

# ADHD: Talking to your Child's or Teen's Teachers

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If you had a child with diabetes, you wouldn't send him or her to school without talking to the school first. You would also stay in close contact with the child's teacher.

Sending a child to school with a chronic condition like ADHD is the same. It's a good idea to talk to your child's school and keep them updated about your child's ADHD and treatment. This handout explains why and how.

## What is ADHD?

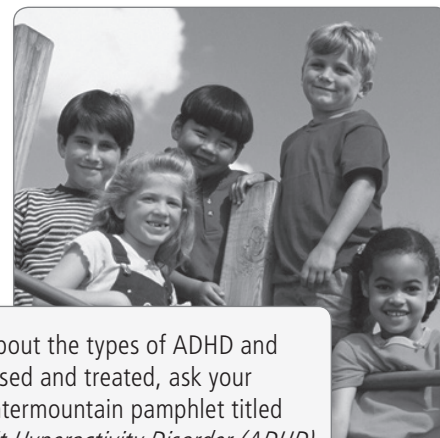
ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. ADHD is a chronic (long-lasting) condition caused by underactivity in certain portions of the brain. This underactivity causes the three main behaviors of ADHD: hyperactivity, inattention, and impulsivity. People with ADHD have trouble paying attention, sitting still, or controlling their behavior.

People with ADHD often have trouble at school, work, and in relationships. As a result, they may feel anxious, unsure of themselves, and depressed. The good news is that proper treatment can help them reach their full potential.

People with ADHD sometimes have one or more of these disorders as well: learning disability, oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, anxiety, depression, autistic spectrum disorders, or bipolar disorder. Effective treatment of ADHD can help minimize the severity of these problems.

**If you suspect your child may have ADHD, talk to your child's teacher and meet with your child's doctor.**

When you meet with the doctor, you'll probably receive screening questionnaires. These questionnaires help you evaluate your child's symptoms and assess how much they interfere with daily life.



To learn more about the types of ADHD and how it is diagnosed and treated, ask your doctor for the Intermountain pamphlet titled *Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)*.

## How can the school help evaluate my child for ADHD?

ADHD symptoms often show up at school because it's a setting that requires self-control and focus. Your child's school counselor, school psychologist, or teacher can give important information on your child's symptoms.

If your doctor gives you a school evaluation packet, take it or mail it to the school. Include a signed statement that gives your permission for your child's teacher or school counselor to complete it. Let them know when you'll need the packet returned so your doctor has it for your child's next appointment.

## How can the school team help my child with ADHD succeed?

**If your child is diagnosed with ADHD, let the school know.**

You can participate on the school team — your ideas and insights about your child can be very helpful. The school will probably invite you to meetings with the school counselor, teachers, and perhaps other school professionals to discuss the best approach for your child. Be sure to attend these meetings.

The team will work together to set goals for your child's learning, decide on consistent school and home plans, and share your child's progress.

Students with ADHD may be eligible for **accommodations in the regular education classroom** or **special-education services** based on 2 federal laws:

- **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973** protects qualified students from discrimination based on their disabilities. Students with ADHD **may qualify** for accommodations in regular classrooms based on this law. The key is whether their symptoms substantially limit their ability to learn.

Section 504-based accommodations for a student who qualifies are unique to the needs of that student. Examples include seating arrangements, peer tutoring, technology, study skills training, extra time to complete tasks, reduced homework, open-book exams, and extra time for exams or untimed exams.

- **The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** guarantees the right to a free and appropriate education to students with disabilities. Students with ADHD **may be covered** by this law. The key is whether their symptoms adversely affect their educational performance.

The school can set up an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for your child, based on IDEA qualification. An IEP sets up measurable learning goals unique to your child's needs, and a plan to meet those goals.

## How can I help my child succeed?

Even if your child has superb teachers, his or her success in school also depends on your teamwork with those teachers. Here are some ways you can work with your child's school to help your child learn at his or her full potential:

- **Learn and listen.** Learn as much about ADHD as you can. Then listen to the opinions and insights of your child's teachers. Your child will have a better chance of success if you approach teachers with a sense of teamwork rather than a list of demands.
- **Work with your child and your child's teachers to set goals.** If you set a behavioral or academic goal together, your child can focus on that goal at both school and home.

- **Make homework positive.** Set aside specific times for homework in a quiet place. Check your child's work and provide frequent guidance. Praise your child's work. A reward system can also be helpful.
- **Communicate regularly.** Follow these tips:
  - Share your insights about your child. No one knows your child better than you. You know what distracts or frustrates your child. You know what rewards are meaningful to your child. Share this information as needed to help your child's teachers choose good strategies.
  - Tell your child's teachers when there are changes in your child's medication or other treatments. Teachers can watch for side effects or other symptoms during the school day. The teacher's input is helpful when your doctor is evaluating medications for your child.
  - Ask one of your child's teachers to set up a brief weekly communication (such as a phone call, email, or note in the child's backpack) to share information about your child.
- **Stay involved.** Along with attending parent-teacher meetings, join the PTA or volunteer in the classroom if you can. Getting to know your child's teachers and friends can help you understand your child's needs and potential at school.

## Resources

### Information about ADHD:

- Intermountain's handout *Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder*, found at [www.intermountainhealthcare.org/adhd](http://www.intermountainhealthcare.org/adhd)
- The National Resource Center on ADHD: [www.help4adhd.org](http://www.help4adhd.org)

### Organizations and groups that can help:

- Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD): [www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org), [www.chaddofutah.com](http://www.chaddofutah.com)
- NAMI of Utah: [www.namiut.org](http://www.namiut.org)
- Utah Parent Center: [www.utahparentcenter.org](http://www.utahparentcenter.org)
- Utah State Office of Education: 801-538-7587