

distractability

the problem:

The student doesn't seem to be listening or paying attention to class material. He may be daydreaming, looking out the window, or focused on irrelevant noises or other stimuli. As a result, he misses lessons, instructions, and directions.

the reason:

AD/HD is not just an inability to pay attention. It is an inability to control what one pays attention to. Some scientists suggest that children with AD/HD have a lower level of brain arousal, leading to a decreased ability to screen out distractions. Children are therefore easily distracted when a current activity is not sufficiently stimulating. They are unable to tune out distractions such as noise in the hallway, movement outside, or their own inner thoughts and feelings.

the obstacles:

Children with AD/HD struggle to stay focused on lectures or any tasks that require sustained mental effort. Sometimes, this distractibility appears intentional and annoying—which works against their getting the help they need. Remarks such as “Earth to Amy!” or “Why don’t you ever listen?” will not correct this attention deficit. If children could pay better attention, they would.

SOLUTIONS

IN THE CLASSROOM:

Where you place a student with AD/HD in the classroom is very important.

What is considered preferential seating may vary among youngsters, but keeping AD/HD kids close to the teacher and away from doors or windows is usually best.

To prevent singling out the AD/HD child, offer everyone in the class the opportunity to try study carrels, privacy dividers, earphones, or earplugs to block distractions during seat work or tests.

All students, especially those with AD/HD, need a teacher who knows how to alternate between high- and low-interest activities. Using a variety of strategies to accommodate the multitude of learning styles in the room allows all students to learn the way they learn best.

+ Try to include visual, auditory, and kinesthetic facets to all lessons, as well as opportunities for students to work cooperatively,

individually, and with the group.

- + **Keep lesson periods short**, when possible, and vary the pacing from one lesson to the next.
- + **Avoid reprimanding a student who becomes distracted.** Instead, redirect him in a way that does not cause embarrassment. Sometimes, asking the child a question you know he can answer, or giving nonverbal cues, such as standing close and patting him on the shoulder, can bring the child back into focus.

AT HOME: Parents often struggle to help their children avoid distractions and procrastination that interfere with homework. Establishing a daily homework routine is crucial. Maybe your child needs a break between school and homework. Some children need frequent breaks between assignments.

+ AD/HD kids may need more “setting up” help than others their age. Some need a distraction-free environment, while others do better with music in the

background or when sitting at the kitchen table. Experiment until you find the right spot.

- + **Sit down with your child and make sure he understands** what is required for each assignment.
- + **Most AD/HD children need constant adult supervision to keep on task**, but as situations improve, and the child matures, a parent can check in frequently rather than sit by the child's side throughout the process.
- + **Provide short breaks between assignments.** Allow the child to stretch or have a snack, which can help make his workload seem more manageable.
- + **Break down a large assignment into a set of smaller, easier tasks.** Sit down with your child and divide each task into smaller “bites,” each one with a clear goal. If your child feels like a task is manageable, he'll be less likely to become distracted.

Don't hesitate to alert the teacher if you think your child does not have the skills to complete an assignment, or if it seems to take an inordinately long time.