

# How to Teach Children with ADHD

Written by Carlton McDaniel

Talk with any group of leaders who work with children and invariably the subject of a hyperactive child will arise. The issue can have a negative impact on both the individual child and the classroom as a whole. In some instances, the ability of the church to enlist volunteers for a particular class can be hindered. Many factors influence the success of a learning environment. But, all too often leaders attribute the problem to a medical condition called ADHD. The result of a non-professional diagnosis is usually an unwanted label that follows the child for years.

A child with ADHD will have problems in two major areas: 1) inattentiveness and 2) hyperactive-impulsive behavior. The American Psychiatric Association has proposed three subtypes in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV). These subtypes are (a) predominately inattentive, (b) predominately hyperactive-impulsive, and (c) combined types. Remember, a child that has ADHD will behave inconsistently with his developmental age and his behavior will consistently impair daily life.

It is also important for leaders to understand how controversial ADHD has become. For some, this condition is over-diagnosed and has more to do with diet and environmental influences on the child. For others, medication and the long-term effects on the child has become a point of controversy. Another unresolved discussion is whether a child with ADHD has the ability to grow out of this condition. Some children's leaders openly state that hyperactive or inattentive behavior is due to poor parenting. For some parents, even a professional diagnosis of ADHD is considered a negative label for the entire family.

## **Children with ADHD often experience difficulty with**

- following detailed instruction that involves multiple steps
- staying focused, being easily distracted
- sharing or taking turns with other children in the class
- emotional issues, depression, and relationships with other children
- tasks that require a sustained mental effort
- remembering things
- restating sentences or paragraphs in their own words
- remaining still without fidgeting, tapping, or squirming
- finishing task
- listening even when being talked to directly

## **To create a classroom environment where every child feels welcome**

- Don't allow your frustrations to carry over from week to week. The first thing every child should feel when entering the room is that you are glad she has come.
- Plan independent times for all children to interact with each other. This will help teach the child with ADHD how to interact and build relationships with other children.  
Identify resources that can be put away instead of causing the child to get in trouble

- Work closely with parents. Plan to meet with them as needed to discuss common strategies that will be consistent at home and at church.
- Look for positive and affirming comments when the child is successful. Keep rewards tangible.
- Provide a place for a child to go in cases of inappropriate behavior that requires removal from an inappropriate situation.

### **To manage classroom activities successfully**

- Provide a consistent class schedule from week to week.
- Make sure you have the attention of the child before giving important directions. If needed, ask the child to repeat the directions back to you.
- Post simple rules that are easily understood.
- Keep transition times to a minimum. Or provide an activity as you move to another activity.
- Enlist an additional helper or give someone in the class the responsibility of helping the child with ADHD when needed.
- Evaluate discipline measures with other leaders and the child's parents. Ineffective discipline should be changed using a "team mentality." Be positive and sensitive to everyone involved.
- Become an organizer for the child. Plan lessons and activities with a plan for step by step instructions as well as a plan for organizing the finished work.
- Plan work that is difficult or requires greater attention early in the class schedule.

### **To plan for the long-term success of the child and team cooperation**

- Maintain a positive attitude and encourage patience from everyone. Some children will improve dramatically with a small amount of support while other children may improve more slowly.
- Common rewards, language, and reinforcement strategies are important for success. Cue in on key words, phrases, and strategies that have proven successful at home, church, or school.
- Communicate strategies and progress to new leaders as students are promoted to the next class. Many times, the greatest change is in leadership and classroom location. The strategies that have been established at home and church can usually remain the same.
- If needed, identify a person that is willing to remain on the team to maintain consistency and guide progress. This will also prevent parents from having to start from scratch each year with new leaders.
- Be an advocate for the child and the parents. During the initial time children are being diagnosed or new intervention strategies are being tried, parents are put under a great deal of stress. Recognize these critical times when parents and their child will need more patience and understanding.

Intervention approaches for children with ADHD include behavioral strategies and pharmacological treatment. Often, if the sole intervention is behavioral, it is usually because parents do not want to medicate their child. For children who are taking medication, it is very important to continue taking the medication at prescribed dosage and times whether at home or at church. But research done by the U.S. Department of Education found that using a "multimodal approach" which incorporated elements from several intervention approaches proved to be the most effective.

Leaders who work with children will inevitably face the challenge of an inattentive or hyperactive child. Some children will be diagnosed by a professional as having ADHD. Some will have parents that are proactive and engaged in finding successful intervention strategies. Some parents will choose to do nothing. Some children will be wrongly labeled by church leaders. Regardless of the diagnosis, any leader can create a learning environment that encourages all children to learn and feel accepted.

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### **References and Resources**

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs, Identifying and Treating Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: A Resource for School and Home, Washington, D.C., 20202  
([www.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/adhd/adhd-identifying.html](http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/adhd/adhd-identifying.html))

CDC (Center for Disease Control and Prevention) [www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd)

CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) [www.CHADD.org](http://www.CHADD.org)

NIMH (National Institute of Mental Health) [www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/adhd.cfm](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/adhd.cfm)