

## **80+ Classroom Accommodations for Children or Teens with ADHD**

Russell A. Barkley, Ph.D.

During my workshops on ADHD, I share with educators a list of more than 80 recommendations, most from research, that they can use to help manage ADHD in school settings for children and teens with the disorder apart from or in addition to using ADHD medications. Behind these recommendations lie 9 principles that need to be considered in planning management programs for children and teens with ADHD in school settings (Pfiffner, Barkley, & DuPaul, 2006). Here are those 9 principles followed by the 80 suggested accommodations.

1. *Rules and instructions provided to children with ADHD must be clear, brief, and often delivered through more visible and external modes of presentation than is required for the management of normal children.* Stating directions clearly, having the child repeat them out loud, having the child utter them softly to themselves while following through on the instruction, and displaying sets of rules or rule-prompts (e.g. stop signs, big eyes, big ears for "stop, look, and listen" reminders) prominently throughout the classroom are essential to proper management of ADHD children. Relying on the child's recollection of the rules as well as upon purely verbal reminders is often ineffective.

2. *Consequences used to manage the behavior of ADHD children must be delivered swiftly and more immediately than is needed for normal children.* Delays in consequences greatly degrade their efficacy for children with ADHD. As will be noted throughout this chapter, the timing and strategic application of consequences with children with ADHD must be more systematic and is far more crucial to their management than in normal children. This is not just true for rewards, but is especially so for punishment which can be kept mild and still effective by delivering it as quickly upon the misbehavior as possible – Swift, not harsh, justice is the essence of effective punishment.

3. *Consequences must be delivered more frequently, not just more immediately, to children with ADHD in view of their motivational deficits.* Behavioral tracking, or the ongoing adherence to rules after the rule has been stated and compliance initiated, appears to be problematic for children with ADHD. Frequent feedback or consequences for rule adherence seem helpful in maintaining appropriate degrees of tracking to rules over time.

4. *The type of consequences used with children with ADHD must often be of a higher magnitude, or more powerful, than that needed to manage the behavior of normal children.* The relative insensitivity of children with ADHD to response consequences dictates that those chosen for inclusion in a behavior management program must have sufficient reinforcement value or magnitude to motivate children with ADHD to perform the desired behaviors. Suffice it to say, then, that mere occasional praise or reprimands are simply not enough to effectively manage children with ADHD.

5. *An appropriate and often richer degree of incentives must be provided within a setting or task to reinforce appropriate behavior before punishment can be implemented.* This means that punishment must remain within a relative balance with rewards or it is unlikely to succeed. It is therefore imperative that powerful reinforcement programs be established first and instituted over 1 to 2 weeks before implementing punishment in order for the punishment, sparingly used, to be maximally effective. Often children with ADHD will not improve with the use of response cost or time out if the availability of reinforcement is low in the classroom and hence removal from it is unlikely to be punitive. "Positives before negatives" is the order of the day with children with ADHD. When punishment fails, this is the first area which clinicians, consultations, or educators should explore for problems before instituting higher magnitude or more frequent punishment programs.

6. *Those reinforcers or particular rewards which are employed must be changed or rotated more frequently with ADHD than normal children given the penchant of the former for more rapid habituation or satiation to response consequences, apparently rewards in particular.* This means that even though a particular reinforcer seems to be effective for the moment in motivating child compliance, it is likely that it will lose its reinforcement value more rapidly than normal over time. Reward menus in classes, such as those used to back up token systems, must therefore be changed periodically, say every 2 to 3 weeks, to maintain the power of efficacy of the program in motivating appropriate child behavior. Failure to do so is likely to result in the loss of power of the reward program and the premature abandonment of token technologies based on the false assumption that they simply will not work any longer. Token systems can be maintained over an entire school year with minimal loss of power in the program provided that the reinforcers are changed frequently to accommodate to this problem of habituation. Such rewards can be returned later to the program once they have been set aside for a while, often with the result that their reinforcement value appears to have been improved by their absence or unavailability.

7. *Anticipation is the key with children with ADHD.* This means that teachers must be more mindful of planning ahead in managing children with this disorder, particularly during phases of transition across activities or classes, to insure that the children are cognizant of the shift in rules (and consequences) that is about to occur. It is useful for teachers to take a moment to prompt a child to recall the rules of conduct in the upcoming situation, repeat them orally, and recall what the rewards and punishments will be in the impending situation before entering that activity or situation. *Think aloud, think ahead* is the important message to educators here. As noted later, by themselves such cognitive self-instructions are unlikely to be of lasting benefit but when combined with contingency management procedures can be of considerable aide to the classroom management of ADHD children.

8. *Children with ADHD must be held more publicly accountable for their behavior and goal-attainment than normal children.* The weaknesses in executive functioning associated with ADHD result in a child whose behavior is less regulated by internal information (mental representations) and less monitored via self-awareness than is the case in normal children. Addressing such weaknesses requires that the child with ADHD be provided with more external cues about performance demands at key "points of performance" in the school, be monitored more closely by teachers, and be provided with consequences more often across the school day for behavioral control and goal attainment than would be the case in normal children.

9. *Behavioral interventions, while successful, only work while they are being implemented and, even then, require continued monitoring and modification over time for maximal effectiveness.* One common scenario is that a student responds initially to a well-tailored program, but then over time, the response deteriorates; in other cases, a behavioral program may fail to modify the behavior at all. This does not mean behavioral programs do not work. Instead, such difficulties signal that the program needs to be modified. It is likely that one of a number of common problems (e.g., rewards lost their value, program not implemented consistently, program not based on a functional analysis of the factors related to the problem behavior) occurred.

Now for the 80+ suggested school accommodations for children and teens with ADHD:

### **Classroom Management: Basic Considerations**

- Don't retain in grade! Research shows it is associated with multiple harms and few if any benefits. Develop a real treatment plan instead repeating a failure (Pagani et al., 2003).
- Use the first few weeks of the school year to establish behavioral control of the classroom. Focus more on establishing rules and providing swift and reliable consequences for them giving less emphasis to the curriculum or lesson plan and more to behavior management. Then gradually shift the emphasis to the lesson plan.
- Decrease the child or teen's total workload to what is essential to be done rather than what is merely "busy" work assigned to fill class time.
- Give smaller quotas of work at a time with frequent breaks (i.e., 5 problems at a time, not 30, with short breaks between work episodes)
- Use traditional desk arrangement in classroom (all desks face forward to teaching area)
- Seat the child with ADHD close to teaching area to permit more supervision and frequent accountability for conduct and performance
- Target productivity (# of problems attempted) first by rewarding child for each problem attempted and ignore accuracy for the time being; then increase focus on both productivity and accuracy later.
- Don't send home unfinished class work for parents to do. Parents of ADHD children have enough stress at home with the ordinary home responsibilities and school homework to be done and do not need to be over-burdened with a teacher's failed responsibility. Unfinished classwork shows that the problem lies at school in the classroom which is where solutions are to be implemented and not shirked.
- Give weekly homework assignments so parents can plan their week accordingly
- Reduce/eliminate homework for elementary kids (research is arguable that it benefits kids before high school) (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006).
  - If homework is given, keep to 10 minutes total x grade level in school

- Allow some restlessness at work area or desk as long as child is working.
- Give frequent physical exercise breaks throughout the school day
- Get color-coded binders & other commercial organizing systems to help keep student materials and assignments organized.
- Try color-coding of text using highlighters for marking key points in the text; better yet write these highlighted key points down on paper after the reading is done.
- Use participatory teaching: give student something useful and physical to do to help you while teaching.
- Practice skills drills on computers – use learning software programs to rehearse skills that have just been learned as children with ADHD pay more attention to computer software learning programs than to mimeographed work sheets.
- Try laminated work slates, not impulsive answers: Each child gets a small white board and marker and when questions are asked, everyone writes the answer on their board and holds it up in the air. Teacher calls on someone only after ALL boards are up.
  - Assign a homework “study-buddy,” which is peer tutoring done outside of school (see below) in which children living near each other from the same class do their homework together alternating whose home they meet at to do so.
- Alternate low appeal with high appeal activities to maintain interest level
- Be more animated, theatrical, and dramatic when you teach (make it interesting!)
- Touch a child lightly when talking to them (place hand on child’s hand, arm, or shoulder)
- Schedule the most difficult subjects in first few periods of the school day when attention span is at its maximum for a child with ADHD.
- Use direct instruction, programmed learning, or highly structured or regimented teaching materials that have short assignments, clear goals, and frequent feedback for demonstrating mastery of the material.
- Have the child pre-state their work goals (How many problems can you do for me?) as children are more likely to do an assignment they have chosen than one imposed on them.
- Train keyboarding & word processor as early as possible given the high occurrence of fine motor coordination and handwriting problems associated with ADHD.
- Give after-school help sessions, tutoring, books on tape, and videos to reinforce class work and assist child with homework completion.
- Require continuous note-taking during lectures & while reading; the child should be taking brief notes of key points in what they are reading, viewing, or listening to help

focus and sustain attention, permit some movement while concentrating, and to partially compensate for their poor working memory.

**Peer Tutoring** (See DuPaul & Stoner, 2003; Spencer 2006).

- Create, discuss & distribute scripts (work sheets)
- Teach any new concepts and skills to class
- Provide initial instructions for work that is to be done
- Break class into dyads (pairs)
- Have one student be the tutor & quiz the other
- Circulate, supervise, and coach dyads
- Alternate who plays the tutor/student roles in dyad
- Re-organize into new dyads daily or weekly
- Graph & post quiz results

### **Classroom Management: Increasing Incentives**

- Increase teacher praise, approval, appreciation of student good behavior and work performance
  - Be a 1-minute manager (Lots of short praises throughout the day)
- Use a token or point system to organize privileges and their prices
- Get parents to send in old games/toys to upgrade class supply of fun activities
- Get a video game donated to the class for use during free time and make it one of the privileges to be earned through the class point system.
- Try team-based (group) rewards (4-5 students per team; members of teams work together to compete against other teams in getting work done)
- Try a tone-tape with self-rewards (see [addwarehouse.com](http://addwarehouse.com) to purchase)
  - Create an audiotape with a variable interval frequent schedule of tones
  - Tell class that when tone sounds while they are doing desk work, they are to self-evaluate and then self-reward a point if they were working when tone sounded. If they were off task, they must deduct a point from their score card.

- Allow access to rewards often (daily or more often) and not just at the end of the school week.
- Keep reward to punishment ratio 2:1 or greater so class remains rewarding, not punitive
- Use a daily behavior report card (see Figure 1)

### **Make Rules and Time Obvious and in Physical Forms**

- Post rules on posters for each work period, or
- Create a 3-sided stop sign with class rules for young kids
  - Red = lecture, yellow = desk work, green = free play
- Place laminated color-coded card sets on desks with a set of rules for each subject or class activity
- Have child restate rules at start of each activity
- Have child use soft vocal self-instruction during work
- Create “nag tapes” - taped encouragement from Dad or Mom with reminders of rules for on-task behavior – child can listen to tape during school work
- Use timers, watches, taped time signals, etc. anything to show how much time they have to do an assignment.

### **Train Self-Awareness**

- Child records work productivity on a daily chart or graph on public display so they can see how well they are performing in class over time
- Child rates them self on a daily conduct card (see Figure 1) and teacher checks it to see if he/she agree with child’s self-evaluation.
- Teacher cues a young child to self-monitor by saying “Turtle” or “Chill” at which:
  - Child stops what they are doing, pulling hands and legs close together
  - Child slowly looks about the classroom
  - Child asks them self “What was I told to do?”
  - Child returns to assigned task

- Child wears a tactile cueing device that vibrates at random, frequent intervals: The Motivaider – it’s a vibrating small box with a built-in digital timer. Set timer to periodically cue the child to pay attention.
  - Available at [addwarehouse.com](http://addwarehouse.com)
- Nonverbal confidential cues for teens – tell teen that if you drop a paper clip by their desk, it was no accident. For them, it’s a cue to pay attention to teacher
- Severe cases, consider videotaping child in class with weekly feedback session with school psychologist

**Possible Punishment Methods** (check with school principle on district policies!)

- Mild, private, direct reprimands – personalize it (go to child, touch child on arm or shoulder, make a brief corrective statement)
- Immediacy is the key to discipline: Swift justice! What makes punishment work is the speed with which it is implemented following misbehavior
- Try the “Do A Task” procedure in place of standard time out:
  - Place a desk at back of class with worksheets stacked on it
  - When a child misbehaves, tell them what they did wrong and give them a number
  - Child goes to the desk and does that number of worksheets while timed out
  - When work is done, place it on teacher’s desk and return to normal seat
- Response Cost (loss of tokens or a privilege contingent on misbehavior)
- Moral essays – Have child write “Why I should not have . . . (e.g. hit other children) and what I should have done instead.”
- Establish a quiet “chill out” location where child can be sent for regaining emotional control when child is upset
  - Use formal time outs in class or private room; hallway time outs don’t work
- Use In-school suspensions or trip to BD/ED class for severe cases

**Classroom Management: Tips for Teens**

- Consider using medication for school days (have parent pay them per day if need be)

- Find a “Coach” or “Mentor” at school who will give just 15 minutes to help teen
  - The Coaches’ office is the student’s “locker”
  - Schedule in three 5-minute checkups across each school day – teens goes to Coach at that time for review of school day, help with staying organized, monitoring a homework assignment sheet, tracking them through a daily behavior report card, and giving them a motivational pep talk to get through to next checkup
- Identify a parent-school ADHD liaison on the school staff
  - This person serves as an intermediary on issues between parents & school
- Use daily assignment sheets for recording homework
- Use a daily or weekly school behavior card (see Figure 1)
  - Move to self-evaluation after 2+ good weeks
- Keep extra set of books at home
- Learn typing/keyboard skills
- Tape record important lectures to listen to later when studying
- “Bucks for Bs” system (grades = \$ from parents: for instance, for every paper brought home with a grade of C, parents add \$.25 to the child’s allowance; for every grade of B, add \$.50, and for every A add \$1)
- Schedule hard classes in morning hours
- Alternate required or difficult classes with elective or more enjoyable classes
  - Don’t give extra time on timed tests – no evidence it helps ADHD cases specifically; better to have distraction free test setting and employ time off the clock. This involves using a stopwatch placed on the students desk. They are permitted the same length of time “on the clock” for testing as other students. But at any time they can stop the stopwatch, take a brief break (minute or two of stretching, getting a drink of water, etc.), after which they return to the test and restart the stop watch. They can do this as often as they feel a need to do so during the test.
- Permit teen to listen to music at a quiet or reasonable level of volume during homework
- Get written syllabus as handouts to review and study
- Require note-taking in class and while reading to help pay attention

- Learn SQ4R system to boost reading comprehension (Meyer, 2007).
  - Survey material, draft questions, then for each paragraph:
    - Read it, recite what is important to remember, write it down, review it, and do this again after each new paragraph
- Try peer tutoring in class for teens
- “Study-with-a-buddy” after school (see above)
- Find “fall-back” classmates (swap phone, e-mail, & fax numbers) for lost or missing assignment sheets
- Attend after-school help-sessions whenever available or get some scheduled if not routinely offered to students.
- Schedule parent-teacher review meetings with teen every 6 weeks (not at 9 week grading period)

Accommodation list adapted from Barkley, R. A. & Murphy, K. R. (2006). *Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: A clinical workbook (3<sup>rd</sup> edition)*. New York: Guilford. Copyright by Guilford Publications. Reprinted with permission.

## References

- Cooper, H., Robinson, J. C., & Patall, E. A. (2006). Does homework improve academic achievement? A synthesis of research, 1987-2003. *Review of Educational Research, 76*, 1-62.
- DuPaul, G. J., & Stoner, G. (2003). *ADHD in the schools (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. New York: Guilford.
- Meyer, K. (2007). Improving homework in adolescents with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder: Self vs. parent monitoring of homework behavior and study skills. *Child and Family Behavior Therapy, 29*, 25-42.
- Pagani, L., Tremblay, R., Vitaro, F., Boulerice, B., & McDuff, P. (2001). Effects of grade retention on academic performance and behavioral development. *Development and Psychopathology, 13*, 297-315.
- Pfiffner, L., Barkley, R. A., & DuPaul, G. J. (2006). Treatment of ADHD in school settings. In R. A. Barkley (Ed.) *Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: A handbook for diagnosis and treatment (3<sup>rd</sup> edition)*. New York: Guilford.
- Spencer, V. G. (2006). Peer tutoring and students with emotional or behavioral disorders: A review of the literature. *Behavioral Disorders, 31*, 204-222.

Figure 1. Sample Daily School Behavior Report Card

A new card is taken to school every day or is given to the child or teen by their first period or home room teacher. The child is to be rated at the end of each class period using the numbered columns below (one per class) as to how they did in the five areas of school performance listed in the far left hand column. Teachers are to use ratings of 1 (excellent), 2 (good), 3 (fair), 4 (poor), 5 (terrible). Each teacher initials the bottom box below their column to protect against forgery. The card can be reviewed with the teen by a school staff member and points can be assigned to each rating for use in buying extra privileges at school. Or, the card can be reviewed by parents at home and the ratings converted to points to be used in purchasing home privileges. Wherever the points are to be award (home or school), a menu of possible rewards should be created.

<i>Subjects</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Class Participation</i>							
<i>Performs assigned classwork</i>							
<i>Follows class rules</i>							
<i>Gets along well with others</i>							
<i>Completes homework assignments</i>							
<i>Teacher's Initials</i>							