

Moving to Independence

“Teachers can open doors, but students must enter by themselves.”

– Ancient Chinese proverb

Students with AD/HD benefit from consistent structure and supports that address their difficulties with attention, hyperactivity and impulsivity. At the same time, their success in school and in life is enhanced by increasing their independence through developing self-monitoring, organizational and self-advocacy skills. Planning for transitions is also important to help students deal with challenges as they move into new settings.

Organization

Difficulties with attention often interfere with organization and time management. To increase independence, students with AD/HD need to develop strategies to improve organization and time management. As students get older, there is greater need for them to be on time, have a plan, prioritize and manage their belongings—keeping what is important and getting rid of the unimportant. Being organized requires attention and is a major challenge for students with AD/HD.

Previously described strategies involved external structures and routines that assist students with organization, such as “To do” lists, homework agendas, schedules, planning projects, colour-coding materials. It is important to model the use of organizational strategies, to encourage students to try the strategies and to provide specific and meaningful feedback about the outcomes. Becoming independent occurs when the individual finds out what works best and becomes organized “enough” to reduce stress and to meet life’s daily demands.

Self-monitoring

An important component of attention is self-monitoring. This component involves checking over a task that is in progress, assessing the progress and making adjustments when necessary. It also involves reviewing a task after it has been completed and making sure that it was done correctly. In short, self-monitoring is “watching” ourselves doing something while we are doing it.²³

The accuracy of self-monitoring is less important than the self-awareness that happens in the process.

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

■ Create opportunities for students to become more aware of their own behaviour and performance

- Encourage students to collect information about their behaviour. Target a desired behaviour and provide the student with a method for recording the frequency of the behaviour during a specific time frame. For example, students could use sticky notes on their desks to record tally marks for each time they contribute to discussions during a language arts period.
- Provide checklists and criteria to help students evaluate their own work. The following checklist is an example of how a student might assess his or her approach to learning.

23. Thorne and Thomas 2003.

Self-assessment Working on my own			
Today:	Most of the day	Some of the day	Not at all
1. I showed good listening.			
2. I followed teacher's directions.			
3. I asked myself, "What do I need to do?"			
4. I got started right away.			
5. I finished each task.			
6. I checked over my finished work.			
7. I told myself, "Good job."			

- Provide a signal that cues the student to think about what he or she is doing. This signal may be a timer on the student's wristwatch or an intermittent beep played on an audiotape as the student wears headphones. When the signal goes off, it is a cue for the student to ask self-monitoring questions: "Am I doing what I'm supposed to be doing?" "Am I on task?" A card on the desk illustrating on-task behaviour may be helpful. Students may also keep a record of their own on-task behaviour to track their progress over time.

■ Teach strategies for self-monitoring

- Show students how to make daily lists of what they need to do and to develop a routine for checking the list. They can use this list to make reminder notes to themselves.
- Work with students to create checklists to guide their behaviour in areas where they experience difficulty, or help them to develop personal checklists. For example, a checklist for "leaving school" can assist in making sure the student has all of the materials he or she needs to take home. (See "Cognitive Credit Cards" on pages 87–88 for more information on using self-mediated cues.)

- Use the Think Aloud process to teach students to ask **themselves** four questions to guide problem solving.²⁴ This helps them organize their thinking and promotes verbalization as they answer the sequence of questions. The process is most effective if students ask **themselves** the questions rather than respond to the teacher posing the questions.

Think Aloud

1. Define the problem: What am I supposed to do?
2. Consider alternatives and make a plan: What are some plans?
3. Monitor the plan: How is my plan working?
4. Evaluate the plan: How did I do?

- Identify strategies that students can use when they are stuck, such as the following.²⁵

What to Do When I Am Stuck

1. Read the directions two more times.
2. Highlight key words.
3. Look at an example and talk the steps through in my mind.
4. Copy the sample question and work it through on my own.
5. Give myself a fresh start. Copy the question or try writing my answer on another piece of paper and then work it through by myself.
6. Mark the question with a star, skip it and come back to it later.

Encourage students to try at least three of these strategies on their own before asking for help.

24. Adapted with permission from Bonnie W. Camp and Mary Ann S. Bash, *Think Aloud: Increasing Social and Cognitive Skills – A Problem Solving Program for Children: Classroom Program Grades 1-2* (Champaign, IL: Research Press, 1985), pp. 41, 56.

25. Adapted with permission from Dana Antayá-Moore and Catherine M. Walker, *Smart Learning: Strategies for Parents, Teachers and Kids* (Edmonton, AB: Smart Learning, 1996), p. 5.

Self-advocacy

Self-advocacy refers to an individual taking action on his or her own behalf. Self-advocacy encourages individuals to consider options and make thoughtful choices for the future.

To advocate effectively for themselves, students with AD/HD need to recognize, accept and understand their attention difficulties and the impact these have on their learning and behaviour. They also need to take responsibility for themselves and learn strategies for problem solving and goal setting. The self-advocacy process needs to begin in the early grades and be practised actively in junior and senior high school.

Students with AD/HD may not self-advocate effectively for a number of reasons, including the following. They may:

- be unable to clearly identify and describe their abilities, needs and preferred conditions for learning. These difficulties may occur because of language difficulties, poor social skills, lack of practice or lack of knowledge about themselves as learners
- not have been directly taught self-advocacy skills and/or do not have someone to coach them through situations where they might need to self-advocate
- have limited confidence in their abilities and as a result, be reluctant to ask questions in class or request extra assistance
- fear being thought of as stupid or as a troublemaker
- be passive in their approach to their own learning, feeling that their future is beyond their control—this includes overrelying on their parents and teachers to advocate on their behalf
- not know who to contact for help, what to ask for or how to best use supports
- be discouraged because they have encountered people who do not understand AD/HD or do not believe that accommodations and assistance are appropriate.

Given these barriers, students with AD/HD need support to learn and practise self-advocacy.

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

■ Create opportunities for students to grow in their knowledge and understanding of their own AD/HD

- “Demystify” the disorder. Use analogies to assist students in understanding how AD/HD affects individuals. For example,

- your brain is like a turbo-charged race car, but your brakes don't work well
- having AD/HD is like driving a car with the windshield wipers going.

- Include information about the challenges and “bright side” of AD/HD.
- Provide additional resources on AD/HD such as videos, books and reliable Web sites.
- Provide older students with opportunities to do projects and research about AD/HD.

■ Create opportunities for students to identify and explore their own strengths and needs

- A-14 • Engage students in structured activities to explore their learning preferences, strengths and challenges. See Appendices A-14 and A-15 for two sample tools students can use: “Know Your Own Strengths Inventory” and “Uncover Your Learning Challenges Inventory.”
- A-15 • Encourage students to talk aloud about their thinking. Help them rephrase their ideas in positive terms to highlight their learning strengths and needs.
- Explain assessment results so that students understand their abilities, their needs, and the implications for their schooling and future lives.
- Provide specific feedback to help students understand their strengths and needs, and how AD/HD affects them personally.
- Involve students in identifying, trying out and reflecting upon different strategies and supports so they gain a better understanding of what strategies match their own strengths and needs.

■ Teach strategies for enhancing communication skills

- A-16 • Help students explain their AD/HD to others. Encourage the use of graphic organizers such as a K–W–L+ chart to record questions and answers about their AD/HD. See Appendix A-16 for a sample K–W–L+ chart.

- A-17** • Self-advocates need to be informed and organized in order to be effective. Help students to prepare for meetings, conversations with subject teachers and other situations in which they may be involved in planning their educational future. Model and role-play appropriate interactions and problem-solving approaches. See Appendix A-17 for a sample tip sheet for students “Be Your Own Self-advocate.”
- A-18** • Provide students with alternative ways for asking for assistance such as an “Asking for Help” form below.²⁶ A blackline master of this form is provided in Appendix A-18.

Asking for Help

Date: _____

Dear _____
(teacher’s name)

These are the things that I am having difficulty with:

- understanding my textbook
- knowing what my homework is
- getting my homework done
- listening in class
- taking notes
- passing tests
- completing assignments
- other _____

Could we please meet to discuss possible strategies?

Two meeting times that work for me:

Student signature: _____

26. This form adapted with permission from Mary Cole and Anne Price, *TNT: Tips ‘N Tricks for Dynamite Learning!!* (Calgary, AB: Calgary Learning Centre, 1999), p. ii (Black Line Masters).

■ Provide opportunities for planning and problem solving

- Help students to advocate for themselves before problems begin.
- Involve students in problem solving and developing plans to address their particular difficulties. Students' input and involvement should increase as they proceed through school.

A-19

- Help students to set appropriate and realistic goals for their learning. One strategy is to make goals **SMART**: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, **T**imely. See Appendix A-19 for a sample goal-setting organizer.
- Use performance evaluations and portfolio assessment. Provide models, practice and feedback in self-monitoring in order to actively involve students in evaluating their performance and increase personal responsibility for learning.
- Follow up with students to review their success in achieving their goals. Self-monitoring and evaluation are important for developing realistic goal setting.
- Facilitate relationships between students and academic counsellors or mentors.

Planning for transitions

As students progress through school, they will face many transitions. All students can benefit from transition planning, but for students with AD/HD, this is especially important.

Planning for transitions involves helping students explore options, build skills, identify resources, and develop knowledge to deal effectively with the changes they will encounter throughout their school years and in later life.

Successful transitions involve planning, collaboration and comprehensiveness.

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

■ Make planning for transitions an ongoing activity

- Start well in advance of the actual transition.
- Base decisions on an understanding of individual student needs, strengths, interests and preferences.
- Be open to new ideas and possibilities since transition goals and plans will likely change over time.
- Keep a written record of the planning for transition process, including goals and commitments by individuals involved in the planning.

■ Make planning for transitions a collaborative process

- Involve parents and students in the planning and decision-making process. Students should gradually take on more responsibility for the planning.
- Build on student preferences and interests, and ensure that all individuals involved agree that the planning is student-centred.
- Respect parents' and students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- Involve community partners, such as post-secondary advisors or employment counsellors, whenever appropriate.

■ Ensure that planning for transitions has a comprehensive scope

- Consider the social, vocational and personal needs of students, in addition to their academic needs.
- Help students become aware of their individual strengths, interests and areas of need, and encourage them to use these as a starting point for decision making and problem solving.

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- Provide opportunities for students to develop problem-solving skills, to monitor and regulate their own performance, and to interact appropriately with peers, teachers and other adults.
- Help students and their parents learn about available supports and accommodations to help them deal with their attention difficulties.

Transition planning is an ongoing process of helping students prepare for the future. It begins the first day of school and continues throughout life. Whenever students are faced with a significant change in their routines, environments or experiences, they will benefit from preparation and support that considers their personal needs and strengths. As students with AD/HD get closer to leaving the secondary school system, the need for transition planning becomes even more critical.

During the elementary school years

During elementary school, transition issues often centre around changes in classroom or school placement and related changes to routines, such as using different transportation (e.g., riding the school bus for the first time, using public transport independently) or managing longer unstructured time periods such as lunch hours.

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

■ Support students and their parents as they prepare for upcoming transitions

- Identify skills needed in the next environment and provide opportunities to develop these skills.
- Listen to students' concerns about transitions and engage in frequent discussions about transitions.
- Highlight the positive aspects of a new environment.
- Help students understand the differences between the current environment and the new environment, including changes in routines, expectations or rules.

- Encourage independence by helping students establish consistent homework and study routines.
- Arrange for students to visit new classrooms or schools and meet with new teachers.
- Encourage parents to become advocates for their children.

During the junior high/middle school years

The junior high/middle school years are often the time when students and their parents begin to think about the types of things a student may experience after he or she leaves high school.

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

■ Begin formal planning for transitions in junior high/middle school

- Encourage students to learn about their personal strengths and needs.
- Actively involve students in planning for transitions and goal setting.
- Create opportunities for students to monitor their progress toward goals and develop plans for sharing this information with teachers and parents.
- Teach students how to explain their needs to others and to become effective self-advocates.
- Teach effective study strategies, such as time management, note taking, study skills and test-taking strategies.
- Explore assistive technology for learning supports.
- Encourage students to begin exploring career interests.

MYTH

AD/HD is only a childhood disorder.

FACT

AD/HD occurs in both children and adults. Most children with AD/HD continue to show significant signs of restlessness and distractibility into adolescence and adulthood, although often the characteristics change as an individual grows up. For instance, hyperactivity and impulsivity may decrease, and the ability to attend may increase. As well, many adolescents and adults learn strategies to help them compensate for their challenges with attention and appear to have “overcome” or “outgrown” their AD/HD. Adults may experience other symptoms, such as emotional issues (e.g., mood swings, stress intolerance) because of their attention issues.

During the senior high school years

Planning for transitions during the senior high school years generally focuses on the move to post-secondary education and/or employment and independent living. Students need to begin to narrow choices and select post-secondary and career alternatives based on their interests, preferences, needs, strengths and abilities.

FYI

For more information on helping students make transitions to post-secondary studies, visit the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) Web site at www.alis.gov.ab.ca/main.asp and download copies of the *Planning for Post-Secondary Studies* workbooks for students and parents.

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

■ Support the planning for transitions process during senior high school years

- Assess students’ academic preparation, self-advocacy skills, technical skills, social skills and independent living skills.
- Help students and their families explore and think about the differences and similarities between high school, post-secondary and workplace settings.
- Help students and their families match career interests with post-secondary training.
- Encourage students to research entrance requirements for post-secondary institutions.

- Encourage students to research the types of supports, accommodations and assistive technologies available to students with AD/HD in post-secondary institutions.
- Provide students and their families with information about agencies or community-based programs that support young adults with AD/HD, such as Alberta Human Resources and Employment and local chapters of Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder (CHADD).
- Discuss the benefits of volunteer experiences and paid employment in helping students explore career interests and develop marketable skills.

FYI

The Alberta Education resource *Building on Success: Helping Students Make Transitions from Year to Year* contains practical information and sample tools for creating a student profile to share information about an individual student's strengths, abilities and learning needs. To download the resource at no cost, visit www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/specialneeds/resource.asp.

