TRIP Guide
Turing Research Into Practice

Classroom Management Strategies for Children with ADHD

Most teachers will have the experience of teaching a child with ADHD at some point in their careers. Meeting the academic and social needs of these children typically requires thoughtful planning of prevention and intervention-focused activities. Implementing interventions at the point of performance of the problem behavior is key, as is monitoring the success of the intervention plans. It is important to design simple interventions that are easy to teach to everyone involved in implementing or monitoring the intervention.

On the universal level of intervention, school-wide or class-wide strategies increase the effectiveness and efficiency of learning and instruction. Strategy instruction is explicitly taught and modeled, with a focus on helping children to replace ineffective learning strategies with practical, effective strategies. School- or class-wide expectations are taught, practiced and acknowledged. Teachers plan for flexible grouping for instruction and progress monitoring of basic skills. Teachers also learn to pre-correct and respond effectively to inefficient or disruptive behaviors in order to increase student attention, promote pro-social behaviors, and enhance academic achievement.

On the secondary or targeted group level of intervention, students with a need for more explicit or frequent instruction are identified and provided with flexible grouping, learning strategies such as peer tutoring and instruction in note-taking, and strategies to promote pro-social behavior such as behavioral report cards and providing strategically planned choices.

On the tertiary or individualized level, school staff determines the function of student problem behavior in order to implement individualized academic and behavioral interventions.

Universal Level of Intervention

Academic Interventions

Flexible Grouping: Children with ADHD often have difficulty focusing on teacher-directed instruction and independent work. When curriculum and instruction is not well matched to the child’s skill level, inattention increases. Flexible grouping practices within or across classrooms allow students to be placed according to their skill level and to move among groups as skills increase.

Progress Monitoring: A systematic way of evaluating student progress in reaching goals, using data that is simple and easy to collect. Brief, targeted, frequent assessments of oral reading and mathematical calculation fluency and reading comprehension are administered and the results are used to guide instruction.

Study Skills and Organizational Strategies: Students with ADHD benefit from explicit strategy instruction that includes modeling and demonstration and allows for practice and rehearsal. Memorization strategies, test-taking and study strategies, active reading strategies, survey and review strategies, and verbal and written practice focused on reading comprehension are all critical skills, along with instruction and monitoring of how to organize notebooks and binders, use planners and calendars, and organize written work. (See Skills for School Success by Anita Archer and Mary Gleason, 2002).

Behavioral Interventions

School-Wide Expectations: The initial step is to develop and teach clear school-wide or class-wide expectations. Teachers learn to use prompts and signals to remind students to follow rules, and to provide opportunities to review and practice expectations before transitioning to settings in which problems are more common.

Active Supervision: Staff practice moving around the area, scanning for problem areas or interactions, and interacting frequently with students to reduce problem behaviors. Precorrection, which is reminding students of the expectations before a possible problem occurs, can be used with individuals or class-wide.
Secondary (Targeted) Level of Intervention

Academic Interventions

Peer Tutoring: Students work together on an academic assignment with one student providing support, clarification and feedback to the other; the two students may then switch roles (Greenwood et. al., 2002). Peer tutoring may focus on new or previously learned information. This strategy benefits children with ADHD by providing individual attention, a self-determined pace, and frequent prompting and feedback.

Choice-Making: Providing choices among two or more activities can increase engagement and work completion for children with ADHD (Dunlap, et.al.,1994). With this strategy, the teacher controls the nature of the assignments and the child is able to choose the specific assignment to complete.

Note-Taking: The goal of this type of instruction is to teach students to create an outline based on lecture materials, including main idea and supporting details, and to teach the effective use of self-questioning. (See articles on the Directed Notetaking Activity: Spires & Stone (1989); Evans, Pelham & Grudberg (1995)).

Behavioral Interventions

Check and Connect: This model is designed for systematic monitoring of important indicators of school success, including attendance, discipline referrals and academic progress, which are reviewed by a student and a staff member who serves as a monitor (http://ici.umn.edu/checkandconnect/).

Behavior Education Program: This program provides behavioral feedback through a daily teacher report that summarizes weekly data on the academic and behavioral performance of the student. The complete program is described in the book Responding to Problem Behavior (Crone, Hawken & Horner, 2004).

Parent Involvement: Develop a system to provide frequent, brief home-school communication focused on progress toward goals and on solving problems before they grow. Home-based acknowledgement of positive behavior and consequences for problem behavior may be useful if appropriate for the student.
Tertiary (Individualized) Level of Intervention

Academic Interventions

Computer-assisted Instruction: Students with ADHD typically show better performance on schoolwork that provides immediate feedback, one-to-one attention, and content presented in an interesting way. Computerized instruction that is interactive and engaging can provide these conditions while helping children to acquire or improve academic skills. Students have frequent opportunities to respond to prompts, and receive immediate feedback about the accuracy of their responses. Well-constructed computerized instruction uses color and design to help the student focus on critical information, breaks material down into smaller chunks to promote mastery, provides immediate feedback and addresses specific instructional objectives. Use of these strategies in teacher-directed instruction also can increase student engagement.

Behavioral Interventions

Functional Behavioral Assessment: The FBA process results in development of a behavior plan with consideration of the current level of academic and behavioral functioning, the triggers for problem behavior, the identification of the behaviors of greatest concern, and the “user-friendliness” of the interventions. Strategies used include observations, data review, interviews, and analysis of previous interventions. Once the variables that help to maintain or reinforce problem behavior are discovered, a plan is implemented to begin to reinforce positive or pro-social behavior and to reduce problems. Positive reinforcement or a response cost system may be used to promote positive behavior.

Self-Monitoring: Teaching children to observe and record their own behaviors (such as on-task behavior) can be helpful for children with ADHD. Using a reminder system such as the Motiv-Aider (http://www.habitchange.com/), an electronic pager-type device that sends a silent pulsing signal, can help children to refocus without the use of verbal teacher reminders. Providing checklists of important tasks or steps for students to follow also may be helpful when combined with positive reinforcement for use of the list and/or completion of the task.