

Teaching Techniques for Inattentive and Overactive Children*

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Working effectively with highly active or inattentive children isn't easy, and with some children it is a matter of trial and error. Ask the child's parents what methods have been successful in the past. Has there been a beloved teacher or mentor who had a magic touch with the child? Seek guidance to increase your chances of success. Following are some general guidelines from the literature that may be helpful in your quest:

1. Provide highly stimulating work, along with structure, firm rules, clear expectations, and specific adaptations for AD/HD.
2. Give them opportunities for movement in the classroom. They can only sit for just so long. Honest. Let them sharpen a pencil, do an errand, go to a learning center, pace, or whatever, *every 15 minutes*.
3. Some children are able to sit for longer periods of time on a large ball that you can obtain from a back store or an occupational therapist. Or try different kinds of cushions.
4. Instead of reprimanding them each time they blurt out an answer, try complimenting them when they demonstrate some self-control. Remember that much of this behavior is not within their control.
5. Provide incentives for homework completion or on-task behavior. Maybe they can earn a special privilege by working hard at adapting to the rules in the classroom.
6. Try providing a more challenging activity or assignment and see if that helps. If it is too hard, they will give up in frustration, and if it is too easy or too repetitious, they will be unable to concentrate.
7. One-on-one attention really helps. Can an aide or volunteer assist the child? This is particularly necessary at the beginning of an assignment, as these children often are uncertain how to get started. They need guidance with organization and elaboration of ideas.
8. Remember that attention is variable, so expect inconsistency. An activity that is new and interesting one day may be unappealing the next day. They respond to variety, so be creative.
9. They usually have trouble stopping an activity they are engaged in and moving on to something else, so develop a signal (e.g., a tap on the shoulder) or assign a buddy to help them with transitions.
10. As most suffer from poor handwriting and racing thoughts, allow them to use a keyboard for written work. A typing tutorial program should be employed, such as Mavis Beacon, Mario Teaches Typing, etc.

11. Shorten writing assignments or allow them to demonstrate mastery in some other way.
12. Preferential seating is often necessary. Sit the child near you and give frequent eye contact to help maintain attention (as well as reduce disturbance of others).
13. Call on them as often as possible during class discussions. Interaction really keeps them focused, and waiting their turn is difficult.
14. Have a firm rule in your classroom that no teasing is allowed. These children are particularly vulnerable to ridicule by other students. A class discussion about individual differences helps set the tone for acceptance.
15. When behavior becomes problematic, ask the child to brainstorm with you some ways to resolve the difficulties. This will increase self-awareness and improve self-control.
16. Develop a good communication system between home and school, so that the child does not get too far behind in homework and the parents are informed on a regular basis about behavior at school. Thank goodness for email...
17. Have a place in the room where the child can retreat when overstimulated or unable to maintain control. This should be a quiet corner with headphones, and perhaps some relaxing music, puzzles, books, etc. This is *not* a time-out center that the child associates with punishment. Instead, it is a self-chosen retreat when needed.
18. A social skills group or “friendship group” can help the child learn skills such as taking turns, not standing too close, not dominating a discussion, finding out what others are interested in, etc. This experience can prevent social rejection.
19. If you have a Student Assistance Team or Care Team (a interdisciplinary group that meets to discuss children at risk) at your school, brainstorm other ways to accommodate the needs of this particular child and other highly active children in your school.

*From *Upside-Down Brilliance: The Visual-Spatial Learner*. (2002). Denver: DeLeon Publishing. **Do not copy without permission from author.** Contact the Gifted Development Center, 1452 Marion Street, Denver, CO 80218, (303) 837-8378.