

5 Essential Accommodations In The Classroom for Students with ADHD



In any given class, chances are that there are one or more students with ADHD present. That is hardly surprising. Between 3 and 5% of children have this neurodiversity.

When I studied to become a teacher, ADHD was still very much looked upon as a deficiency.

But students with ADHD are not less intelligent or capable than other students. Their brain works differently. To enable these students to fulfill their full potential, some accommodations are necessary.

Students with ADHD Are Not The Only Ones That Need

Accommodations

If we are completely honest, most of us need accommodations in some form or another to function at our best. When I write on this blog, for instance, I always arrange my workspace in a certain way. This is an accommodation that enables me to be as productive as possible.

Our students are no different. The only difference is what kind of accommodations a specific student needs.

Some accommodations I used for students with ADHD worked quite well. Also for my neurotypical students.

Before we come to the list, we want to look at some challenges that children with ADHD might face in the classroom.

What Unique Challenges Do Students with ADHD Face in The Classroom?

Attention regulation

One of the main symptoms of ADHD is the difficulty to regulate attention. That does not mean that children with ADHD can not focus at all. It usually means that it is difficult for them to direct their attention and focus to where it is needed.

Take an important example. In any environment, you have some “background noise”. Sounds or visual inputs, that have little to do with what you are engaging in.

My laptop, for instance, always makes some noise. From my window, I can hear cars or nature sounds. Or people are passing by my office door.

Usually, our brain learns to filter out these distractions. But students with ADHD often struggle with this. They will not only pick up these clues, but often their brain directs them to respond to these stimuli.

Motivation

Another issue that students with ADHD often struggle with is to keep motivation up. They will lose interest in your boring lesson faster. Yes, admit it. Sometimes our lessons are boring.

The brain’s motivation and reward system is activated by the release of dopamine. The problem is, that many learning activities do not release

dopamine in the short term.

When I play guitar, for instance, I always need to practice my scales. Which is incredibly boring. I am not getting a dopamine hit out of it. But I must force myself to get on with it if I want to be a successful guitar player in the long run.

Hyperactivity

Some, but not all children with ADHD also present with hyperactivity. They cannot seem to sit still. Often I have observed students with ADHD taking on very 'exotic' seating positions.

Or they will frequently change position. When it is break time, they often seem to be much more energetic than their peers. They attempt to climb all sorts of structures. Or they pace around the school corridors without ever stopping.

Sometimes, they are more likely to get into physical confrontations. Both with their peers and their teachers.

Impulsivity

Another major symptom is impulsivity. Students with ADHD will often say whatever comes to their minds at this instant. Or they follow whichever urge presents itself.

If they come to think of something that might be in their schoolbag, they will look for it. Even if that item has nothing to do with the activity they are supposed to be doing.

Or they might engage in seemingly random activities. Which have nothing to do with the social context they are in.

Now, we all struggle with these things from time to time. But students with ADHD struggle with these issues most of the time. But there are a lot of things we teachers can do to lift them.

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Some of the accommodations come in the form of equipment or devices, that can make a positive impact. Others refer to ways we can manage and organize our classrooms to make life a bit easier for students with ADHD.

Timers

Timers are a great tool, not only for students with ADHD. When we use timers, we set an artificial interval for ourselves, where our brain stays on track.

I even use the Pomodoro technique myself, when I write. And I found that it benefits many of my students as well. With timers, you can also break up your activity into more manageable chunks. Even on a good day, 45 minutes is quite a bit to chew off for most students.

Feel free to experiment with the intervals. One of the best timers is the Time Timer because it also visualizes the remaining time in a bright, red color. But I have used regular egg timers with success as well.

Music

Over the years I found that many of my students with ADHD seemed to work much better if they could listen to music. So it is worth an investment into a decent pair of noise-canceling headphones. That way, the students can listen to music without disturbing their peers.

Naturally, this should only apply, when the students are working on their own.

As for genre, I usually tried to find fitting music together with my students. But in most cases, some low-fi beats or even classical music works very well.

Fidget Toys

When the teacher is running the show from the board, fidget toys are indispensable.

for ADHD students, the fidget toy will engage the student's attention.

But just enough so they can direct their remaining attention on what they need to focus on. Jessica McCabe made a great video on this.

Of course, that means we as teachers need to say goodbye to the false assumption that the students are not focused when they are fidgeting.

I recommend something that is not too distracting for the other students. Fidget spinners are great for the purpose.

Keeping Environmental Stimuli at A Minimum

Many teachers feel compelled to plaster our classrooms with informational learning posters. We also like to put all sorts of gimmicks on our desks. I have been guilty of that as well.

In recent years, I have minimized this a lot. This is because these posters act as visual stimuli. Too many of these kinds of stimuli can make it more difficult for students to focus. Instead, I kept my posters in a drawer or bag and only took them out when I needed them.

In general, I tried to minimize outside stimuli where I could. Like keeping my classroom door closed at all times during a lesson.

Adjusting the blinders, so you don't see everyone walking by the window.

In some cases, I even offered students to wear headphones when working on their tasks on their own. And I tried to keep only the essentials on my desk as well.

That does not mean I cannot decorate my classroom. This brings me to my last tip.

Nature

Research has shown, that exposure to nature can improve ADHD symptoms. This entire issue warrants an article on its own.

But how about bringing some nature into the classroom? Even a few plants can make a significant difference.

I also found, that pictures with nature motives also had a calming effect on my students. We should give our students more green time. Again, this can benefit all your students. Again, I will reference Jessica's great video on her channel How To ADHD.

Conclusion

I hope you found this article and the tips helpful. I will just sum up the five essential accommodations, that I found to make a great difference.

1. Use timers to break up your lesson into manageable chunks and help your students keep their focus on track.
2. Listening to calm music can significantly boost your student's

ability to focus and keep attention to their activities.

3. Fidget toys are indispensable, as they capture just enough attention to enable your student's to direct the remaining focus on what is going on.
4. Reducing outside stimuli means that your student's brain does not need to work as hard at filtering out unnecessary distractions.
5. Decorating with plants giving students 'green time' can significantly improve ADHD symptoms.

Let me know, if you have other tips you would like to share.

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