

ACHIEVEMENT, PRODUCTIVITY, AND BEHAVIOR

Because the part of the brain that screens out distracting stimuli and inhibits extraneous movement is underactive in people with hyperactivity (ADHD), there can be significant impairment in school, productivity, work, and even family life. In mild cases with adequate structure, disruptive, off-task behavior can be managed without drugs. For others, both medication and behavioral interventions are needed to tame the beast. Mark any of the following strategies that you think would be helpful to you or your loved one:¹

ACADEMICS

- ___ Have students repeat instructions or restate the purpose of the task before starting it.
- ___ Vary type, length, format, and color of worksheets. Intersperse movement with sedentary activities. Use computer programs when possible.
- ___ Teach how to organize information into outlines and charts. Buy textbooks so key points can be highlighted.
- ___ Maintain close feedback between home and school. Parents can add extra incentives for on-task behavior. Time allowed for highly valued privileges (telephone, TV, or video games) can be earned according to the percent of time spent on task in school.
- ___ Obtain tutoring to make up for past deficits in (premedication) learning or to keep up with current skills. ADD people learn best in one-on-one situations.
- ___ Have testing done to identify learning disabilities and arrange special training.
- ___ Make specific arrangements for standardized tests such as extended time limits or a quieter setting. A letter from the clinician who made the ADD diagnosis can help.²
- ___ Make distinctions between ADD and intelligence. Even if a car has a powerful engine (intelligence), it may need brake fluid (to stop unnecessary movement) and a tighter steering wheel (to stay on task). Identify positive role models from family or history who have had ADD: Thomas Edison, Mozart, and Einstein.
- ___ Get counseling to change defeatist attitudes and improve self-image.

PRODUCTIVITY

- ___ Break large tasks into smaller units. Set deadlines for small parts. Reinforce completion of each unit with points that can earn prized privileges. Using the computer, running errands, or free wandering time can be effective rewards.
- ___ Make lists and prioritize what needs to be done first, second, and third. Having small parts on lists to mark off gives a great sense of accomplishment.
- ___ Use white boards with colored markers for list making. They are more fun and attention-getting and less likely to get lost than paper. Have one in every room.
- ___ Use a stopwatch to self-monitor. Estimate how long it will take to complete (part of) a job and find out if you're right. This increases motivation to stay on task.
- ___ Use immediate consequences for off-task behavior. Redirect children to the task, sit at a time-out desk away from others, or run laps during recess. Adults can use self-talk—"I'm off task. I won't let myself use the computer until this gets done."

¹ Adapted from *Beyond Ritalin* by Stephen Garber, Marianne D. Garber, and Robyn F. Spizman (Harper Perennial, 1994) and *Driven to Distraction* by Edward Hallowell and John Ratey (Simon & Schuster, 1995).

² Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act (Office of Civil Rights, P.O. Box 65808, Washington, DC 20035-5808, 202-514-2151, www.usdoj.gov) requires schools to accommodate students with disabilities (psychiatric diagnoses) with suggestions similar to the above.

- ___ Find the best places for staying focused at school, the office, or home. Avoid facing windows and open doors. Place TVs and other major distracters where they will not interfere with task completion.
- ___ Identify working conditions that improve productivity. Some people work best doing two or three things at once. Others need a minimum of distractions.

TIME-OUT

- ___ Think of time-out as interrupting disruptive, off-task behavior rather than as punishment. Time-out is important for both ADD adults and children
- ___ Identify behaviors ahead of time that require time-outs and make agreements about when these will happen. Focus on actions that threaten safety or other's rights.
- ___ Pick a location for time-out with few distractions. Often, this may be someplace other than the child's room. The car can be used for time-out when you're away from home.
- ___ Give a three-count warning for starting time-out if a behavior doesn't stop. If you are an adult, count to yourself, and if you cannot calm down, take a time out. Start time-outs before the point of no return is passed.
- ___ Hold children on the time-out seat until they can comply for at least one minute. Often, this is needed until children realize they cannot avoid time-out. Gradually increase time but never for more than one minute per year of age. Time-outs that require ADHD children to be still for too long can cause worse behavior later.
- ___ Use creative time-out. This may include aerobics (running laps or jumping jacks) or very brief time-outs that can build concentration and coordination (standing on one foot while holding the other foot and pointing to the ceiling with the opposite hand, walking on a balance beam, holding a sand timer or glitter wand, balancing a book on the head, or breathing exercises). Find out what helps you or your child focus best.
- ___ Allow children to choose between (shorter) creative or traditional time-outs that are one minute per year of age. Conventional time-out may have little impact on ADD children because they are daydreamers and can sit still for long periods of time.

BEHAVIOR AND MOODS

- ___ Recognize needs for high-stimulation behavior. Balance moderately exciting activities with brief periods of "down time." Find diverse sources of excitement to avoid "addictions" to one thing.
- ___ Develop healthy addictions (crafts, hobbies, or exercise) on which to get hooked. This provides structure for the need to keep busy.
- ___ Keep small, tactile objects handy for fidgeting: felt, Velcro, Koosh balls
- ___ Arrange 30 minutes of daily "piddle" time to waste guilt-free and recharge batteries. However, warn children in advance so they can plan for unstructured time.
- ___ Recognize the "ADD blues": an overreaction to or letdown after an engaging event. Refocus on something enjoyable or take out frustrations on pillows.
- ___ Praise on-task behaviors—"You didn't need any reminders today to finish . . ." If you cannot find anything to compliment, break tasks into smaller units and force yourself to notice at least two positive things a day. If you are an adult, find a coach or contract with a family member to praise you when you do things well.
- ___ Reframe tendencies toward mistakes as expertise on foibles. There are advantages to not being a perfectionist who falls apart whenever a blunder happens.
- ___ Make a list of successes and refer to it to combat hopelessness. Have a "success (bulletin) board" in a prominent place in the home for both children and adults.