

ADHD at School: Hyperactivity Help

Strategies for harnessing ADHD hyperactivity in the classroom.

by ADDitude Editors

Many children with attention deficit disorder (ADD/ADHD) are in constant motion. In school, they squirm in their seats, jiggle their feet, tap their pencils, and talk incessantly. They might even get up and roam around the classroom. One recent study of boys with ADHD found they moved about the room eight times as often as other boys, and made twice as many arm motions.

Hyperactive behavior isn't a choice, but an expression of a brain-based biological disorder. Hyperactive children also have problems with impulse control - among other things, they can't resist the impulse to move. You can tell them to sit still or stop fidgeting or talking, but within minutes they'll be at it again.

The best way to help? Channel excess energy into constructive activities, or provide ample opportunities for kids to burn it off.

Solutions

In the Classroom

- **Keep in mind that a child with ADHD may lag in social maturity.** Even if he's on target academically, think of him as being two years younger than his classmates - and work with him accordingly.
- **Build in movement throughout the school day.** In kindergarten and first grade, get the whole class stretching, jogging in place, and singing songs accompanied by hand and body motions. With older students, create opportunities for ADHD students to move around. Have them hand out supplies, collect papers, and deliver messages to the school office. Responsibilities like these help kids feel special while allowing them to blow off steam.
- **Alternate high- and low-energy lessons.** Follow a spirited music class with a period of creative writing. Schedule a subject that requires great concentration - such as math - after recess or physical education.
- **Provide alternatives to the standard classroom seat.** Some children do better work if they're allowed to move while doing their lessons; not having to focus on keeping still frees up energy for learning. Have them stand at raised tables at the back of the classroom, or allow them to pace quietly while thinking through a problem. During literature or free reading, let students sit on pillows, in armchairs, or on the floor.
- **Recognize the breaking point.** Even if you've provided ample downtime between lessons, some ADHD children can be still for only a short time. If you sense that a student is reaching his limit, let him get up to stretch his legs - even in the middle of a test.

At Home

- **Acknowledge your child's need to move.** Allow her to take a quick break from the dinner table to get rid of surplus energy - and to rejoin the family when she's able. Use the same strategy at sporting events, religious services, and other settings that require kids to sit still for extended periods.
- **Encourage physical activity before school.** Have your child take the dog for an early morning run or ride her bike to school. Inclement weather? Jumping rope or bouncing a ball provides a great energy release.
- **Get a rocking chair -- the rhythm can be calming.** Place it in a quiet spot where your child can sit to read. If he's a serious squirmer, try Disc 'O' Sit, an inflatable 12-inch cushion that lets a child wiggle while sitting at a desk or table (\$21, abilitations.com).

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