

Improving Relationships Between Teachers and Kids with ADHD

Katherine Dueck, Fiona Meek, and Maria Rogers
ADHD & Development Lab, University of Ottawa

Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a lifelong condition that affects all aspects of a person's functioning. These impairments often extend into the classroom environment, where kids with ADHD tend to experience academic difficulties and strained relationships with their teachers.

Research has found that kids with ADHD typically experience more conflict and less closeness with their teachers, in comparison to kids without ADHD. This is really important because positive student-teacher relationships, characterized by high levels of closeness, warmth, and support, and low levels of conflict, are associated with better academic outcomes and overall functioning for the child. Since kids with ADHD face many challenges in school, it is especially important to take proactive steps to build success. Fortunately, teachers have the opportunity to work on this relationship and help promote these beneficial outcomes.

If you are a teacher, you have also likely encountered behavioural challenges stemming from ADHD symptoms of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. These challenges can make patience, warmth, and support difficult to achieve with every student in a class.

We all know you are doing the best you can and with that in mind, we want to take this opportunity to offer you some tips for improving your relationships with students with ADHD.

- **(1) Reduce conflict.** We know that this one is easier said than done, but research has found that lower levels of conflict can have a very positive impact on the student-teacher relationship, which has all kinds of positive benefits for the child, including engaging in less risky behaviour later on. Try seeking out support from your colleagues or community organizations if you need ideas on how to reduce student-teacher conflict. (e.g., YOU CAN: www.youcan.ca, which has workshops and conflict resolution resources for student and teachers; and the American Psychological Association: <http://www.apa.org/education/k12/relationships.aspx>, which has a great website filled with information and tips for positive student-teacher relationships)

(2) Increase warmth and support. Taking active steps to increase the level of warmth and support you provide to your students can also be beneficial to the quality of your interactions. If you are able to, try to provide more positive reinforcement, through praising success and encouraging student academic competence. Kids thrive when they feel supported by the people in their lives.

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(3) Increase parent-teacher communication. Positive communication between parents and teachers can have positive far-reaching effects on the child and their level of academic achievement and functioning, particularly for students with ADHD. Try talking to parents not just about the behaviour difficulties related to ADHD, but also about their child's successes and achievements.

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(4) Engage in self-care to improve well-being. Remember to take time for yourself and engage in relaxing and enjoyable self-care activities. This will reduce your stress and help with your well-being and mood, which will also benefit your relationships with your students.

If you would like a list of references or would like to learn more about research in this area, contact the ADHD & Development Lab at the University of Ottawa (www.socialsciences.uottawa.ca/tdah-adhd).