Tips on How to Keep ADHD Children Focused in the Classroom

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Strategies for Teaching Students With ADHD

To understand attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), you must first know the common signs. As a teacher, it can be difficult for us to know if a student is showing signs of ADHD or is merely misbehaving.

The signs of ADHD can mislead anyone into believing that a child is ill-mannered, and it's easy to blame it on bad parenting. But as a teacher who really cares, it's worth making an effort to understand the signs of ADHD so you can spot them in the classroom.

Children With ADHD versus Children Misbehaving

Children portray a behavioral pattern that closely resembles what you may call "misbehavior." So how do you differentiate an ADHD child from others?

The Common Signs

The word 'symptom' can make ADHD sound like a disease, so I'll use 'signs' to describe the condition.

- **Hyperactivity** – This is one of the first and most obvious signs that one can identify. Constantly talking, moving when seated, fidgeting with an object in front of them, frequently moving around in the classroom for no reason.
- **Impulsivity** – Children appear to lack patience when waiting for their turn, may annoy someone by interrupting them, or say inappropriate things. They might also overreact to situations that challenge them emotionally.
- **Inattention** – This is a sign that teachers might easily skip and not notice. Children struggle to understand new things, experience difficulty in organizing tasks, are unable to concentrate on a given activity, do not follow directions, and easily get bored in the class.

Sometimes, you may notice a mixture of all these signs together, making it clear that you need to take further action.

ADHD in the Classroom, Strategies for Teachers

Now that you know the common signs to look out for, it will be easier to understand your students and introduce new ways to teach them effectively. Using some of the methods listed below will not only help students with ADHD but will make learning fun even for others in the classroom.

Do Your Research First

The first step is to get the basics right. I started off by watching this video by Dr. Laura Grashow and understood

the four basic steps to start off with. This was followed by watching more videos and spending my weekends doing some extensive research on ADHD online.

I've briefly listed down what I have learned so far.

Talk to the Children

When you see a child behaving differently in your class, it's best to speak to the parents right away so that they can take further action. They'll tell you if the child has any particular condition that needs to be attended to differently.

Once you come to know that a condition exists, you must communicate it to the children and let them know about it and comfort them. It gets difficult for children to understand why they are different. By identifying where the problem is, they can now cooperate with you to try and focus on improving their behavior.

Take Extra Classes

You need to accept that teaching children with ADHD becomes difficult in a normal classroom environment, and teachers can do the "real work" only when they are alone with them.

So start by taking hour-long extra classes after school for a couple of months to make the students feel comfortable around you and other teachers. This is where I initiated Dr. Laura's advice on the four elements of:

- Positive Feedback
- Organizational Structure
- Teaching Self Monitoring
- Grabbing Attention.

You can use various tricks like giving them stars, or applauding with the class, using cartoon characters while making timetables, lessons, and schedules. You can provide them with a checklist of tasks and ask them to tick off each task after completion.

The most important thing to do is to grab their attention. You can use many methods like holding their finger while reading, raising your voice when making a point, tapping on their desk, using squeaky toys, etc.

You can also teach them yoga and meditation to sit down and focus. This is hard, but you can train them to meditate for two to five minutes at a time.

A Feeling of Emotional Security

Children with ADHD tend to feel different, insecure, detached, low in confidence, and angry. To motivate and build confidence in them, promote what they are good at. Comfort them by talking kindly and paying extra attention to them in the class.

Make them sit closer to you so that they don't get distracted by students around them. Appreciate their little improvements in posture, homework, or any contribution in the classroom. Be open and approachable so that they feel confident in talking to you.

Use a Breakdown Approach

ADHD children lack concentration and the ability to self-regulate their behavior. They find it easier to focus on assignments or tasks if they are broken down into smaller subtasks.

By breaking the instruction down into smaller subsets, students can understand and accomplish the task at intervals and concentrate more on the next task at hand.

For example, during reading comprehensions, I break the passage down into short paragraphs of not more than three sentences each. I add a couple of questions after each paragraph. My students remain focused on one task at a time, and by the end, they remember the entire passage.

Use Repetitions

Children tend to forget quickly what they learn. In the middle of every lesson, go back to the first step and repeat it. Keep repeating it every time you think the child is drifting away. You have to do this individually so that you don't disrupt the class.

For example, when teaching mathematics, you'll have to go back and repeat the basics of addition and subtraction before solving every problem.

Vary the Pitch of Your Tone

This extends from the training sessions of your extra classes. Whenever you're highlighting an important point in a lesson, raise your voice. This grabs their attention immediately and gives them a cue that they need to concentrate here. (Use that squeaky toy if possible.)

For example, as I raise my pitch, I look at my students (you know who) and wink at them, or smile at them. This reminds them what the high pitch means as they learned it during the extra class.

Make a Game Out of Learning

Who doesn't like games? My children live for games which are interactive, informative, and make learning and remembering concepts easy. Making attractive flashcards with graphic images and sharing it with them after every lesson grabs their attention and helps them to revise and memorize important concepts in an interactive way.

For example, one of the tools that I use is Cram to create flashcards, add my voice for audio assistance, and tell my children to play word games like Stellar Speller that's available with each set that I make.

Simplify the Schedule

Set clear expectations and rules when you're giving instructions in the class. Ask the students to write down the instructions in a list format so they could go back and refer to it whenever they forget something. This helps students to stay focused and know what to do next.

Eliminate Caffeine

Regular sleep and rest are important for children to stay active in the class. Consuming food containing caffeine during lunch may aggravate hyperactivity in children and worsen the condition. Inform the children and the cafeteria to avoid such foods in their diet.

Teach Them to Make Friends

Lastly, social skills training helps the children to make new friends who understand their condition. Tell the kids that there is nothing to be ashamed of and they will become better with time and practice.

They may be good at singing, painting, writing or any particular sport. Embrace it, and help build their self-confidence.

What Is Not ADHD?

An Uncommon Disorder

ADHD is a very common condition in children. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CPC) reports that around 6.4 million children in the United States in the age group of 4-17 have ADHD.

A Temporary Condition

ADHD is a lifelong condition, and there is no permanent cure as of now. But the symptoms can be controlled as the children grow up and the situation improves with age.

A Result of Bad Influence

This condition is not a result of bad parenting or social influence. It’s inherited in children, and the signs become evident only when they start schooling. It’s important to consult a doctor when you first notice the signs and begin the necessary treatment.

ADHD can be controlled, and as a teacher, it requires some extra effort to help your students. Thank you for reading, and I'd appreciate it if you could share your experience in the comments section.