

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES FOR CHILDREN WITH ADHD AND OPPOSITIONALITY

Compiled by Child Study Center Psychology Department

GENERAL PRINCIPLES:

1. Rules should be brief and clear. Children follow rules better when they are written on signs, posters, and cards or on audio tapes. It helps to repeat the rules before the child begins working in the new situation, e.g., reminding the child of the expectations for the lunchroom immediately prior to lunchtime.
2. Rewards and punishments should be delivered quickly and immediately after the child behaves or misbehaves. Most young children cannot wait until the end of the day to be rewarded. Children in middle grades need daily reinforcement rather than weekly. Children must be in junior high or middle school before they can wait as long as a week for incentives.
3. Avoid repeating or lengthy reasoning. Lectures and nagging don't work. Talking too much about the misbehavior is one of the most common behavior management errors.
4. **ACT, DON'T YACK!** Immediately intervene with a consequence or limit rather than giving repeated verbal threats or injunctions.
5. Feedback (telling the child how s/he is doing) and consequences (rewards and punishments) need to be frequently delivered.
6. Rewards in the classroom can be the opportunity to do something the child really likes, such as games, computer time, comic books, or Nintendo. "You may play on the computer as soon as I have your completed worksheet." The rewards can be on a menu of desired activities so one reward isn't overused. Rewards should be free or very inexpensive.
7. Rewards for appropriate behavior should be given to the child before you start using punishment. Rewards should be used at least twice as often as punishment. Catch 'em being good rather than point out all the negatives.
8. Reinforcers need to be changed frequently, usually with consultation with the child. How often can you play the same game and it still be fun?
9. Establish a ranking of punishments from weak to strong, ranging from time-out with head down to suspension from school. The child should understand what will happen after the next misbehavior; a written list of the punishment hierarchy can be helpful.
10. Response cost is a form of punishment consisting of the loss of something positive for failure to respond appropriately (e.g., talking out costs 5 points). Logical consequences involve being

responsible for making restitution (e.g., scrubbing a desk after coloring on it.) Response cost and logical consequences make sense to children.

11. It is important to plan ahead for changes or transitions across activities or classes. Warn a child what to expect, e.g., “You have 10 more minutes to finish your math paper before it is time to go outside.”
12. A daily behavior report card should be used to coordinate home and school consequences for appropriate behavior. Daily feedback is helpful in maintaining a child’s appropriate behavior.
13. Children usually like it when adults pay attention to them, so use this as a reward; smiling, nodding, or use of a warm tone of voice to respond to appropriate behavior. You may also tell children that you are delighted to be able to tell their parents about their positive behavior.
14. A token economy system with chips or points that are traded later for rewards may serve as concrete reinforcement which can be given frequently.
15. Rewards can be for one child or a group of children; for example, “Everyone can watch the end of the World Series game as soon as the classroom passes my inspection.” This builds a team spirit of cooperation.
16. Home-based reward and punishment programs for school behavior are cost-effective. The teacher awards chips or points on the child’s daily behavior report card, and the parents provide the rewards or punishment. Be sure the parent will be conscientious about sticking with the program.
17. Ignoring (extinguishing) an undesirable behavior is usually not sufficient to stop significant classroom misbehavior. Typically, the behaviors are so disruptive or elicit so much attention from classmates that the misbehavior is reinforced. Therefore, other techniques should be used.
18. Reprimands should be immediate, unemotional, consistent, brief, and delivered early in the sequence of misbehavior. An intervention immediately after the child starts misbehaving works much better than after it has continued for a while.
19. It is important that it be easier to earn tokens/points than it is to lose them. Children should be rewarded three times as often as they are punished. It is OK to rig the reward system so this occurs.

20. In-school suspension (e.g., breakfast club or Saturday school) for significantly undesirable behaviors is more effective than out-of-school suspension. Kids may have more fun at home than school by having access to TV and Nintendo.
21. Consider preferential seating near the teacher for disruptive children.
22. ADHD children do best in organized, highly structured, and predictable classrooms with a warm and accepting teaching style.
23. Post the classroom schedule and behavioral rules prominently.
24. Minimize potential distractions in the classroom.
25. Allow breaks as needed; ADHD children cannot sustain concentration as long as ordinary children.

ACADEMIC SUGGESTIONS:

26. Increase the novelty of tasks by the use of color, shape, texture, and animated teacher presentation. Alternate low-interest/passive tasks with high-interest/active tasks. Also, it may help to alternate high and low-difficulty tasks to avoid overwhelming the child's frustration tolerance.
27. Assignments should be brief or broken into shorter units. The amount and accuracy quota should be reduced by 30% from what is expected of the average student. An ADHD student may do every other problem or spelling word or write a paragraph or outline rather than a long report.
28. Give one instruction at a time. Provide immediate feedback regarding accuracy and ensure that the child has understood the directions and is doing the work correctly. If your time is limited, monitor the first few problems, rather than at the end of the lesson.
29. Inform the child of time limits for completion of the work. A timer provides external structure and impetus to complete the work.
30. Involve an ADHD child in frequent and active participation. Have the child stand at the blackboard writing down classmates' suggestions. Have him/her pass out materials; this also provides an opportunity to praise the child.
31. Many individuals with ADHD have difficulty with written output. They may benefit from such strategies as multiple-choice or short answer format rather than essay tests, word processing and editing on the computer, voice recognition software, dictation to a tape recorder or person, oral response rather than handwriting, shortened written work, additional time when writing is required, and receiving copies of instructions.

32. As much as possible, academic classes should be scheduled in the morning. Schedule PE, art, and music in the late morning or afternoon.
33. Work out a signal, preferably nonverbal and unobtrusive, to remind the child to get back to work.
34. Determine the child's typical attention span and give praise for on-task behavior at intervals slightly shorter than that. For instance, if a child generally maintains attention for 5 minutes, praise the child at approximately 4-minute intervals.
35. Monitor medication response and note changes or side-effects and report these to the parents or physician. Communicate what you observe about the child's behavior but avoid giving medical advice such as "Stop the medicine" or "Your child has to go on Ritalin."
36. If you have any reason to think the physician prescribing the medication is not getting correct feedback on its effects, get permission to communicate with the doctor or nurse directly. This can be a written note, behavior rating questionnaire, or telephone call.
37. Encourage parents to communicate with you frequently; make them part of the committee looking for the solution, rather than viewing them as the problem. This is particularly important if they are not cooperative. Remember the adage, "It is better to have someone on the boat than on the shore throwing rocks."
38. If a parent is disruptive to the class or is very critical, designate someone other than the teacher as their sounding board, e.g., vice-principal, psychologist, counselor, etc.
39. Remember that ADHD children need more structure and guidance at every age and grade level than do ordinary children, even if the ADHD child takes medication. Medication does not usually remove all the organizational difficulties associated with ADHD.
40. A weekly locker or desk clean-out to search for missing materials/assignments should be facilitated by the teacher, typically on Friday.
41. Academic performance should not be overly penalized for lateness in determining the final grade.