

SELF-REGULATION

Students with learning disabilities and/or Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) often have difficulty with managing their behaviour. They need to recognize, channel and manage their frustrations, excessive physical energy and impulsiveness that may result from their difficulty. Engineering the learning environment and teaching students strategies to deal with these issues are key to their success in school and in life.

Keys to Understanding and Help

Research has shown that learning disabilities and/or AD/HD are due to genetic and/or neurobiological factors that alter brain functioning in a manner that affects one or more processes related to learning or attention. These cognitive functions and processes are important for behavioural self-regulation and control as well as for academic performance. Generally, these students are of average to higher intelligence. They do, however, have difficulty processing information or focusing their attention. They often exhibit difficulties in:

- Executive functions such as planning, organizing, monitoring, decision-making and completing tasks. These functions are important to academic success.
- Working memory, which allows us to briefly store and manipulate information, which is then held “online” to guide actions. Working memory is essential for a range of activities including problem-solving, listening, and reading comprehension.
- Processing speed, the rate at which an individual can deal with incoming and outgoing information. Slow processing speed can make it difficult to follow instructions or respond quickly to questions.

So, it's not that these students are intending to be disruptive, rude etc., it is simply the way their brain is wired that leads to their behaviour.

While we cannot “cure” these conditions we can provide strategies, supports and accommodations to help students be successful in their schoolwork and life. Developing self-monitoring, organization and self-advocacy skills are key.

Strategies

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

ENGINEERING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR MOVEMENT

Providing students with opportunities to physically move can help them to release excess energy, reduce stress and anxiety and re-energize their ability to focus.

- Use active responses as part of instructional activities. For example, students may turn and talk with a partner, stand up to indicate agreement, or move to different parts of the room to use materials.
- Allow students to work at different stations such as at a large table, the board, an easel, interactive white board or chart paper on a wall.
- Arrange an area of the classroom where students can move around without distracting others. Give students the option of going to this area when they need a stretch break.
- Replace a student's chair with a large ball.
- Allow for fidget toys such as squeeze balls.
- Set up a system where students can use printed cards to signal when they need a break from a classroom activity to go to a supervised prearranged area. This strategy requires teamwork and planning to develop a routine and safe area for the students to move to.
- Incorporate group work. This requires teaching the roles and responsibilities for individuals working within the team. The key is to set the expectations, teach the process and coach and monitor.
 - Guiding questions for group work
 - What do we need to accomplish?
 - Each person has a role. What is my role? What is your role?
 - How will we capture results?
 - How much time do we have?

ENGINEERING EXPECTATIONS

External routines, structure and organization are critical for students who do not have the internal “wiring” to plan and organize on a consistent basis.

- Provide clear expectations for behaviour and discuss and post classroom rules.
- Provide clear expectations for assigned work, e.g. develop a rubric for evaluating a written assignment with the class and provide each student with a copy to guide their work.
- Post a daily schedule (always in the same place so the students know where to look).
- Develop consistent routines for assigning and recording homework, handing in assignments, etc.

TEACH A PROBLEM SOLVING APPROACH

Teach students a problem solving approach to increase their understanding of their behaviour and their responsibility for finding appropriate solutions. Consider the following five-step strategy.

- Define the problem. Provide descriptive feedback about the student’s academic or social behaviour to increase his or her awareness to what he or she is doing and the impact it has on others.
- Brainstorm possible solutions. The student may need assistance in coming up with ideas.
- Evaluate the options. Assist the student to think about the possible outcomes or consequences of each option.
- Select an option and make a plan.
- Evaluate the outcome. Was it successful? If not, why not? What else could be done? If yes, congratulate and celebrate!

TEACH STRATEGIES FOR WHAT TO DO WHILE WAITING FOR HELP

- Encourage students to continue with easier parts of tasks while waiting for help. For example, they could underline, highlight or rephrase directions before beginning a task.
- Teach strategies for jotting down keywords or questions so students will not forget what they want to say as they wait for their turn. Sticky notes can be great tools for marking the spot in a book or writing down key words.
- Provide students with a checklist for “what to do when I am stuck”. For example:
 - Read the directions two more times.
 - Highlight key words.
 - Look at an example and talk the steps through in my mind.
 - Copy the sample question and work it through on my own.
 - Give myself a fresh start. Copy the question or try writing my answer on another piece of paper and then work it through by myself.
 - Mark the question with a star, skip it and come back to it later.

DEVELOP SIGNALS FOR ASSISTANCE

In upper grades, consider using coloured cards (one or two per subject time block) that students can display on their desks to indicate that they need assistance from a teacher or a peer helper.

Teach Students to Stop-Think-Plan

- Emphasize the importance of planning before undertaking tasks. The initial step of Stop-Think –Plan before starting is critical.
- Model group planning and thinking aloud to reinforce the process.
- Consider word processing programs on computer to develop templates or plans for completing tasks. It can be helpful for ongoing reference for common tasks (e.g., completing homework, solving a math problem, asking for help in class).

TEACH ORGANIZATION SKILLS

As students get older there is greater need for them to be on time, have a plan, prioritize and manage their belongings – keeping what is important and getting rid of the unimportant. The following strategies will help students develop structures and routines that will help with organization.

- Show students how to make daily “To Do” lists and to develop a routine for checking the list – take advantage of mobile phones, iPads and tablet apps that provide “To Do” list functions.
- Encourage colour coding of materials.
- Create schedules, calendars and homework agendas.
- Encourage students to create planning outlines and checklists for projects.
- Encourage students to try different strategies and provide meaningful feedback on what works.

TEACH STUDENTS TO SELF-MONITOR

Self-monitoring involves checking over a task that is in progress, assessing the progress and making adjustments when necessary. It also involves reviewing a task after it has been completed and making sure that it was done correctly. The accuracy of the self-monitoring is less important than the self-awareness that happens in the process.

- Encourage students to collect information about their behaviour. Target a desired behaviour and provide the student with a method for recording the frequency of the behaviour during a specific time frame. For example, students could use a sticky note on their desks to record tally marks for each time they contribute to discussions during a language arts period.
- Provide checklists and criteria for students to evaluate their own behavior and product. For example:

Self-Assessment: Working on my own

Today:	Most of the day	Some of the day	Not at all
1. I showed good listening.			
2. I followed teacher’s directions.			
3. I asked myself, “What do I need to do?”			
4. I got started right away.			
5. I finished each task.			
6. I checked over my finished work.			
7. I told myself, “Good job.”			

Alberta Learning. (2006). *Focusing on success: teaching students with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder*.

Alberta Learning.

- Provide checklists and criteria for students to check their own work such as rubrics and step-by-step strategies. For example, for proofing written work: COPS (Capitalization, Organization, Punctuation, Spelling).
- Provide a signal that cues the student to think about what they are doing. This signal may be a timer on the student's wristwatch or on a mobile phone. When the signal goes off, it is a cue for the student to ask self-monitoring questions:
 - Am I doing what I am supposed to be doing?
 - Am I on task?

HANDLING CONFLICT

- Teach students a structured approach to mediate conflicts. For example:
 - Identify each point of view ("So you're saying that ...").
 - Frame it as a common problem to reduce defensiveness ("That's a problem" not "You have a problem").
 - Involve students in finding a solution ("What are we going to do about it?").
 - Generate alternatives with adult help.
 - Try to reach a solution that is acceptable to each student and that encourages ownership of the solution.

MOTIVATION BUILDING

Students with learning disabilities and/or AD/HD are often success deprived and consequently start to lose confidence and motivation. One of the keys to success is helping these students to recognize their strengths and their accomplishments.

- Provide positive feedback.
- Ask student to identify what went well for them.
- Build in success opportunities.

For Further Learning

- Alberta Learning. (2006). *Focusing on success: teaching students with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder*. Alberta Learning. Retrieved February 12, 2013, from education.alberta.ca/media/511987/focus.pdf
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- Using Flexible Grouping. (n.d.). *Inclusive Education Library Page*. Retrieved February 12, 2013, from www.learnalberta.ca/content/ieptlibrary/documents/using_flexible_grouping.pdf
- Walker, C., & Moore, D. (2001). *Make school work for you*. Edmonton: Alberta Learning.
- Welcome to the Learning Toolbox. (n.d.). *College of Education at James Madison University*. Retrieved February 13, 2013, from <http://coe.jmu.edu/LearningToolbox>

Tools

The following templates can be used by students to help them manage their work, frustration and behaviour:

- Self Assessment – Working on My Own
- What To Do When I Am Stuck
- Tips for Handling Conflict

Self Assessment – Working on My Own

Self-Assessment: Working on my own

Today:	Most of the day	Some of the day	Not at all
1. I showed good listening.			
2. I followed teacher's directions.			
3. I asked myself, "What do I need to do?"			
4. I got started right away.			
5. I finished each task.			
6. I checked over my finished work.			
7. I told myself, "Good job."			

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What To Do When I Am Stuck

I Tried These While I Waited for Help	Most of the day	Some of the day	Not at all
1. Read the directions two more times.			
2. Highlight key words.			
3. Look at an example and talk the steps through in my mind.			
4. Copy the sample question and work through it on my own.			
5. Give myself a fresh start. Copy the question or try writing my answer on another piece of paper and then work it through by myself.			
6. Mark the question with a star, skip it and come back to it later.			

Moore, D., & Walker, C. (1996). *Smart learning: strategies for parents, teachers and kids* (p. 5). Edmonton, AB: Smart Learning. As found in *The Parent Advantage: Helping Children Become More Successful Learners at Home and School, Grades 1–9*, 1998, Edmonton, AB: Alberta Education.

Tips for Handling Conflict

Take a structured approach to mediate conflicts. For example:

Identify each point of view (“So you’re saying that …”):

Frame it as a common problem to help reduce defensiveness (“That’s a problem” *not* “You have a problem”):

Involve others in a solution (“What are we going to do about it?”):

Generate Alternatives with adult help:

Try to reach a solution that is acceptable to each student and that encourages ownership of the solution.
Here is the solution:

Adapted from:

Alberta Learning. (2006). *Focusing on success: teaching students with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder*.
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