Behavioral Strategies for ADHD in the Classroom

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Students with ADHD range from the type who just stare out the window to the type that do not stay sitting in their seats, even if their teachers used Krazy Glue (Segal & Smith, 2016)! Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a condition that is frequently diagnosed among children and applies to children who demonstrate patterns of inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity (Anderson, Watt, & Noble, 2012). These characteristics of ADHD make it difficult for children to exhibit expected behaviors in a classroom because the behaviors that are expected of them in the classroom conflict with the symptoms of ADHD (Anderson et al., 2012). There are three different types of ADHD, which are as follows: the predominantly inattentive type; the predominantly hyperactive/impulsive type; and the combined type (Grosser, 2015). Some characteristics of the inattentive type may be that he or she submits assignments that are not accurate or complete; he or she is readily distracted; and usually loses his or her materials. Some characteristics of the predominantly hyperactive/impulsive type may be that he or she seems to be moving constantly; usually moves restlessly in his or her seat; and interrupts other students and lessons or activities in the classroom (Grosser, 2015). The combined type of ADHD includes some characteristics from the predominantly inattentive type and the predominantly hyperactive/impulsive type (Grosser 2015). There are different strategies that can be used to help students with ADHD, which include behavioral strategies, instructional/academic strategies, and home-school strategies.

**Behavioral Strategies**

Behavioral strategies for ADHD include: antecedent-based and consequence-based strategies. An antecedent-based strategy would be the teacher posting and frequently discussing classroom rules at the beginning of the year and throughout the year. There should be a limited number of classroom rules that are worded positively and located in a place in the classroom where all students can see them (DuPaul, Weyandt, & Janusis, 2011). Students should be praised often by the teacher for following the classroom rules. The classroom rules may need to be placed closer to students who have ADHD. This could be done by taping the classroom rules on their desks and they should also be praised more often than the other students for following the rules (DuPaul et al., 2011). A different antecedent-based strategy that can be used for students with ADHD is modifying the length and/or content of their assignments. The last antecedent-based strategy would be to give students choices as to how they could complete their assignments. According to DuPaul et al. (2011), when students were allowed to make choices about how to complete their assignments, they became more engaged and were less disruptive than if the teacher had just chosen how they were to complete their assignments.

There are three types of consequence-based strategies, which are contingent positive reinforcement, response cost, and self-management strategies (DuPaul et al., 2011). Contingent positive reinforcement is the most common strategy that is used for students with ADHD. This includes praise from the teachers and a token system (DuPaul et al., 2011). Reinforcement is provided as much as possible. Student rewards should be provided on an individual basis, be varied, and follow soon after the desired behavior is performed (DuPaul et al., 2011). The response cost involves the token system in which tokens are taken away for undesired behavior during class and should be used after positive reinforcement has not been singularly effective in solving an undesired behavior. Time-out from positive reinforcement can also be used to decrease undesired behaviors (DuPaul et al., 2011). Self-management interventions help students with ADHD to watch, gauge, and/or strengthen their own behaviors (DuPaul et al., 2011). For students with moderate levels of ADHD, self-management is an effective strategy (DuPaul et al., 2011). An effective behavioral intervention strategy for both the class and the student with ADHD is a classroom lottery. Students earn rewards for following the class rules. At the end of the school day, the names of all the students who followed the rules each put his or her name into a lottery bin. As the teacher draws their names, the children get to select a classroom job they want to have the following day (Curtis, Hamilton, Moore, & Pisecco, 2014).

**Instructional/Academic Strategies**

Different instructional techniques throughout teachers’ lessons help students with ADHD focus and these techniques can benefit not only that student, but the entire class (Aparecida Capellini & Marques de Oliveira, 2013). To begin a lesson, teachers use an auditory cue such as a cowbell or horn; make eye contact with students who have ADHD and write what will be taught during the lesson on the board (Segal & Smith, 2016). Teachers also tell students what they will be learning about during the lesson, what is expected of them, and what materials they will need for that lesson (Segal & Smith, 2016). During the lesson, teachers keep their instructions basic and specific by using visual aids. Teachers change the pace of their lessons and include various types of activities (Segal & Smith, 2016). At the end of the lesson, teachers summarize key points and if an assignment is given, three students should repeat what the assignment is, then the class should state the assignment together, and finally the teacher writes the assignment on the board. Assignments for students with ADHD should be divided into smaller sections (CHADD, 2016). Teachers need to be explicit about what the students need to take home (Segal & Smith, 2016).

Since students with ADHD have a very hard time with organization, the classroom environment should have set class routines and procedures along with a very organized learning environment (Grosser, 2015). Using a different colored folder for each subject helps students with ADHD keep their subject materials organized (Blotsky-Gallant, Martin, McGonnell, & Corkum, 2015). A two-pocket folder may be used to help students with ADHD organize their assignments by having the left side designated for assignments that are to be completed and the right side designated for assignments that have been completed each day or night (Hamilton & Astramovich, 2016). Students with ADHD should be given an assignment notebook to help them organize their assignments (Grosser, 2015). These students can be assigned homework partners to help them write their assignments in their assignment notebooks and help them put their assignments in the correct folders (Hamilton & Astramovich, 2016). Connie Harr, a special education teacher at Lewis and Clark Elementary School in Mandan, stated that some students with ADHD are partnered with one of their peers in their general education classrooms to help them organize their assignments and stay on task (C. Harr, personal communication, November 13, 2016). One day each week the teacher has all the students clean their desks and backpacks (Grosser, 2015). According to Grosser (2015), students can be provided with extra textbooks or electronic textbooks that they may keep at home, so they do not need to remember to take books home or bring books back to school.

Other strategies can be used in the classroom to accommodate students with ADHD to stay focused and complete other class work (Eiraldi, Mautone, & Power, 2012). Changing the seating arrangement, so that the student with ADHD is closer to the teacher and not near possible distractions in the classroom helps the student with ADHD stay focused (Eiraldi et al., 2012). An extended amount of time for taking tests for students with ADHD can be granted by the teacher (Eiraldi et al., 2012). Students with ADHD can also be given the choice of taking their tests in a quiet room (Eiraldi et al., 2012). Connie stated that students with ADHD who attend Lewis and Clark are given extended time to take their tests and the choice to take their tests in the quiet room in their classroom or to go to their special education classroom. These students are also allowed to stay in their general education classroom until the instruction for a lesson is finished and then they have the choice to go to the quiet room or to their special education classroom to work on their assignments (C. Harr, personal communication, November 13, 2016).

Verbal and nonverbal cues are instructional strategies that can also be used in the classroom. Teachers’ verbal strategies include controlling their tone of voice, repeating their directions, short phrases, and using their students’ names with visual cues and verbal directions (Geng, 2011). Verbal praise should simply and specifically praise the appropriate and expected behavior (Grosser, 2015). Students with ADHD need concise verbal redirection more often (Grosser, 2015). Using nonverbal strategies, such as touching a student gently, can redirect the attention of students with ADHD (Geng, 2011). Two nonverbal cues that Connie uses are touching the table where the student is sitting or a gentle touch on that student’s shoulder (C. Harr, personal communication, November 13, 2016).

**Home-School Strategies**

Home-school strategies are an important part of helping students with ADHD in the classroom and at home (DuPaul et al., 2011). Three of these types of strategies that can help students with ADHD are education involvement at home, the family and the school communicating with each other, and for parents to become involved with a school organization (Mautone, Lefler, & Power, 2011). To help students with ADHD with their homework, teachers can direct parents to help chunk the students’ assignments into smaller sections to help make completing an assignment more workable (Mautone et al., 2011). The teachers will check the homework assignments to be sure the assignments are correct and being completed (Power et al., 2012). The teacher also helps to establish a reasonable amount of time for the student to complete his or her homework (Power et al., 2012). The daily report card is a contingency management strategy that the teacher uses to report to parents how well the student has met pre-determined goals, such as speaking at appropriate times or returning homework to class. The student receives rewards for meeting these goals (Clay, 2013). The daily report card has been successful in helping to improve in-class behavior and academic work of the students with ADHD (DuPaul et al., 2011).

**Conclusion**

The strategies that help students with ADHD the most are the blend of strategies that take place in the classroom and the strategies that these students are taught to use themselves (Grosser, 2015). Antecedent-based strategies can help prevent unwanted behaviors in students with ADHD by the teacher posting limited classroom rules, modifying the length of assignments, and giving students choices on how to complete assignments (DuPaul et al., 2011). Consequence-based strategies are used to alter environmental events after a certain behavior to change how often that behavior occurs (DuPaul et al., 2011). Through self-management strategies, students are taught how to manage their behavior (DuPaul, et al., 2011). The instructional/academic strategies that teachers use to help students with ADHD stay focused on what they are teaching and sustain the students’ concentration on what the teachers are teaching and the assignments that these students are given, can not only benefit them, but their peers as well (Segal & Smith, 2016). Since difficulties that students with ADHD experience are not just limited to school, it is important that schools and these students’ families stay in contact as part of a plan to help students with ADHD (DuPaul et al., 2011). In addition to these strategies, teachers need to be very patient, creative, and consistent with students with ADHD (Segal & Smith, 2016).

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