

School Strategies for ADD Teens

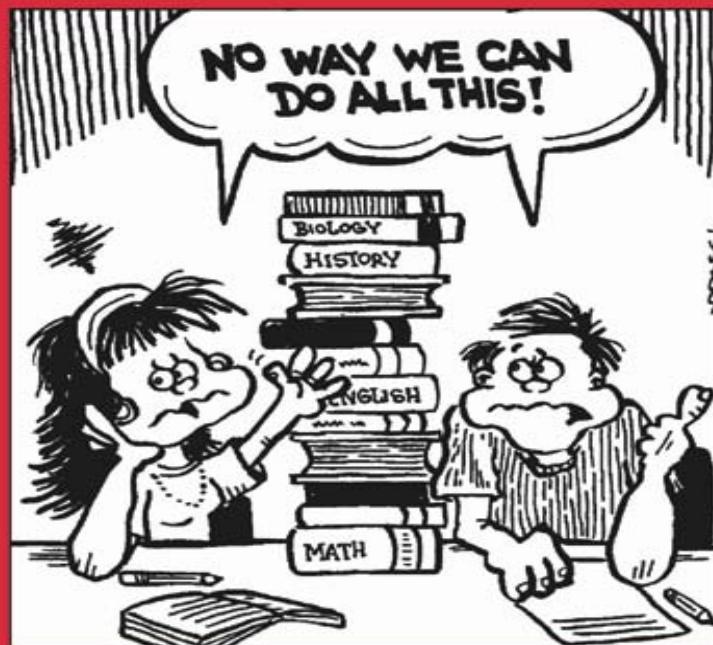
**Guidelines for Schools,
Parents and Students**

Grades 6–12

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School Strategies for ADHD Teens, Revised Edition

A guide for developing educational plans for secondary students with ADHD

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A guide for developing educational plans for secondary students with ADHD

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Introduction

This brief guide has been written for parents, teachers, counselors and school administrators to address the needs of high school students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. ADHD is one of the most widely researched childhood disorders, and it is well understood that children with ADHD need many adaptations in the school environment in order to be able to produce consistently good work in the classroom that is commensurate with their ability.

Teens with ADHD continue to experience difficulty with concentration, focus, sustained attention, poor self-esteem, lack of acceptance by others, and difficulties with managing frustration. As the demands of school increase, through

middle school and high school, their problems with procrastination, inefficiency, planning, organization, and follow-through typically become more problematic. High school years – where all adolescents move in a more complex social world, and where students with ADHD may be especially ill-prepared to cope with issues of identity, emerging sexuality, and the responsibilities that come with increased freedom and responsibility, are among the most challenging years for students with ADHD.

While elementary school teachers are often familiar with the classroom accommodations needed by children with ADHD, this seems to be less true in secondary schools. In middle and high school, individual students have multiple teachers who are necessarily less familiar with the needs and challenges of each student they teach in the course of each day. There is no longer one single person who is aware of the student's difficulties in all subjects and who can work with the student and consult with the parents.

In high school the student is faced with requirements for memory and organization that are often far beyond his capacity. Many aspects of the school day can be overwhelming for the adolescent with ADHD. For example:

- The need to keep up with different teacher styles and expectations
- The fatigue and stress which come from attempting to maintain attention throughout a difficult day
- The need to find the energy and motivation for longer and longer periods of time when attending to homework and special projects.

Grades often fall and behavioral or emotional problems often increase in response to these demands and stresses.

Like their younger counterparts, adolescents with ADHD can show surprising capacity to concentrate and to put forth effort when school work is meaningful and interesting to them. As is true for elementary school students with ADHD, high school students benefit from increased clarity, structure, predictability and positive reinforcement. As with students of all ages with ADHD, extra effort is required to help these students experience success. This booklet outlines some of the strategies, policies and approaches that we have found helpful for teens with ADHD as they face the multiple challenges of their high school years.

Note to Teachers, Counselors and Service Providers

The needs of middle and high school students with ADHD don't seem to be well understood in many schools today. Oddly, ADHD seems better understood and better accommodated on the elementary school level and on the college level, leaving a large six-year gap in the middle.

Perhaps one of the reasons for this gap is that no strong model has yet developed and been adapted by a majority of middle and high schools to meet the needs of students with ADHD. It is heartening to learn of excellent experimental programs here and there that provide specialized academic counselors for students with ADHD, or which provide structured check ins at the beginning and end of each school day for students with ADHD. It is our hope that teachers, counselors and school administrators who may have the opportunity to read this small guide will be inspired to begin to institute appropriate accommodations and programs of support in their schools.

It has been our experience that some secondary school teachers and counselors are resistant to the idea of providing structure and support for middle and high school students with ADHD. Their reasoning is that these are years during which students should become increasingly independent and that it is inappropriate, even "enabling" to continue to provide supports and accommodations.

What is critical for secondary school teachers, counselors and administrators to understand is that there is a significant gap in maturity between the typical secondary student and those with ADHD. Students with ADHD are typically far behind their non-ADHD peers in their capacity to remember, plan, organize, and take responsibility. While they need to develop these skills, they will require much more structure and support if they are to succeed.

We offer a range of supports and accommodations that can be provided by teachers and counselors that, in our experience, have proven very helpful for students with ADHD. In many cases, such approaches can be used with every student in the classroom, thereby relieving the teacher of having to remember specific, detailed procedures for several different students. We realize the tremendous demands upon the classroom teacher's time and have worked hard to make our recommendations realistic and practical.

Through following these guidelines, we hope you will find that the student with ADHD in your classroom becomes more successful and less challenging, freeing more of your time to focus on other concerns. We understand that no single teacher will implement all of the suggestions in this guide. Our hope is that each teacher will choose strategies that work best with his or her classroom style, course demands and teaching philosophy.

We have also outlined important roles that counselors and resource providers can play in a coordinated plan to help a student with ADHD. We strongly encourage a team approach involving the student, his parents, teachers, counselors, and resource providers.

The needs of students with ADHD vary widely. No single student is likely to need all of these accommodations and supports. Our guide is written as a tool for use by both parents and school personnel as they work together to develop appropriate support plans for individual students.

We have received valuable input from teachers while developing this guide, and we welcome your comments and suggestions. Please write to us at:

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Note to Parents

Please refer to this guide as you go through the process of developing an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) or “504 Plan” for your secondary school student with ADHD. All of our recommendations will not be necessary or appropriate for your son or daughter, but our suggestions will give you ideas about the range of services and accommodations that you may want to consider and request.

Currently, each school jurisdiction is unique in the way it handles the needs of students with ADHD. There are no well-established guidelines for “reasonable accommodations” for secondary students with ADHD. We hope that you find this manual useful in working with your child’s school to develop a plan of support.

You may want to consult your nearest Civil Rights office which handles claims regarding the needs of students with ADHD under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Another excellent resource is the network of parent training and information centers. Parent centers serve families of children and young adults (from birth to age 22) with physical, cognitive, emotional, or learning disabilities. These centers work to assist parents in obtaining appropriate education and services for their disabled child. The goal of these centers is to improve education results for all children and to resolve problems between families and schools or other agencies. In addition, these centers attempt to connect children with disabilities to community resources outside of the public school system that can address their needs.

You may find the address of your regional office by contacting the central office:

Technical Assistance Alliance for Parent Centers

8161 Normandale Blvd.

Minneapolis, MN 55437

1-888-248-0822

www.taalliance.org

A third important resource for parents of secondary students with ADHD is CHADD (Children and Adults with ADHD), a national advocacy organization for individuals with ADHD that also has local volunteer support groups in many cities across the country. To find your nearest CHADD support group, search online at CHADD’s website – www.chadd.org. CHADD also offers a national ADHD resource center through their national office in Landover, Maryland, where parents can access a wealth of information related to ADHD.

Your goal, as the parent of a secondary student with ADHD, is to learn as much as you can about ADHD and how your child is specifically affected by ADHD. Then, work hard to form a cooperative alliance with your child’s teachers. In some cases,

supports and accommodations can be arranged on an informal basis, flexibly, to meet your child's needs. In other cases, you will need to have your child tested (either at school or privately) and schedule a formal meeting, including all of your child's teachers, school counselors, school psychologist, and possibly other service providers and school administrators in order to create a formal "504 Plan" or IEP (Individual Educational Plan).

Even after such a plan has been determined and put in place, you will need to work closely and consistently with your child's teachers throughout each school year in order to make sure that teachers are aware of and are implementing the recommendations contained in your child's plan.

It is important to realize that your child's school, no matter how well motivated, cannot provide for all of your child's educational support needs. You will also find, in this guide, strategies that your child, with your assistance, can begin to implement at home. Throughout your child's secondary school years – through middle and high school – your goal should be to make sure that he or she receives all necessary supports and accommodations at school, but just as importantly, to help your child learn the habits and strategies he or she will need in college and later in their adult life.

Identifying Middle and High School Students with ADHD

Before focusing on “what to do about” ADHD, we should first focus on what ADHD is and how to recognize it. Most parents and teachers are familiar with the stereotyped image of a hyperactive, impulsive young boy with ADHD who is unable to sit quietly at his desk, doesn’t complete his school work, and presents behavior problems at school and at home. Students with ADHD who don’t conform to this image in elementary school may escape notice until they are much older. There are a number of reasons why a student may not be identified until high school years:

Predominantly Inattentive Subtype of ADHD

In recent years, we have recognized that there are many students with ADHD who don’t fit the hyperactive/impulsive stereotype – students who may be quiet and shy, and who may even do well academically during their elementary school years and only begin to show significant struggles as they enter middle or high school. Students who are primarily inattentive are easy to overlook and to under-estimate.

Students with ADHD of above-average intelligence

Another group of students with ADHD who are often overlooked are those who are bright, or even gifted. These students rarely perform consistently at their potential and may be mistaken for a student of average ability.

Adolescent and ADHD patterns can look an awful lot alike!

Students with ADHD can become more difficult to identify by the time they reach adolescence. Part of this difficulty results from the fact that many of the behaviors and tendencies of ADHD teens are shared by many teens without ADHD such as:

Distractibility While distractibility is a hallmark of ADHD, many teens tend to be distractible. This is a time in the life of a developing adolescent when what they should do and what they want to do are at great odds. Many adolescents are distracted from their academics by video games, instant messaging with friends, dating, driving, part-time jobs and hanging out at the local mall. Adolescence is a time of restlessness and sexual awakening, a time of rebellion against adult controls. When life itself serves as a giant distraction, it can be difficult to tease out the distractibility of ADHD.

Low Motivation ADHD has been characterized as a disorder of low motivation. Teens and children with ADHD don’t seem to respond as strongly to rewards and punishments. They seem to need stronger and more immediate rewards in order to be motivated to sustain their engagement in activities (such as academics) that

don't interest them. But teens with ADHD are hardly alone in feeling unmotivated to do school work. Many parents despair at their teenage son's or daughter's seeming inability to pay attention to the long-term life consequences of not paying attention to academics during high school.

Disorganization. Disorganization is an ADHD trait that tends to intensify with age, as the demands for organization increase. Younger children with ADHD also have great difficulty organizing their belongings or organizing a project, however young children are typically surrounded by parents and teachers who help organize them. Thus the ADHD trait of difficulty with organization tends not to come to the forefront until high school years when students are expected to function much more independently. However, many teens spend little time and effort being organized. A remarkably messy bedroom is often considered a classic adolescent pattern. So the challenge becomes in distinguishing normal adolescent messiness from the executive dysfunction of ADHD.

Impulsivity What adolescent is *not* impulsive? Most adolescents struggle with emotions and desires that often overcome their not yet fully developed self-control system. Teens give in to angry impulses, sexual impulses, and dare devil impulses, often fueled by alcohol that lowers their already inadequate self-control leaving them at risk for assault charges, unplanned pregnancies and tragic automobile accidents. In the case of teens with ADHD, their self-control mechanisms are even more impaired. The pre-frontal lobes of the brain where self-monitoring mechanisms are located are not yet fully developed during adolescence. It is this very part of the brain that is under-active in those with ADHD.

Daydreaming Is there a teenager who doesn't gaze out the window at times, lost to the class, waiting for the bell to ring? And yet this sort of indolent inattention pales in comparison with the real inability to pay attention reported by many teens with ADHD. Even when they *try* to listen, their mind involuntarily wanders elsewhere, often within a few seconds.

As is easy to see after reading the paragraphs above, it can be challenging for all adolescents to maintain their focus and effort on tasks that are less interesting and appealing than the myriad distractions that surround them. But teens with ADHD face a fierce double challenge as they are forced to cope with adolescence and ADHD simultaneously. In fact, perhaps we should refer to their double challenge as ADHD for attention deficits multiplied by adolescence.

Distinguishing attention deficits from normal adolescence

Given the overlap between ADHD and adolescence, how does a parent or teacher identify the ADHD student? Often the difference is a matter of degree. Some questions that teachers and parents should ask themselves in considering whether or not a teen may have ADHD are:

- Is this student usually or always late?
- Does he or she seem overwhelmed by keeping up with daily demands?
- Is he or she chronically disorganized?
- Are homework papers wrinkled, sloppy with poor organization on the page and scribbling in the margins?
- Is the student's handwriting barely legible?
- Does he or she typically have difficulty listening to, remembering and following directions?
- Does he or she show unusual variability in performance?
- Are grades repeatedly lowered due to careless errors or tardiness?
- Does he or she seem restless and unable to sit calmly without fidgeting or talking in class?
- Does the student doodle or fidget with small objects?
- Is he or she often unprepared for class – having forgotten to bring their homework, their book, paper or writing utensils?
- Does the student seem unable to stop socializing in class despite repeated reprimands?

Varying images of ADHD in teens

Many teens with ADHD belie the stereotype of a “hyperactive kid” and can present in a variety of ways. For example:

Social butterfly - Many teenage girls with ADHD are hyper-social rather than classically hyperactive. She may constantly giggle; pass notes, flirt and gossip in class.

Chatty Kathy - A “chatty Kathy” type is not necessarily a social butterfly who has many friends, but may be a girl sending a constant flow of chatter to those around her. Her chattering may be annoying, not only to the teacher, but to other students around her who are trying to concentrate, but she just can't seem to stop.

Class Clown – This disguise is more often chosen by a boy with ADHD than by a girl. Boys with ADHD may choose to amuse themselves or to compensate for their poor academic performance by entertaining the students around him. Unfortunately, humorous or mocking remarks about the class or teacher are often highly reinforced by the appreciative laughter of fellow students.

Shy Sam or Samantha - The high school students with ADHD who are easiest to overlook are those that are inattentive and socially withdrawn. They may go to great lengths to “disappear” in the back of the classroom because they dread being called upon, for fear of embarrassment. These students often feel socially left out and struggle with low self esteem because they are not part of the social whirl of high school and don’t distinguish themselves academically either.

Absent-minded professor/or Space Cadet - Some very bright boys with ADHD come across as “absent-minded professors.” They may truly excel in some subjects, while barely making an effort in subjects that don’t interest them. Often lost in their own interesting thoughts, they stand out for not noticing what’s going on around them. Sadly, gifted girls with ADHD, though they may exhibit similar patterns, are often viewed more negatively. Girls are under more expectations to be tuned in to the social world around them and may be dismissed as “weird” or “spacey” if they are bright, but socially awkward and unaware.

The klutz – Some high school students with ADHD stand out for being both socially and physically awkward. These students may be sloppily dressed and ill-groomed. They may frequently drop or break things, bump into furniture and people, and seem embarrassingly out of step with their peers. Such students may be the frequent but of teasing and practical jokes.

The troublemaker - When ADHD is combined with oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder, students may be labeled as troublemakers with ADHD going unrecognized because their defiant attitude and behavior takes center stage. More boys than girls tend to fall into this category. They may be belligerent with other students, argumentative with teachers, and may defiantly sleep in class or skip class to declare the low regard they have for the educational process.

As you review these “types” above, it becomes very clear that ADHD comes in many guises and disguises during high school and both parents and teachers may need to look beneath the surface to recognize ADHD that is in need of treatment.

The good news is that ADHD is a highly treatable disorder. With appropriate treatment that may involve counseling, coaching and medication, and with supports at school and at home, these troubled or troubling teens can begin to feel and function better.

Middle School Challenges

Students whose ADHD was clearly identified in elementary school typically struggled with issues such as difficulty sitting still in class, difficulty paying attention to the teacher, difficulty staying focused on school work, poor handwriting, tendency to make careless errors, inefficient work habits, talking out of turn, and, for some, behavior problems in class. During elementary school, most students have one primary teacher, although they may have specialized teachers for certain subjects. Elementary school students typically spend their day in the same classroom, where their teacher comes to know each of them quite well. In elementary school, little demand is placed on students to keep track of time, to remember deadlines or upcoming events, or to organize themselves or their belongings.

Moving from elementary to middle school is a major transition that suddenly requires students to become more independent and more organized. In middle school, much greater demands are placed on the executive functions of the brain – the ability to self-monitor, to keep track of time, to remember, to get started on, and follow through on assignments, to plan and to organize. In response to these sharply increased demands, executive function deficits associated with ADHD come to the forefront. The student has not one teacher, but many teachers, each of whom gives the student assignments, instructions, and paperwork that the student is expected to manage and remember.

Students with ADHD who are of above average intelligence (and who have no significant learning disabilities) often go unidentified in elementary school, particularly if they have predominantly inattentive type ADHD. Such students are often able to sail through elementary school performing well academically, and only begin to struggle in middle or high school (or later) when the demands for organization and self-management surpass their executive function capacities.

High School Years May Be More Challenging than College for Students with ADHD!

Demands for executive functioning continue to increase in high school. In high school, every grade takes on a heavier significance as the student begins to accumulate a grade point average that will be a major determinant the college admission process. The student faces more long-term assignments – reading, writing and special projects – that require greater planning, consistency and follow through. The bright student with ADHD who was able to earn good grades despite last-minute preparation often finds that this approach no longer works well.

In addition to increased academic demands, the typical high school student has greatly increased extra-curricular activities – sports, clubs, lessons, and part-time jobs. The student is caught up in the high school world of socializing, burgeoning sexuality, driving automobiles, managing money, and taking responsibility for ever increasing levels of independence.

The high school student's day often starts before dawn, with the student passing through seven academic periods in rapid succession, with little break. The student's school day is often immediately followed by after school activities that keep the student away from home each day for 10 or more hours, following which the student is expected to do several hours of homework before going to bed to rest before another demanding day. High school students are often chronically sleep deprived as their natural diurnal rhythms are ill-suited to early rising.

Accommodations and supports for high school students with ADHD

- Individual Educational Plans (IEPs)
- 504 plans
- Informal accommodations

Crucial Roles for High School Counselors

One of the biggest challenges for the student with ADHD in secondary school is that suddenly there is no single person who is aware of how the student is functioning and who can alert parents to academic or behavioral problems quickly, as they arise.

Ideally, specially selected secondary school counselors should receive training in how to work with students with ADHD, helping them to advocate for themselves in the complex secondary school environment. Such counselors would help students with ADHD solve problems, whether academic or administrative in nature. Students with ADHD need assistance in class scheduling and in monitoring their progress in all of their classes throughout the term.

Specially identified and trained counselors could provide and coordinate services in the following areas:

Communication coordination

It would be very helpful for the guidance counselor to serve as the primary contact person between the home and the school, as well as the primary person who is monitoring the student's overall performance during the school year. Without such a coordinator, it is difficult to consistently monitor a student's performance.

Daily monitoring and structure

The counselor, or a resource teacher working in coordination with the counselor, could be the person with whom the student with ADHD checks in daily to maintain organization and to keep up with assignments. The student could check in with this person on a daily basis, either at the end of the school day, to be sure that necessary books and papers are available, that homework assignments are written down properly, that everything that is necessary has been placed in the student's backpack to take home, and so on. This type of intensive, hands-on support is especially crucial in middle school, as the student makes the transition from elementary school to a complex class schedule.

Scheduling classes

The student with ADHD should receive customized scheduling of classes, rather than having classes computer scheduled, as is the case in most secondary schools. Customized scheduling should be the standard operating procedure rather than the approach taken in many schools of starting with a computer-generated schedule and later making schedule revisions if and when complaints are made by the student or the student's parents. In creating a schedule, the counselor should consider the order of classes throughout the day, the student's particular strengths and weaknesses, and the teaching styles of teachers.

Scheduling guidelines for ADHD students:

- 1- In general, the most challenging academic classes should be scheduled earlier in the day.
- 2- If the student has a history of sleep problems and chronic difficulty awakening in the morning, the first period class of the day should not be a challenging one, allowing the student time to become fully awake and for medication to become fully effective.
- 3- Classes that require great concentration should rarely, if ever be scheduled for the last period of the day when the student's mental fatigue is greatest.
- 4- No more than three high-demand classes should be scheduled during each semester. Which classes qualify as "high-demand" depends upon the academic strengths and weaknesses of the individual student.
- 5- To avoid academic overload in any given semester, careful planning will be necessary. In some cases, the student may need to take one or more high-demand classes during summer school in order to avoid overload during the academic year.
- 6- Students with ADHD in secondary school need to be allowed maximum flexibility to alter their schedules according to their needs. The standard "drop and add" policy on the college level should be applied to secondary school as well. Under this policy, students may, during the first two weeks of each term, drop classes that do not seem to be a good match, switching to alternative classes that better suit the student's needs.

Teacher Selection

Not all teachers are suitable for students with ADHD. Having a teacher whose teaching style is compatible with the ADHD student's needs often means the difference between good and poor performance in a particular class. Students with ADHD typically perform best with teachers who are:

- 1- **Highly organized** – Because organization is often an area of difficulty for students with ADHD, they need teachers who plan ahead, who don't change plans in mid-stream, who are not forgetful, and who routinely remind students of upcoming deadlines and dates.
- 2- **Active and engaging** – Because students with ADHD often have difficulty remaining tuned in and motivated and are highly susceptible to boredom, they need teachers who are enthusiastic and active, and who routinely engage the students to participate in the learning process.
- 3- **Flexible** – While attention to different learning styles is important to all students, it is critical for the student with ADHD. Teachers who are flexible – for example those who would allow an oral presentation in place of a written one; who will allow a hands-on learner to engage in special projects; who recognize the difference between careless errors and lack of knowledge – are ideal teachers for students with ADHD.
- 4- **Aware of the needs of students with ADHD** – Working successfully with students with ADHD requires a good measure of knowledge, training

and awareness. Teachers who are aware of the need for structure, encouragement, and active engagement will have much greater success than teachers whose attitude is that students with ADHD must learn to function in the “real world” and therefore shouldn’t receive special considerations.

Assisting with Testing Needs

There is often a wide gap between the knowledge level of a student with ADHD and the student’s demonstration of knowledge on quizzes and tests. This gap is the function of a number of factors. The student’s problems with organization may cause him to take longer to organize a short essay answer. The student’s distractibility may cause him to need to read and re-read questions or passages before he can respond to them. The student’s divergent thinking patterns may make selecting a single correct response on a multiple-choice question more difficult. And the student’s difficulty with memory retrieval may result in an inability to correctly answer a question during the exam even though he knows the answer and could easily retrieve it at some other point in time. For all of these reasons, students with ADHD have a strong need for a variety of test accommodations.

- 1- **Extended time.** Extended time on tests allows the student with ADHD the opportunity to at least partially compensate for his distractibility, difficulty putting thoughts into an organized structure, and memory retrieval challenges.
- 2- **Non-distracting environment** – Students with ADHD tend to be highly distractible generally, and will be even more distractible during anxiety provoking circumstances such as test taking. The possibility of taking exams in a quiet, non-distracting environment, away from classmates, can help diminish the impact of distractibility.
- 3- **Use of a computer** – Many students with ADHD have poor, nearly illegible handwriting. Additionally, they often have difficulty organizing their thoughts coherently. The use of a computer removes the disadvantage of poor handwriting, and allows the student to quickly and neatly make changes in what has been written.
- 4- **Alternative format** – Some students with ADHD find written examinations so challenging, for a variety of reasons, that they are rarely able to demonstrate their true level of subject mastery when taking a written test. Often, a reasonable accommodation is to allow the student to take a follow-up oral exam with the teacher.
- 5- **Coordination of exam schedules** – Given the extra challenges faced by students when taking exams, these students should never have two major exams or assignments due on the same day. Although initial responsibility for coordination of exams and assignments should rest with the student, the counselor may need to coordinate such arrangements if difficulties arise.

To summarize, the guidance counselor specially trained to work with students with ADHD can play a crucial role in the student's success in secondary school through:

- Coordinating communication between parents and the school
- Providing or coordinating daily monitoring of the student's progress
- Taking charge of customized scheduling of classes
- Coordinating teacher selection
- Arranging the provision of special test accommodations

Certain students will be in need of a wider range of accommodations than others, but all students with ADHD will greatly benefit from specialized guidance counselors who can coordinate accommodations and supports for the secondary student with ADHD

The Role of the Classroom Teacher

Current educational law focuses on the individual student with ADHD or learning disabilities, calling for an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) or “504 Plan” for each student who has been diagnosed with learning disabilities or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). This system places a huge, unrealistic burden upon secondary classroom teachers, who may teach 150 or more students in the course of a day. Although mandated by law, it seems humanly impossible for a teacher to keep in mind a detailed list of accommodations that have been deemed “appropriate” for all students with either learning disabilities or ADHD.

In this section of our guide, we will list numerous strategies that are helpful for various learning challenges associated with ADHD. No single student should require all of these strategies and/or accommodations. They are offered as educational material for the secondary classroom teacher to use as he or she deems appropriate in a particular circumstance.

Creating an ADHD-friendly classroom.

Rather than attempting to provide a detailed list of supports and accommodations customized for numerous individual students, it seems more reasonable to educate the classroom teacher in creating a class that is “ADHD-friendly” – i.e., a classroom and teaching style that is structured to maximize the functioning of students with ADHD. The good news is that whatever is helpful for students with ADHD is also very helpful to all students. Thus, a classroom wide approach is more efficient and helpful to more students in many instances.

Of course, there are specific accommodations that may not be practical or realistic to provide to all students in the classroom – at least as secondary schools are currently structured. For example, although it might be helpful to all students, it may not be feasible to offer extended time on tests to all students.

Helping students become “able” rather than “enabling” them to under-function

Some secondary school teachers believe that it is “enabling” (i.e., helping in a way that actually undermines the student’s path toward self-sufficiency) to provide students in high school with accommodations. Their position is that the student must function in the “real world” after high school; therefore, they must prepare for that “real world” by not expecting special supports or accommodations in high school. In that “real world” after high school, these teachers warn, no one is going to be there to attend to your every need and wish.

Those teachers are right! Students with ADHD *do* need to learn how to survive in the world of adults that they will enter after high school or college. That’s why they need

our help *now*. If high schools are to become “ADD-friendly”, i.e., become schools that work to help students with ADHD to achieve academic success and prepare them to function effectively as adults, then many skills need to be taught during high school years.

No one would argue that the best way to learn how to swim is to jump into the deep end of the pool and see what happens! And yet, in many ways, this is the approach we take with students with ADHD in high school. High school is definitely the deep end of the pool, and students with ADHD are far less prepared than their peers to swim in deep water.

Rather than watching students with ADHD drown in lengthy reading assignments, assigned papers and reports, poor time management skills, lack of planning ability, and poor study skills, high schools need to actively teach these students how to swim. ADD-friendly high schools should become pro-active – teaching and coaching students with ADHD – with special classes and supports that help them learn efficient study techniques, good time management and planning techniques, how to break long-term assignments into short, do-able tasks, and how to read, take notes and remember.

What Can High Schools Do to Help Students with ADHD to Succeed?

Let's break the help and supports offered to students with ADHD into three broad categories – accommodations, skill building, and supports.

Accommodations - These are alterations in policies or procedures that are meant to accommodate students with disabilities, in this case with ADHD. In considering what accommodations might be appropriate for high school students, we should consider what accommodations are typically provided to students with ADHD on the college level. These include:

1. Extended time on tests
2. Taking tests in a quiet, non-distracting environment
3. Note-takers in class
4. Permission to use a computer for in-class writing assignments and for exams
5. Early registration privileges to allow students to customize their schedules
6. Ability to email papers to professors rather than handing in hard copies of papers.
7. Reasonable extensions of deadlines
8. Permission to take “incompletes” in classes and complete the work at a later date.

Supports – Supports are more informal accommodations that may or may not be available to all students, but which are especially helpful to students with ADHD. Helpful supports would include:

1. Posting all relevant dates and assignments online for easy reference by the student.
2. Posting review outlines online prior to tests and exams.
3. Allowing the student to work in his area of strength – i.e., allowing students to dictate answers into a recorder if written language poses a significant difficulty; allowing a verbal presentation in place of a written presentation; allowing a presentation to emphasize visual graphics and illustrations for students whose strengths are visual rather than verbal.
4. Working closely with students who need extra support to break down long-term assignments into a series of shorter tasks.
5. Provision of specially trained counselors with whom students with ADHD can check in on a daily basis to remain organized, on track and on time with assignments and preparation for tests.

Skill building – Many high school students with ADHD have never developed good study skills, time management skills, planning skills, or active reading skills. Such skills often don't develop automatically and need to be taught. Some very advanced and forward thinking high schools have begun developing special 7th period study halls for students with ADHD in which these skills are actively taught. All students are provided with day planners and are taught to use them. This last period of the day is spent helping students to learn efficient learning skills such as:

- How to read long assignments and filter out key information they need to learn
- How to underline and take effective notes when reading
- How to break long-term assignments down into tasks to be done on a daily basis
- How to learn and remember detailed information
- How to prepare for tests and improve recall
- How to take tests to maximize performance

While such skills are critical for students with ADHD, they are important skills for all students to learn. In schools where these learning skills are not taught in a special class, it becomes the responsibility of the teacher to introduce these skills, integrating them into the course content of each class.

Strategies for the Classroom Teacher to Help Students with ADHD

In this section, we will introduce a number of strategies that classroom teachers can use to help students with ADHD. These suggestions are only a few among many. The interested classroom teacher is referred to the resource section at the back of this guide for more detailed information about working with students with ADHD in the classroom setting.

Helping the student with ADHD cope with hyperactivity

1. Allow the student to handle or fidget with a small object while seated at their desk so long as this is not distracting to other students.
2. Provide the student with opportunities for movement – passing out or collecting papers, taking notes to the office, erasing the chalk board, etc.
3. Consider abbreviated classroom assignments in the student comprehends the material, but is too restless to complete the entire assignment.

Promoting more efficient learning

1. Present students with a basic outline of a lecture so that they can take notes more efficiently as the teacher lectures.
2. Teach using a multi-sensory method using diagrams, charts, outlines, graphs, maps, etc.
3. Encourage students to bring laptops to class for note taking and test taking purposes. A student who is highly skilled at keyboarding will be able to take notes more efficiently and present his won ideas and thoughts more effectively if he is not hindered by the process of handwriting.
4. Provide the student with work samples that exemplify and delineate the criteria that the teacher expects the student to achieve. Students with ADHD are often concrete in their thinking, and such stated criteria, accompanied by examples, can be very helpful.
5. When possible, review the students work with him after school, so that there is a continuous flow of feedback between the student and teacher.

6. When possible, provide a “first draft” review of the student’s work so that there is an opportunity for the student to benefit from teacher feedback before the final draft of his project is completed.
7. Offer a variety of styles and formats when presenting information to students such as lecture, demonstrations, drills, manipulatives, and simulations.
8. Give the student a choice of assignments at times, so that the student can select a task that most closely fits his own learning style and skills.
9. When possible, make the subject matter personally meaningful to the student by explaining the purpose of the work, relating it to the student’s own life or environment or relating it to current events. This will assist in cognitively “anchoring” the task and raising the motivation of the student. This, in turn, will improve the student’s capacity to attend to and focus upon the work.
10. Be sure that there is enough structured opportunity for the student to ask questions, clarify assignments, and so on.
11. Allow peer study opportunities and arrange peer tutoring, if needed.

Enhancing the student’s ability to listen to and follow directions

1. Preferential seating continues to be important in high school (even in college!) as it is for younger children with ADHD. The student should be seated near the front of the class, where the teacher can maintain proximity and monitor attention level and work habits. It is also important for the student to be placed at a distance from distractions or from provocative individuals.
2. Whenever feasible, lengthy instructions and oral directions should be accompanied by written instructions. The student with ADHD will more readily comprehend and remember directions that he has heard *and* seen and for which he has a permanent reference in the form of the instruction sheet.
3. Allow the student to tape record classes whenever he thinks that this might be useful. This might be particularly helpful to the student when there is a review class for a major test or exam. The teacher may wish to tape the review for a major test or exam at her own desk, particularly if there is a chance that the student may be embarrassed to have attention drawn to him for taping the class. The student may then borrow the tape and later return it to the teacher.

4. Multi-step directions often seem confusing and are misunderstood by students with ADHD. When such directions are given, it will be important for the teacher to cue the class with remarks such as, “Is everyone listening? This is very important.” Directions should then be given slowly, one step at a time. Again, it is important to provide the student with ADHD a written copy of multi-step directions. In any event, the teacher should monitor to see that the student with ADHD has understood and is following complex directions.
5. Be sure that assignments are given in a clear, unhurried manner.
6. Be prepared to restate or paraphrase if the student appears confused.
7. Keep directions short and simple. Don’t embed directions in the middle of a paragraph-long narrative to the class.
8. Whenever possible, give an example, demonstrating how the students should proceed, rather than relying on the ADHD student’s faulty listening skills.
9. Relate important information early in the class period. The ability of the student with ADHD to concentrate will be greatest in the beginning of the period and will tend to deteriorate as the class continues.
10. Specify precisely what will be needed for completion of individual projects. Also, specify the criteria against which the student will be graded.

Helping the student with ADHD to become more focused and organized in class

1. Establish consistent classroom routines, which can be described to students in a handout or wall chart.
2. Give notice of transition times within the class, such as a 10-minute notice that test time is about to end, followed by a 5-minute notice. Similar notices for the class being over, for seat work time about to end, etc. will all help the student with ADHD to organize his work and his use of time.
3. Be sure that there is enough structured opportunity for the student to ask questions, clarify assignments, and so on.
4. Keep an “in basket” conveniently and prominently placed, colorfully identified for students to use to turn in assignments. Forgetting to turn in assignments is a chronic problem for many students with ADHD.

Alternatively, when feasible, allow students to turn in assignments electronically. It is generally easier for a student to immediately turn in a written assignment, via the internet, as soon as it is completed, than to print it out and remember to turn it in the following day.

5. Encourage the student with ADHD to develop better organizational habits, but avoid embarrassing him with comments about his inattention or messiness. Remember, he is constantly fighting a high level of internal disorganization. Teasing or derogatory comments will only serve to lower his already vulnerable self-esteem.
6. Prepare the student with ADHD through repeated reminders if the classroom routine is to be temporarily changed; for example, a field trip or all day achievement testing.
7. If a student repeatedly forgets to bring needed items to class, help him develop a check list of items such as: 1.) Book, 2.) pen, 3.) notebook paper, 4.) homework, 5.) project folder. Suggest to the student that he use this checklist each evening to make sure he is prepared for the following school day.
8. If the student demonstrates significant difficulty bringing needed books back and forth from school to home and back, arrange for the student to have a second set of text books that he keeps at home for the duration of the term.

Helping the student with ADHD learn better planning and time-management skills

1. Instruct students to obtain a weekly planner throughout the academic year. These are inexpensive and can be purchased at a local office supply store. (Recommendations for student planners can be found in the resource section of this guide.)
2. Teach the student to records all assignments, due dates and dates of quizzes, tests and exams in his weekly planner.
3. When making announcements in class, instruct students to get out their weekly planners so that they can record the information that you are about to give them.
4. Help the student learn to prepare for exam dates. For example, say to the class, "Remember, your midterm exam is next Wednesday. Write in your weekly planner to review for this exam on Monday and Tuesday.

5. Announce all tests, special projects, reading assignments, etc. at the beginning of each grading period and supervise students as they record these in their weekly planner.
6. Develop and display monthly calendars in class to keep track of important events such as test dates project due dates, assignments, and so on. This will allow a student with ADHD, who typically struggles with forgetfulness, to check whether he has recorded all important dates in his weekly planner.
7. Teach students to break down lengthy assignments, such as reading assignments, into small segments and then record those segments on appropriate days so that the entire assignment can easily be completed before the assigned end date.

Helping the student who has difficulty completing in-class and homework assignments

1. Allow the student to break lengthy assignments into more manageable parts. The teacher may need to assist in this process.
2. If the student can demonstrate mastery of a particular concept, consider reducing the size of the in-class assignment so that the student will be more likely to complete it within the allotted time. Repetition, though helpful for many students, may be counterproductive for the student with ADHD. Slow processing speed, motivational problems, and boredom proneness all work against the value of written repetition.
3. Allow the student with ADHD who writes slowly to either reduce the length of the assignment or to complete it at home. Be sure, however, that the combination of homework plus the completion of in-class assignments is not overwhelming for the student with ADHD.
4. When feasible, provide alternate assignments that allow the student to draw on his interests and strengths.
5. Allow the student to perform difficult assignments in an alternative fashion – for example, dictating for transcription or oral presentation.
6. Allow the student with poor handwriting and slow processing speed to write on a computer laptop in class.

Enhancing and promoting self-esteem

Although the organizational and learning challenges associated with ADHD can be significant, it is often low self-esteem that proves to be the most damaging aspect of ADHD over the long run. Due to countless incidences of embarrassment, criticisms from teachers and parents, and teasing remarks from peers, a student with ADHD often struggles increasingly with low self-esteem as he moves through middle and high school. It is essential that teachers be aware of this problem and take active steps to counteract such demoralization and expectation of failure.

1. Develop an understanding with the student with ADHD that you will not directly call on them in class if they demonstrate that they are listening and participating by raising their hand voluntarily from time to time to answer a question. (This helps to reduce the student's anxiety that he will be embarrassed in class if called upon when he hasn't been paying attention or can't quickly recall the appropriate answer.)
2. Word questions to the student with ADHD in a more general format. Due to a divergent (rather than convergent) thinking style, a student with ADHD may have considerable knowledge about a particular topic, but be unable to quickly retrieve a specific fact. By asking a more general question, the teacher allows the student to demonstrate what he *knows* rather than to demonstrate his inconsistent memory retrieval system.
3. Do not call on the student with ADHD as a means of testing his level of attentiveness. This will only serve to embarrass him and it will not be likely to result in better attending in the future.
4. Search for legitimate opportunities to provide positive feedback, rewards, and appreciation of the student's individual strengths.
5. Try to match the work to the student's ability, so that when he does well he can attribute his success to his own efforts rather than dismissing his success as being due to an easy assignment.

Helping the student with ADHD learn to successfully manage long-term projects

1. Instruct the student to create a folder that is labeled with the name of the project and closes with an elastic band so that nothing can fall out of the folder.
2. Provide written assignment sheets with the necessary information for each project and instruct the student to place the appropriate assignment sheet inside of the labeled folder for each project.

3. Establish due dates for successive parts of long-term assignments and make the student accountable for these intermediate due dates by requiring him to hand in intermediate work products. For example, for a paper, the student should be asked to hand in a paragraph describing his topic, then later an outline, a bibliography, a rough draft, and finally a finished product.
4. Written contracts can be helpful, in which the teacher specifies the dates and the amount of work which is expected to be presented on specific projects. The student should enter dates relating to the written contract into his weekly planner.

Accommodations for written language difficulty

1. Allow the student to dictate written assignments into a tape recorder and to have the work transcribed by a parent or paid typist.
2. Alternatively, if affordable, suggest to the student and his parents that they purchase software that allows the student to dictate directly to the computer. (Dragon Dictate and Naturally Speaking are two such software programs.)
3. When it is feasible to do so, allow the student to demonstrate his knowledge of classroom material through means other than regular classroom tests. This might include an oral examination in private with the teacher, a special report or project, or simply the opportunity to take a test in a different format.
4. Try to discriminate between knowledge of content areas and other skills such as written language skills when grading papers. A dual grade, one for content, one for “mechanics,” may be appropriate.

Reducing distractibility in the classroom

1. To reduce the impact of a student’s visual distractibility and visual confusion, notices and assignments on the chalk board should be printed neatly and clearly blocked off from the remainder of the board in a box.
2. To reduce problems with visual distractibility, the chalk board should be erased frequently and completely so that remnants of previous presentations are not left to distract and confuse the student as you begin another explanation.

3. Try to keep classroom noise at a minimum. Conversation among other students makes concentration for the student with ADHD nearly impossible.
4. Allow the student with ADHD to take his work to a quiet place outside of the classroom, such as the library or a study carrel. It is important to impress upon the student that this privilege can only be extended to him if he can demonstrate that he will use this opportunity responsibly.
5. Seat the student with ADHD away from peers or activities that may serve as auditory or visual distractors.

Testing accommodations

1. Tests are often taken more successfully in a quiet, non-distracting environment, outside of the regular classroom.
2. A computer should be made available for essay exams or in-class writing assignments, allowing the student to compensate for slow processing speed, poor handwriting, and poor organization skills.
3. Allow the student extended time on tests and examinations. This will serve the dual purpose of reducing anxiety (and thereby improving performance), as well as actually providing the student with more time to organize his thinking and put his thoughts on paper.
4. Scantron exams should be avoided, as well as any other type of exam that requires the student to transfer answers to a different sheet of paper. Under such testing formats, the test may be measuring careless errors as much as measuring knowledge.
5. When it is feasible to do so, allow the student to demonstrate his knowledge of classroom material through means other than regular tests. This might include an oral examination in private with the teacher, a special report or project, or simply the opportunity to take a test in a different format.
6. Try to arrange final examination schedules so that the student has only one major exam per day.

Physical Education and the Student with ADHD

Although physical education is not often thought of as a critical issue for students with ADHD, the knowledge and understanding of a physical education teacher or coach can be an important opportunity to enhance the self-esteem of a vulnerable student.

Good athletes with ADHD

Some students with ADHD are gifted in terms of gross motor skills and eye-hand coordination. In addition, hyperactivity may result in a nearly boundless level of energy. Such students are often excellent athletes. Their prowess may be the student's major source of self-esteem at school. The student's coach in such a case can be an invaluable ally, encouraging the student in his academic efforts. Coaches and PE teachers may be able to work cooperatively with other teachers in motivating athletes with ADHD.

Students with ADHD and coordination difficulties

Other students with ADHD may have both fine and gross motor problems, in addition to their academic difficulties. Often, these students have self-esteem problems of long standing. Because of their listening problems, they may not remember verbal instructions and may become confused about complicated game rules. It is essential that the PE teacher be aware of such a student's disabilities and that the teacher take care not to humiliate such a student in front of his peers when he is awkward or absent-minded. While athletics may never be a source of self-esteem for such a student, it is critical that the teacher take measures to prevent a physical education class from becoming a significant source of shame and humiliation.

Strategies for the Student for Managing ADHD

In class:

1. Sit in front near the teacher and away from friends who might tempt you into fooling around or talking.
2. Stay involved. Try to ask at least one question and take at least one page of notes in each class.
3. When you are lost, ask a question. Don't tell yourself you'll figure it out later, or that you're stupid for not understanding or that the work is unimportant or boring. If you're not sure what to do, find out! You'll soon be on your way to becoming a more successful student.
4. Try to get to class early rather than chatting in the hall with friends. This will give you time to find your homework, your notebook, your pen, etc.
5. If your grades have slipped ask teachers what you can do to improve them. Many teachers will allow make up work or give extra credit assignments to students who show that they want to do good work.

Being organized:

1. Keep all notes, quizzes and tests in one large three-ring binder. Use tabs to separate notes and papers from each class. In each section, put all new papers and notes on top. Take your binder to all classes and home every day. Do not store any papers in your textbooks.
2. In addition to the three-ring binder, get a two-pocket folder. Use this for homework. Label one side "WORK TO BE DONE" and label the other side "WORK TO BE TURNED IN." Also, put notices for your parents in the WORK TO BE DONE pocket so you'll remember to pass them along to your parents when you take out your "Work to be done" at night.
3. Use a calendar. Buy one with both a month-by-month section and a daily section. Use the monthly sections to plan longer projects and papers and to record exam dates. Use daily sections for regular homework, daily progress on long-term projects, and extra-curricular events. It's important to record events like family gatherings, sports, lessons, etc., so you can plan your study time around these other commitments.
4. Develop the daily habit of emptying out your backpack after school, throwing away outdated papers, handing papers to parents that need to be signed, and re-packing papers that need to be returned to school the next day. Supplies of pens, pencils, erasers, or paper should be checked and replenished at this time. You should have separate "at home" supplies so

that you do not “rob” your backpack and then risk forgetting to replace the necessary items.

5. If you don't have the assistance of a second set of books, you should organize yourself by automatically replacing books in your backpack after each class that assigns homework. If there is no homework in a particular class, the book goes on the locker shelf to wait for the next school day. All notebooks and the assignment book should be carried in the backpack at all times to reduce the likelihood of forgetting.

Homework

1. Work hard on your homework and it will become easier! Like sports, music, art, etc., the more effort you put out, the more fun practice is and the better your performance. Academics are the same way.
2. When you start your homework each night, spend ten (10) minutes updating your calendar and filing any papers returned that day in your binder. Keep a three-hole punch handy. Ask yourself what tests, quizzes and projects have been assigned.
3. Don't overlook late assignments. Whether you were sick or just forgot an assignment, often teachers will give some credit for late work.
4. If you own your textbooks, write in them! Avoid using a highlighting marker. Instead, use a pen. Circle important words. Write important ideas in the margins. Add details to maps or figures. Underline important ideas. Remember, you do not have to underline the whole sentence, just the important words.
5. When reading a textbook, use the questions to stay active. Find a heading and read that section (usually just a few paragraphs), then answer the question. Reading out loud helps some people stay focused.
6. When reading a novel, write a sentence or two at the end of each chapter to summarize the ideas. Keep these in a journal. Or, dictate the summaries into a tape recorder.
7. Study at optimal times. These times may vary from student to student. The chronic temptation is to procrastinate and then study late at night. This leads to sleep deprivation and less chance of concentrating in class the next day.
8. Learn to take “controlled breaks.” You will work most efficiently and effectively if you take a break when your concentration and motivation are low. The key word, however, is “controlled” break – stand up, stretch, walk around, get a drink or quick snack. You shouldn't take a break by watching TV or making a phone call, because your 5- minute break is likely to stretch to half an hour!

Tests and projects

- 1.** Pick some rewards to motivate yourself. Fit the size of the reward to the amount of work. Learn to reward yourself for a job well done so that you can have things to look forward to when the work is difficult.
- 2.** With long assignments like papers, set deadlines along the way like finishing research, writing an outline and writing a rough draft. Have someone else read your draft (it's best if your teacher will do this).
- 3.** Make flashcards to study vocabulary (English or foreign languages), dates, important names, etc. When you've learned all the definitions, flip the cards and practice saying the word from the definition.
- 4.** Ask your teacher if you can tape record class review sessions. Listen to the tape later when studying.
- 5.** On tests, focus on checking your work with extra time. If extra credit problems are included, review your test at least twice before spending time on extra credit. Usually you save more points by checking your work than by doing difficult bonus items.

How Parents Can Help

Parents play a crucial role in helping their adolescent with ADHD learn the life skills and academic skills to succeed as independent adults. The various roles that parents should play are briefly outlined here. It is essential that parents educate themselves about ADHD and the supports their middle and high school student needs from his parents to succeed. We have listed a number of resources at the end of this guide to help parents more fully inform themselves about how they can help.

Create an ADHD-friendly family

One of the most supportive approaches that a parent can take during middle and high school years is to create an ADHD-friendly home – one that becomes a safe haven for their adolescent who must deal with stress and numerous challenges during the course of each day. An ADHD-friendly home is one that deals with ADHD in a constructive, problem-solving fashion. It is one in which ADHD foibles are accepted and met with humor. It is one in which a parent with ADHD (Yes, most teens with ADHD have at least one parent with ADHD!) serves as a positive role model and mentor. It is a place of acceptance and encouragement.

Seek professional support

There are a broad range of professionals in the community who can play a variety of roles in helping a teenager with ADHD. These include psychotherapists, counselors, psychiatrists, other physicians, tutors, ADHD coaches, and specialized college counselors. Parents can play a vital role by carefully researching and finding the best resources to help their son or daughter.

Participate in treatment (when appropriate)

Often, it can be very helpful for one or both parents to participate in counseling or psychotherapy with their teenager with ADHD. In this way, the student and his parents can all become educated about ADHD and how best to manage it. When parents are involved in treatment, the therapist or counselor has an opportunity to help the family problem solve and develop strategies that will suit both the student and his parents.

Provide structure and support at home

Not all students with ADHD are alike and not all ADHD management strategies are helpful for a particular student. It may be best to develop strategies for homework, chores, nutrition, sleep, driving privileges, curfew, etc. with the help of an ADHD counselor or therapist.

Tutoring

If the resources of the school do not allow the provision of a tutor to work on study skills and organizational skills, the students' parents should consider hiring a private tutor who is highly experienced in working with teens with ADHD to help develop these essential skills. It is our experience that short-term study skills courses are not very helpful for the student with ADHD. Instead of a short-term course, teens with ADHD typically benefit more from consistent, regular, long-term help keyed to homework that will allow them to gradually develop better "executive functions."

Some parents attempt to fulfill the tutoring role themselves. While this may work in some cases, in our experience, few parents are trained to teach the study and organizational skills that are needed, and few teens welcome parental tutoring. Working with a professional, with whom one is not in conflict over other issues, can allow the student to focus on the skills being taught rather than becoming caught up in disagreements and conflict with a parent whose close supervision may be resented.

Consequences and rewards

When extra motivation is needed, it is appropriate for the parents to maintain a home point system for the teenager with ADHD. Under a point system, the teenager can earn privileges based upon specific and regular feedback from his or her teachers. Points can also be earned on the basis of completion of chores, completion of homework, or other desired behaviors that are agreed upon by the parent and teen. Short-term, immediate rewards (rewards that can be enjoyed on the same day, or rewards that can be enjoyed during the upcoming week-end) are typically more effective in motivating a teen's behavior than long-term rewards such as a privilege at the end of a grading period.

How Professionals Can Help

Counseling

High school years are among the most challenging years for students with ADHD. Often, a student with ADHD will benefit from focused, specialized counseling that helps to educate the student about exactly how he is impacted by ADHD and what strategies can be helpful in managing ADHD symptoms. The four years of high school are years in which the student with ADHD should gradually take over more and more responsibility for managing daily life; otherwise, he'll be ill-prepared to function independently in college or in the work force.

Practical, focused solution-oriented counseling can be very helpful as a student struggles to learn to manage his time, to prioritize his activities, to set and meet goals, and to begin the complicated process of applying to college.

Group therapy

Adolescence is a time of intense focus on oneself in relation to one's peers, a time of asking, "Who am I?", "Where do I fit in?", and "What am I going to do with my life?" Typically, adolescents with ADHD struggle with frustration and with low self-esteem. Often, a therapy group that brings adolescents with ADHD together, to share feelings, compare experiences, and problem solve, can be a highly therapeutic experience. In a group, teens can support one another and gain a sense of normalcy that they may rarely feel during the course of a typical school day.

Medication

Most children with ADHD benefit from stimulant medication. As we learn more about ADHD, the range of medications that are helpful in treating ADHD is growing. Unfortunately, inaccurate myths about stimulant medication persist. It is essential that teachers, counselors and administrators in secondary schools are aware that:

- 1. Medication is effective in adolescence and adulthood.** Misunderstandings still persist regarding medication, with some parents and even teachers believing that stimulant medication is primarily used for the treatment of children. We now know that ADHD is a lifespan disorder and that stimulant medication is helpful to individuals with ADHD at any age.
- 2. Medication is effective with non-hyperactive students.** Many people have the misimpression that stimulant medication is only appropriate for those who are hyperactive. In fact, stimulant medication is very helpful in treating the executive problems of ADHD, helping non-hyperactive students to focus more effectively, to listen better, plan better, and follow through more consistently.

- 3. Medication during the school day.** Until a number of years ago, students with ADHD who took stimulant medication were required to take a mid-day dose. This led to significant complications because students had to walk to the office of the school nurse to obtain their mid-day dose of medication and then return to class, often arriving late, which proved embarrassing to the student and frustrating to the teacher. Today, the great majority of students who take stimulant medication are prescribed long-acting stimulants which do not require a mid-day dose.

Even today, with long-acting stimulants widely available, there may be some circumstances under which a student might need to take medication at school. This might be true for students who are “rapid metabolizers”, resulting in their long-acting stimulant only lasting for 7 to 8 hours rather than 10-12 hours. Some students involved in after-school activities may need to take a second dose of short-acting stimulant medication to allow them to focus well during athletic practice or other after-school activities as well as to focus on homework when they arrive home later in the afternoon.

ADHD coaching

ADHD coaching is a profession that has grown out of executive coaching in recent years. As there is not yet any universally recognized credential for an ADHD coach, it is important to get references and recommendations from someone who has personal knowledge of any coach that you consider hiring to work with a high school student.

In a few very innovative high schools, school counselors have been trained to function as ADD coaches. In most cases, however, an ADHD coach will need to be privately hired by a family to work with a high school student with ADHD.

A coach works with a high school student to help them with the pragmatics of daily life. Coaches focus on time management skills, on using day planners to plan and prioritize daily activities, to help students set reasonable goals and then meet them, and to generally develop improved daily living habits (sleep, nutrition, exercise) and daily life management skills (laundry, room organizing, homework management, and money management).

Coaching will only be effective for students who are motivated to make changes and take charge of their ADHD symptoms. A coach provides structure, support and accountability – talking with the student once a week or more often, and communicating by email as well as they set goals, devise strategies and then problem-solve if strategies are not successful.

If a student does not seem ready for coaching, often a best first step is to engage in counseling. A specially trained ADHD counselor can help a student begin to better understand ADHD, to stop the cycle of shame and self-blame, and to begin to feel hopeful that he can begin to function better both in school and in his daily life.

Study skills training

Some ADHD coaches are also educators who can work with a student to improve his academic performance. Most often, however, a specially trained academic tutor is best to work with a high school student with ADHD to develop better study skills, to learn memory techniques, to learn how to efficiently read and outline text, and to improve writing skills.

Even students who have done relatively well in earlier grades can greatly benefit from this sort of focused academic training. Often, bright students with ADHD have sailed through earlier grades with taking advantage of their high IQ, never really learning effective study skills. Often, these students reach a point, in high school or college, when their “smarts” alone can’t carry them. Without help in learning how to read, write and study effectively, a student’s grades may plummet with the result that the student is not accepted to a competitive college, or is not able to meet the demands of college once he is enrolled.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that we have known about ADHD for many years, and have developed a broad range of supports for students with ADHD at the elementary school level, it remains true that middle and high schools have yet to consistently offer appropriate supports to help students with ADHD succeed.

Most public middle and high schools, as they currently are structured, are high risk environments for students with ADHD. They place an enormous demand upon students for independence, organization and planning. At the same time, secondary level courses require ever increasing ability to attend, concentrate, organize and remember new, varied and complex information.

In college, the student with ADHD will have options open to him such as a reduced course load, early registration privileges, note takers in class, and extended time on all tests. Such accommodations are rarely available to secondary school students with ADHD. It is important that teachers and administrators recognize that these years are possibly the most challenging, overwhelming and potentially failure-producing years faced by a student with ADHD. At minimum, they deserve the same level of supports that are available to their college level counterparts.

Adolescence is a critical period of building academic and life management skills so that teens are adequately prepared to function independently in college or in the work force. Great expectations are placed on students during these years; however, those with ADHD are ill-suited to meet those expectations. Their maturity level is often well below that of their peers, and their dysregulated arousal systems and under-active pre-frontal lobes leave them unable to meet the demands of secondary school without treatment and accommodations. In order to succeed in secondary school, these students need an integrated, active system of supports provided by parents, teachers, counselors, physicians, psychotherapists, tutors and ADHD coaches. Without such supports, many students with ADHD are falling through the cracks – earning low grades, becoming demoralized, engaging in high risk behaviors and never reaching their potential.

This brief guide proposes a range of approaches and strategies that can be implemented by school personnel, parents, professionals in the community, and the student to manage the challenges of ADHD and to function better academically and in daily life.

It is our hope that school personnel will use this guide to begin to think about developing school-wide and system-wide supports for middle and high school students with ADHD. Parents are encouraged to use this guide as they work with their child's teachers and counselors to develop an Individual Educational Plan or 504 Plan to meet the student's academic needs. With communication and cooperation between the student, his parents, professionals in the community and school personnel, students with ADHD can build confidence and skills during secondary school years that will prepare them for success as they enter adult life.