

Behaviour strategies for ADHD

Behaviour strategies focus on teaching your child the skills she needs to increase her cooperative behaviour and reduce her challenging behaviour.

You can start learning about and using these strategies even if you're still waiting for an official diagnosis for your child.

Clear verbal instructions

Your child will find it easier to behave well if he has a good understanding of what you want him to do. Clear, easy-to-follow verbal instructions with demonstrations will help. You can help your child to follow verbal instructions by:

- Keeping instructions clear and brief, with the shortest number of steps
- Showing your child what to do – for example, 'Please pick up the clothes from the floor and hang them up in the cupboard'
- Keeping eye contact with your child
- Asking your child to repeat instructions back to you to make sure he has understood.

Tiredness levels

All children find it easier to behave well if they're not tired. You can stop your child from getting too tired by:

- Providing healthy food options for longer-lasting energy and concentration
- Building rest breaks into activities
- Doing learning tasks like reading or homework, and then doing some physical exercise for a little while
- Being ready with a few fun but low-key activities like picture or sticker books – your child can do these if she starts to get overexcited
- Getting your child into good sleep habits, like getting to sleep and waking up at much the same time each day
- Keeping screen time to a minimum during the day and making sure all electronic devices are switched off at least an hour before bed.

Regular, predictable routines

Routines help children feel safe and secure, which can encourage good behaviour. You can set up routines and handle changes by:

- Talking to your child about his daily schedule. You can also ask teachers if they can keep a copy of the school schedule where your child can see it
- Using lists, pictures of your child's routines and/or timetables
- Letting your child know in advance about changes – for example, 'In five minutes, you'll need to brush your teeth and get ready for bed'
- Limiting the number of choices your child has to make – for example, instead of saying, 'It's time to get dressed. What do you want to wear?', you could say, 'It's time to get dressed. Do you want the green t-shirt or the red one?'

Social skills

Children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) might need a bit of extra help learning to get along with other children. You can help your child develop social skills by:

- Rewarding her for helpful behaviour like sharing and being gentle with others
- Teaching her strategies to use if there's a problem with another child – for example, walking away or talking to a teacher
- Teaching her how to keep an eye on her own behaviour, using a short prompt like 'Stop, think, do'.

Praise for positive behaviour

Praise, encouragement and rewards for positive behaviour will make this behaviour more likely to happen again. You could try:

- Getting your child involved in activities where he's likely to go well
- Making a big deal when he does go well, even if it's just a small success to start with – for example, 'You finished that entire page of homework. You must feel so proud!'
- Going over the highlights for your child at the end of each day. You can also talk through things he might have had trouble with.

In the classroom

You could talk with your child's teacher about:

- Dividing tasks into smaller chunks
- Offering one-on-one help whenever possible
- Giving your child a 'buddy' who can help her understand what to do
- Planning the classroom so that children with special needs are seated near the front of the room and away from distractions
- Making a visual checklist of tasks that need to be finished
- Doing more difficult learning tasks in the mornings or after breaks
- Allowing some extra time to finish tasks.

To get the support your child needs for any learning, language and physical problems at school, you might need to 'speak up' for your child. This could involve talking to your child's classroom teacher, the principal, the special needs support officer or teacher and others about special programs, funding and other help for your child.

Schools can help by setting out these support plans in your child's individual learning plan. The school should also work with you to set and review your child's goals in regular support group meetings.