

SEND & INCLUSION · GRADES 1–6

ADHD Strategies

For the mainstream classroom

What ADHD actually is

ADHD is not a 'lack of attention.' It's a difference in how the brain regulates attention. ADHD brains can hyperfocus for hours on something interesting — and find it genuinely impossible to focus on something boring. The core differences are: • Trouble starting tasks (especially boring ones) • Trouble sustaining effort over time • Working memory differences • Difficulty regulating emotion (often forgotten — but huge) • Time blindness (15 minutes feels the same as 2 hours) It's roughly 5-7% of children. Mostly genetic. Often runs in families. Often missed in girls.

What ADHD looks like in class

Inattentive (often missed in girls) Daydreaming. Slow to start tasks. Loses things. Doesn't seem to listen even when spoken to directly. Misses instructions. Easily distracted.	Hyperactive/impulsive Can't stay seated. Fidgets, taps, hums. Talks excessively. Blurts out answers. Interrupts. Acts before thinking.
Combined (most common) Both inattentive AND hyperactive features. The classic 'ADHD' picture, but actual children rarely fit textbook descriptions cleanly.	Emotional regulation Often missed. ADHD brains feel emotions intensely and recover slowly. A small upset becomes a big one. Often labelled as 'attention-seeking' when it's actually neurology.

What helps — environment

Strategy	Why
Front-and-centre seating, near you	Easier to redirect; you can see early signs of drift
Away from windows, doors, busy displays	Reduces external distractions



Strategy	Why
A 'workstation' with sides if needed	Visual focus channel
Movement allowed (standing, wobble cushion)	Stillness IS the problem, not the solution
Clear, decluttered desk	External order helps internal order

What helps — instructions

Strategy	Why
One instruction at a time	Working memory limits
Use the child's name first, then instruct	Get attention before content
Repeat key instructions in writing	Auditory memory failed; visual catches it
'Show me you understood' — quick check	They may have nodded but not heard
Break long tasks into 3-question chunks	Attention span fits the task, not the lesson

What helps — behaviour

Strategy	Why
Discreet redirects (a hand on the desk)	Public corrections shame, don't help
Praise the effort, not the outcome	Outcomes are unreliable; effort is controllable
Movement breaks every 15-20 min	Fuel; not distraction
Errands ('take this to the office')	Movement disguised as helpfulness
Don't punish forgetting — scaffold it	Forgetting IS the disability

What doesn't help

- 'Just try harder' — ADHD is not effort-based.
- Long lectures about behaviour — by minute 3 they've drifted.
- Naming-and-shaming charts — public, repeated humiliation often makes things worse.
- Removing recess as punishment — this child needs MORE movement, not less. Removing the most-needed regulator backfires.
- 'Calm down' — the brain genuinely cannot, in the moment.
- Comparisons with siblings or peers — corrosive.

Working with parents



Parents of children with ADHD have usually been told their child is naughty, rude, or that they themselves are bad parents. Many are exhausted, defensive, or both. • Lead with the child's strengths • Be specific about behaviours, not labels • Offer concrete things you're doing (don't just describe problems) • Ask what works at home — they often have brilliant strategies • Acknowledge how hard it is — don't fix Parents who feel judged stop engaging. Parents who feel partnered show up.

