



Winning Remote Learning Strategies for Teaching Kids with ADHD

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For teachers, supporting students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is nothing new, as research points out that anywhere from 3-7% of the student population arrives on campus with it. Every school year, educators utilize a variety of tried-and-true methods to support them, many of which are highly individualized to the student and their specific needs. But when kids are at home learning through a screen, how do teachers reach this special population of children, who often need hands-on approaches in a learning environment that is anything but?

If you're a teacher or a parent of a child with ADHD, you probably already know that this school year has been a learning curve for everyone involved. To understand how to help these children thrive in an online learning environment, it's important to understand how virtual classes change the usual supports and accommodations that kids with ADHD receive in the classroom. Let's take a closer look at how online affects these students

and their accommodations, before exploring strategies for teaching kids with ADHD in remote classes.

How to Teach Kids with ADHD: How Has Virtual Learning Changed Things?

As you may already know, educators have all sorts of tricks up their sleeves to engage and support their students with ADHD in the face-to-face classroom. These children are ordinarily on what is known as a 504 plan, per the U.S. Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This law legally ensures that kids are treated fairly in school and are provided with accommodations to help them be as successful as their peers.

Some of the most common accommodations include:

- Preferential seating and frequent breaks

Sometimes kids with ADHD work better in a specific spot in the classroom, sometimes nearest the teacher, but at other times in a location that may enable them to stand up or fidget when needed. Preferential seating strategies may also include alternative seating options, such as sitting on exercise balls. Frequent breaks from work also allow the student to refocus and move around to help keep them engaged and on task.

- Extended time on assignments, projects, and tests

Children with ADHD often need extra time in the classroom because the nature of their condition disrupts their ability to focus for long periods of time. If kids need frequent breaks, they must certainly be offered the extra time to complete their assignments to account for the time lost.

- Positive reinforcement and reminders to stay on task

It's easy to become disengaged and frustrated when a child struggles with focus and completing learning tasks. Positive reinforcement (such as praise, or a reward system) and subtle reminders are great ways to keep someone with ADHD focused.

By now, it might be obvious that these strategies may be difficult to implement in the online learning environment. While children can certainly still receive extended time on their assignments, others, such as preferential seating, and even reminders to stay on task are impossible over a teleconferencing app. Not only do teachers lose the ability to seat children strategically and monitor them over the space of class time, but verbal reminders can serve as obtrusive efforts that calls attention to him/her in front of the entire class, causing embarrassment.

Besides these more official accommodations, classroom teachers have also been implementing changes into their lesson plans to help students with ADHD. Some of these changes include incorporating engaging technology, such as this study suggests. In-class technology, such as using interactive quizzes, polling apps, or games can help children multi-task and remain engaged in the lesson while they learn. Thankfully, such distance learning strategies that are used in the face-to-face classroom, hold promising potential for use in fully remote classes.



Teaching Strategies for Remote Classrooms

While many of the widely accepted accommodations for students with ADHD become obsolete in the online learning environment, there are ways to adapt them, as well as new methods that are designed with remote learning in mind. When planning to support these students in remote classes, consider the following:

- Adapt strategies for a variety of learning styles

We already know that just like us, all students are their own individuals who learn differently. Plan lessons with variety in mind, to determine which learning styles are present within your class and your students. For instance, many children are visual learners, and may benefit from tasks that are rich with images and diagrams. Others may benefit from listening to soft music while they work independently, as it keeps their mind

stimulated while they complete assignments. The key here is to get to know the students and to differentiate based upon their individual needs.

- Speak with parents about fidgets and alternative seating ideas

In the classroom, some students are given or allowed to hold fidget toys, which give them a way to self-regulate their movements and stay focused. Other children may be seated in exercise balls or are allowed to stand when needed. Sometimes families do not know about all of the different accommodations that are given to kids once out of their care and in the classroom. Reach out to parents and discuss their child's needs should a fidget toy or special seating be necessary. Give parents some ideas for what can be used that they may already have in the home.

- Work in some wiggle time

All children, especially the youngest, need some time to wiggle and move about! Even in the absence of a condition such as ADHD, all kids need frequent brain breaks, and an opportunity to get up move their bodies to keep their focus sharp when engaged in learning. To keep your virtual class engaged and motivated, schedule in frequent breaks that will help all students throughout each session!

Plan ahead to find the perfect spot for small pauses and instruct students to get up from their chairs to perform some special moves. Tell them to stand up, touch their heads, wiggle their arms, and anything that you can think of to get them to move! Not only will this help to keep children motivated, but they will also love seeing each other being silly on camera!

- Break up projects into smaller chunks

This strategy, commonly referred to as "chunking" is a common technique implemented all the way through high school. The idea is to present students with the "big picture" of a project so they know the end product before breaking up the steps into small, manageable chunks. This prevents discouragement as children are often overwhelmed when presented with a large assignment. This can be used with an entire class, or it is possible to break up any assignment that an instructor sees fit into smaller parts for students with ADHD.

- Create firm schedules and be consistent

Something that many children with ADHD commonly struggle with is with time management and organization of materials and assignments. Online classes seem to be highly structured, as they have a firm start and stop time, but the space of time during the teleconference itself is what needs to be managed to help keep kids focused and attentive.

Of course, how many meetings that are scheduled throughout the school day is often dictated by individual campuses or districts, it's also possible to break down each session by planning ahead for specific activities, breaks, and transitions. Create a common routine and online classroom procedures, just as would for the face-to-face classroom.

- Take what works in the classroom and adapt it for online learning

Sometimes all teachers need to do is think of what they would ordinarily do in the classroom, and think about how that strategy, activity, or lesson could work in an online environment instead. Last spring, when much of the US pivoted to online learning, educators were understandably stressed with the difficult task of learning how to teach in a much different way that is unlike anything they have ever been trained to do!

This year, educators have begun to adapt strategies for remote classes, many of which are based upon the familiar methods. For instance, if a child with ADHD is ordinarily allowed to stand and fidget at his or her seat in the classroom, reach out to that student and their family to discuss how that can be done for home. Perhaps all that is needed is a simple adjustment of the laptop camera when that child stands up, or even a few moments to turn the camera off.

Understandably, it can seem quite challenging to support students who have special needs in the online learning environment. Teaching online makes it all the more difficult for teachers to observe and monitor students, let alone manage their ADHD accommodations. Fortunately, there are strategies that teachers can use to support their students, even when some of their usual accommodations have been rendered obsolete. Try the above methods to reach your kids and to support them through each and every Zoom lesson.

