

Creating a Positive Physical Environment

In working with children exhibiting challenging behaviors, the old adage “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is especially true. Although most advice on working with ADD/ADHD children focuses on behavior management, *preventing* misbehavior by manipulating the environment may be equally effective.

Carefully assess the center’s physical environment relative to anticipated ADD/ADHD behavior. Examine every area of the center for how it might foster or impede various behaviors. Carefully observe children and staff participating in their usual activities and note: traffic patterns, interactions among children, interactions among children and staff, and so forth. Then ask, “Can the environment be changed to prevent misbehavior? If so, how?”

Following are some examples of typical ADD/ADHD behaviors and possible environmental accommodations to prevent misbehavior:

1. *The child makes many trips to your desk/work station to get your attention disrupting activities for others.*
 - Make a place for the child in close proximity to adult work station. Allow the child to be close to the adult from whom s/he seeks attention.

2. *The child jostles the other children during seated activities and/or the child has difficulty remaining seated.*
 - Assure there is adequate room between tables and chairs so jostling is minimized. Spread the tables out or rearrange them; adjust height.
 - Create enough space for children to move around without disrupting others.

3. *The child is “all over the room”.*
 - Use tape lines to designate activity-specific areas; allow them to use one area at a time.
 - Use visual barriers (e.g. file cabinets, book shelves, etc) to block view of all areas.

4. *The child is over stimulated by activities and by brightly decorated room.*
 - Set up a serene, clutter-free, undecorated corner for quiet time.
 - Install a study carrel (like those in libraries) where children can work on focused activities (such as homework or reading) free of distractions.

5. *The child fidgets with pens, scissors and other implements.*
 - Reorganize the supplies so that they are in bins/baskets that can be put away between activities.
 - Hand out implements just prior to activity and collect them just after.

6. *The child is disorganized and loses supplies.*
 - Use cubby system for storing belongings. Help the child store supplies in pouches or smaller boxes within his/her cubby for greater organization.

7. *The child has difficulty following directions and/or completing activities.*
 - Create a “direction bulletin board”. Break activities/directions into small chunks. Write these on sheets. Post on the bulletin board and help child carry out tasks one at time.

8. *The child interrupts during discussions or when reading aloud.*
 - Provide a speaking stick. Children only speak when they hold the stick.

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Learning Center Instructions

1. Read the accompanying background information, “Creating a Positive Physical Environment”.
2. Look at the sample diagram of a typical after-school space. Brainstorm ways you would change the environment to minimize poor behavior. Jot these down.
3. Work together to draw a diagram of a more positive environment. Use colorful pens. Label those characteristics you want to bring to everyone’s attention.
4. Hang your masterpiece on the wall.
5. Think about your own center. On the index cards, jot down ideas you will try in your own after-school space.

ALTERNATIVE: Instead of using the picture of the center provided (step #2), create a diagram of your center. Then complete steps 3 and 4.

Supplies for Your Use:

1. Copies of “Background Information”
2. Diagram of typical after-school space
3. Flipchart paper, pens, and tape
4. Index cards