

Why Is My Child Having Trouble in School?

It is very common for children with ADHD to have difficulties in school. These problems can occur for several reasons:

- Symptoms of ADHD like distractibility and hyperactivity make it hard for children with ADHD to pay attention or stay focused on their work, even though they may be capable learners and bright enough to understand the material.
- Many children with ADHD also have trouble organizing themselves, breaking an assignment down into smaller steps, and staying on a schedule.
- Some children with ADHD have difficulty with self-control and get into trouble with peers and/or teachers.
- Many children with ADHD also have a learning disability. Schools usually define a learning disability as a discrepancy between a child's IQ score and his or her performance on achievement tests. A child with a learning disability has difficulty understanding information he or she sees or hears OR trouble putting together information from different parts of the brain.
- Children with ADHD often can learn material but it may take longer and require more repetition.
- Children with ADHD often show inconsistency in their work because of their ADHD; one day they may know information and the next day they cannot seem to remember it.

Typical School Performance Difficulties Associated With ADHD

- Poor organization and study skills
- Weaknesses in written language/writing skills
- Minimal/inconsistent production and output (both in-class assignments and homework)
- Behavior that interferes with learning and impacts on interpersonal relationships
- Immature social skills

What Can I Personally Do to Help?

There are many different ways that a parent's participation can make a difference in a child's school experience, including:

- Spending time in the classroom, if your work schedule allows, and observing your child's behavior.
- Talking with your child's teacher to identify where your child is having the most problems.
- Working with your child's teacher to make a plan for how you will address these problems and what strategies at school and home will help your child be successful at learning and completing work.
- Acknowledging the extra efforts your child's teacher may have to make to help your child.

- Reading all you can about ADHD and sharing it with your child's teacher and other school officials.
- Becoming an expert on ADHD and your child.
- Finding out about tutoring options through your child's school or local community groups. Children with ADHD may take longer to learn material compared with other children even though they are just as smart. Tutoring may help your child master new materials.
- Making sure your child actually has mastered new material presented so that he or she does not get behind academically.
- Acknowledging how much harder it is for your child to get organized, stay on task, complete assignments, and learn material compared with other children. Help your child to get organized, break tasks down into smaller pieces, and expend his or her excess physical energy in ways that are "okay" at home and in the classroom.
- Praising your child and rewarding him or her for a job well done immediately after completing tasks or homework.
- Joining a support group for parents of children with ADHD or learning disabilities. Other parents may help you with ideas to help your child.

Another good way to get help from your school is to determine if your school has a regular education process that helps teachers with students who are having learning or behavioral problems that the teacher has been unsuccessful in solving. The process differs in various school districts and even among different schools in the same district. Some of the names this process may go by include Student Study Team (SST), Instructional Support Team (IST), Pupil Assistance Team (PAT), Student Intervention Team (SIT), or Teacher Assistance Team (TAT).

Parents are encouraged to request a meeting on their child to discuss concerns and create a plan of action to address their child's needs. In addition to the child's teacher, members of the team may include the child, the parents, a mentor teacher or other teachers, the principal, the school nurse, the resource specialist, a speech and language specialist, or a counselor or psychologist. The team members meet to discuss the child's strengths and weaknesses, the child's progress in his or her current placement, and the kinds of problems the child is having. The team members "brainstorm" to develop a plan of action that documents the kinds of interventions that will help the child, the timeline for the changes to take place, and the school staff responsible for the implementation of the team's recommendations.

The team should also come up with a plan to monitor the child's progress. A follow-up meeting should be scheduled within a reasonable time frame (usually 4 to 6 weeks) to determine whether the team's interventions are actually helping the child in the areas of difficulty.

Adapted from material developed by Laurel K. Leslie, MD, San Diego ADHD Project.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

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