

SECTION 5 |
EDUCATION

the other offers a more organised and confident approach. The first supplies you with a face you almost certainly would prefer not to see again (and would never name your child). The second gives opportunity for a new relationship where you feel you have impacted a life in need. If you are going to be with this child for a year, make it a better year for both of you.

Other Childrens' Opinion

Another common frustration that many teachers feel is held in the belief that *“all children have to be treated the same”* (parents struggle with this one as well). Of course, there does need to be rules that everyone is expected to follow. But children are often more aware than adults realise. If you have a child with ADHD in your class, or any other child with a disability, you can rest assured that the other children have already worked it out.

In fact, they would have worked out how this child operates much faster than most adults. It is part of being a child to test boundaries and hope to ‘get away with it’. You can very safely accommodate for some differences in a child with a disability and not feel guilty. Chapter 7 may be helpful.

The Child's Strengths

The weaknesses of a child with ADHD will not be hard to discover. But this child's strengths hold the key to a more successful year. At the beginning of the year, work to ascertain this child's areas of **interest** and **skill**. Parents or the child's previous teachers might have some knowledge of these areas.

Just about all children with ADHD have areas of great **talent**. Often in sport, art, inventing, music, nature or problem solving. Knowing the child's strength will allow you to structure learning around and build relationship based on positive aspects of the child's life.

Children with ADHD also usually have strong areas of **interest** – their obsessive side. These areas of interest can be used in all aspects of school life. The child's interest immediately provides subject matter for reading, writing, research, spelling and projects. If his interest is an obsession it may well provide you with the key to his learning.

Understanding the particular strengths and interests of the child with ADHD will allow you to integrate these into all facets of the school day. They can be used to increase positive involvement in general school activities, to raise the stature of the child among his peers, to intellectually and academically challenge the child or to provide him with a positive time-out situation.

A reminder – these children rarely *can* attend to mundane tasks.

It's not that he won't, he can't – yet.

Parents

It is also necessary to consider the parent teacher relationship. Teachers, particularly

of Secondary School students, have often stated that they struggle with forming a cooperative relationship with a student's parents – frequently the mother. To gain an understanding of why this may be so, it is important to recognise that most parents of a child with ADHD feel overwhelmed and inadequate. From the time that the child was very young parents have struggled with feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and judgement. Their child may have been unwelcome at playgroups, embarrassing at shopping centres, social functions and family gatherings. Trouble at school was soon to follow.

All of these years included times of deep guilt and grief. The years also involved many hurtful and ignorant comments even from loved ones. Parents soon ran out of ideas about how to manage or cope with their child. After years of consultations with doctors, psychologists, schools and teachers the well of optimism soon runs dry.

And that's to say nothing of the controversy and guilt about using medication. By the time the child reaches secondary school, the parent has very little left to say. In fact, many have given up. Receiving a defensive reaction from a parent usually has little to do with you – the teacher. It speaks loudly of the hopeless and helpless situation of the parent.

The following pages contain specific strategies for managing a child with ADHD. Do not underestimate the impact that you – one teacher – can have on the lives of these students and their families. You do make a difference.

A high school teacher wrote the following regarding the practical challenges that she found in teaching P.E.

I have found a practical subject like Physical Education is either a 'love it' or 'hate it' subject for students. With a strict hat and uniform policy, this subject can be a nightmare for students with ADHD who really struggle with forward planning and organisation. Over the years I made a conscious decision to address my role in assisting these students in subtle ways.

I found it useful to keep a couple of spare hats available for forgetful students. I'd also offer reminders the day before class to groups of my students rather than single the particular student out.

What amazes me time and time again is that I see these challenging, disruptive and inattentive students really perform well in practical activities.

Now, not every student is athletic, capable and graceful, but when these students are set tasks with clearly defined boundaries, they seem to perform. I find establishing a routine of expectations from marking the roll to equipment distribution assists those students who find it difficult to exercise self control. Pairing students together also helps as they tend to look out for one another.

I try not to do 'special treatment' for students. Why further polarise them from the expectations of the class? I try to keep the expectations for all students clear and simple. As I teach across a number of subjects I never compromise on expectations that students will exercise tolerance, remain courteous and display a commitment to giving their best effort towards their work.