

Get Teacher Feedback. Too often, a classroom teacher is asked to do something that does not fit with his or her style. The teacher may not view the plan as reasonable. The school team may write an IEP for an ADHD student, but it is usually the teacher's job to implement it. We need to know what they think about the plan.

Reconsider Certain Accommodations. There are some accommodations that are commonly recommended but not particularly helpful. Not every child can sit up in the front of the classroom and if a teacher moves freely about the class as he/she teaches such preferential seating is not always necessary or even desirable. Assignment extensions may be listed as part of an IEP, but they often make it harder for teachers to keep track of work turned in and they undermine a student's sense of responsibility. It is usually better to turn in assignments when they are due and get the chance to improve upon the work once it is given an initial grade.

Give an "Apple." Teachers are working harder than ever and a well-timed Starbucks coupon, flower arrangement or jam jar can do wonders for their morale. While parent meetings are part of the job, it does not hurt to show your appreciation in some tangible way.

Write a Note. Teachers tell me how much they appreciate a note of thanks from a parent. Consider a letter to the principal expressing your appreciation for the teacher's effort and caring.

Have Reasonable Goals. There is sometimes pressure on teachers to accomplish too much too quickly. Remember, we have many years to achieve some goals and for some children progress is made small steps at a time. Some behaviors are difficult to change, and teachers need our support and reassurance that they have not "failed."

Be a Good Listener. Teachers need the opportunity to discuss how students are doing without being given even more advice about how to "fix" the problem or change the behavior. Listen to what the teacher has to say and ask whether there is anything you can do at home or in the classroom to be supportive. Resist any temptation to tell the teacher how he or she should do their job.