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6. Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder - a summary

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurological condition in which the child's behaviour regularly appears to be different from that of other children of the same age. It is caused by imbalances of chemicals in the brain.

The prime approach adopted in helping these children is one in which the school and the parents combine to create routines and reward systems which particularly suit attention deficit children. Through using these systems the children can grow to overcome the negative aspects of their ADHD.

It is also possible to correct these imbalances through any one of a number of simple medications. However it is often the case that children do not take these medications, either because the parents feel uneasy about the use of drugs or because the GP is not fully conversant with this condition.

It is also agreed that children with ADHD can have many positive features within their behaviour which their contemporaries lack. It is always worth noting them so that we can look at ways of developing positive aspects of each child's behaviour.

Here are some of those positive attributes:

- Ability to focus deeply on selected items
- Able to adapt quickly to changed circumstances
- Creative
- Divergent thinker
- Good at individual sporting activities
- Good leader in team games
- Good at visual thinking
- Highly aware of the environment around him/her
- Highly questioning
- Highly independent
- Highly flexible
- Imaginative
- Innovative
- Inquisitive
- Keen to take part and contribute
- Perfectionist
- Persistence
- Sensitive
- Sharp observational skills
- Single-minded when pursuing an opportunity or interest
- Thoughtful
- Tremendous energy
- Unusual outlook
- When motivated responds very well indeed with great energy
- When motivated can change strategies quickly
- Willing to try despite problems
- Willing to take risks

7. Day to day work with ADHD children

Most researchers agree that if children with ADHD can be approached in certain ways then they will find work easier to cope with. Such approaches usually reduce the level of stress experienced in trying to work with these children in the class.

- It is suggested that attention deficit children should be placed where there will be the least number of distractions from the outside (i.e. a door with glass will lead to looking down the corridor). A desk near the teacher is obviously very helpful, particularly with well-behaved children in surrounding positions.
- When speaking engage the ADHD child in direct eye contact whenever possible.
- Tell the class the focus of the task or lesson and remind them of the key factor you are working on. For at least one of these reminders have eye contact directly with the ADHD child.
- It is suggested that ADHD children can find it helpful if you talk clearly and straightforwardly to the whole class about what is being learned and how it is being learned.
- It is helpful if you can spare a moment to check the attention deficit child's desk. ADHD children share with dyslexic children the interesting habit of surrounding themselves with mountains of clutter. Help the child by removing as much clutter as possible leaving only the book required, a pen, pencil and ruler.
- Tell the class that by the end of the lesson, or the end of the homework, they should know XYZ. At the end of the lesson remind them of that target.

The greater active involvement there is for an ADHD child in a lesson, the better it is for that child. This should not mean that other children suffer at the expense of their requirement, but that lessons should have as strong an active element in them as possible. The ADHD child should be deeply involved in this.

Those involved in ADHD always ask teachers to reconsider the routine of the classroom. If there is no set routine, they suggest trying to implement one. It can make the whole class more efficient, and it will certainly reassure and help the attention deficit child.

Attention deficit children tend to respond well to praise. For them, praise should be given for improvement over previous behaviour and work, not for behaviour measured against the ultimate level of the class. It is sometimes said that children do not like to be singled out in this way, but the reality is that every child in the school will know about the difference of the ADHD children, thus they are already singled out. What other children will not have heard or seen is much praise being given to these 'different' children. Witnessing praise in this way can be a positive example of treating each child as an individual deserving of respect.

Try to get to know the length of attention the child has, and return to this child with more eye contact and clear statements as that time span draws to an end. Review with the ADHD child where he/she has got to, and then set the child on the way to the next part of the task.

Children with ADHD are much better at dealing with and learning through immediate examples rather than theoretical examples. They work in an intuitive way rather than using a systematic logical approach. They like you to work from the concrete to the abstract.

It is also widely suggested that it is possible for teachers to improve the attention deficit child's behaviour by taking note of each misdemeanour. Whatever caused the child to lose attention in one lesson, it is argued, will cause a problem in the next lesson. The only solution is to remove whatever caused the misbehaviour to start last time.

Certainly it can be helpful for the ADHD child if you can break the overall goal and teaching task down into a series of steps, giving them a view of those steps both at the start and as you take them through.

Generally speaking it is a good idea (indeed many say it is utterly essential) to keep a close eye on attention deficit pupils. At the first sign of an attention problem, try to bring that pupil back in with good eye contact, any praise you can muster. "Now James, you have been doing very well so far, that's good - what we're now saying is...", and repeat the point that may have been missed by James because he was starting to rock backwards on his chair and any second it was going to crash to the floor. What would not work would be to ask James to repeat the point to you. You know he hasn't got it, he knows he hasn't got it, and the class just love any chance to make fun of those who are different from them.

Finally for homework, write it out very clearly and ensure the ADHD child has taken note of it. Ensure he/she puts it in the right place.

8. Treating ADHD children specially

- 1.** Circulate the chapters ‘ADHD: A summary’ and ‘Day to day work with ADHD children’ to relevant members of staff in your school. You may also wish to circulate other items from this book such as the ‘Summary of ADHD’ which appears later.
- 2.** Discuss the issues involved with your colleagues and ensure that in general you have got their support for the approach to ADHD that you are adopting. Also, ensure they have a clear idea of the nature and causes of attention deficit disorders, as well as the symptoms that appear in the classroom.
- 3.** When you are ready, circulate the ADHD Action Document which follows and endeavour to get feedback from staff.
- 4.** Take the combined reports from various members of staff (Form 2) and look at the most troublesome area. It may be that the child shouts out. It may be a tendency to wander around. It may be that he or she taunts the other children. Whatever it is, take that one behavioural pattern and note it down.
- 5.** Circulate the ADHD Proposed Behavioural Plan document to staff, and gain support or amend the proposal. ADHD behavioural plans must include some form of reward, and you may find it helpful at this point to distribute the Rewards Policy document which follows later in the book.
- 6.** Talk to the child about the selected problem area. Outline a possible reward system that might be used. You might suggest to a child that he has “a tendency to pinch and push other people in your classroom. Can we agree that this is not good behaviour in school?”

Upon gaining agreement you would add that “both your teachers and classmates would like you to stop. From now on, for every five minutes that you go without pinching or pushing you will get a special bonus point. When you have reached 50 bonus points you will get a certificate from the headteacher in assembly for improved behaviour.”

If the agreed reward is acceptable and interesting to the child, you now circulate the Behaviour Contracts to all relevant staff. Ask staff to comment to you on any issues that arise from this approach.

- 7.** After any issues have been clarified with staff, a copy prepared for the child must be signed by him/her and by all relevant teachers. The Team Leader keeps a copy, gives a copy to the child, and if appropriate and helpful sends one home to the parents.
- 8.** Each teacher must now apply the rules specifically and exactly following an agreed routine. Set out the routine as per the following pages and make sure all teachers have a copy and abide by it.

ADHD Action Document

It is medically recognised that up to 10% of children have a neurophysiological condition known as ADHD. It is not unreasonable to believe that we have a number of children with this medical condition in our school.

These children find it hard, if not impossible, to control their behaviour and tend not to respond to traditional school rewards and punishments. We would like to explore the possibility of introducing a system known as ‘the behaviour contract’ as one method of helping these children to gain control of their behaviour. Briefly, the system involves those members of staff who spend time with the child in question nominating the child’s most difficult or disruptive behaviour. From this list, one particular behaviour type is selected as the one that the school will try and improve.

While we work on this one particular behaviour, it does not mean we will ignore all the other negative aspects of the child’s behaviour. However, for this approach to work it is important that everyone involved with the child in question should adopt a particular approach to this most difficult aspect of the child’s behaviour.

The behaviour contract states what the child does that is wrong and makes the point clearly that it is wrong. After this it states that if the child can make a modest effort to overcome this one problem for short spaces of time the child will be rewarded. The reward is set out, the child signs the form and so do we.

During the lesson you will have to watch this child and make a note of each time span that excludes the designated behaviour. You are then asked to sign the child’s form at the end of the lesson and keep a note yourself.

During, and at the end of the lesson please try to find a way of giving praise to this child. Even if no bonus points for improved behaviour have been earned try and find something positive to say - even if it is “you nearly got some points - I’m sure you can do it next time.” This means that this child is being given special attention and treatment, and it will distract you a little from normal classroom work. However I am sure you will appreciate that the problems faced by this child, and by all of us teaching the child, are taking up a lot of classroom time anyway.

If this approach does work it should benefit not only the child but all the children in the class whose work will not be so disrupted by one person’s ADHD.

If you would like to know more about ADHD please do not hesitate to ask, as I have a number of short papers which I can photocopy for your use.

I would like to initiate our action with regards to _____.

The behaviour I propose that we aim to stop is _____.

It is proposed that the reward given will be a bonus point for every _____ that the behaviour is avoided. When _____ bonus points are gathered the following reward will be given:
