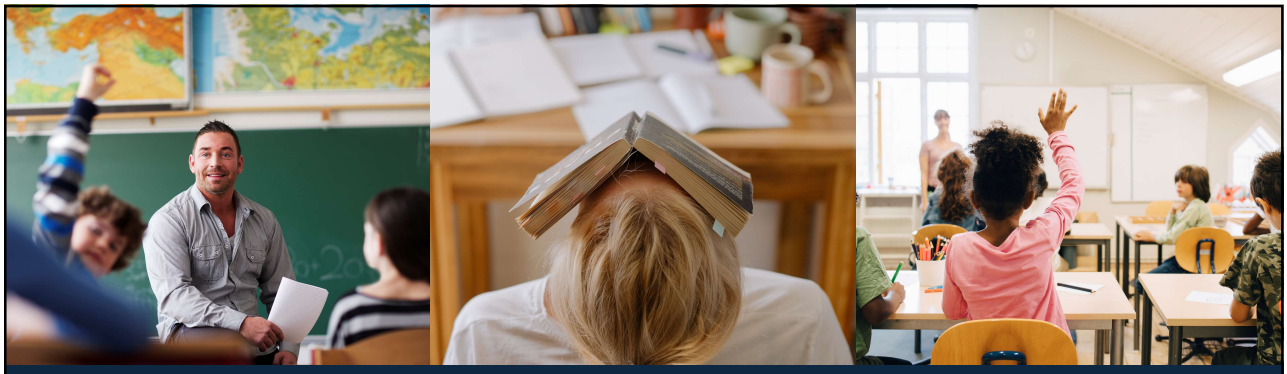


ADHD GOES TO SCHOOL

Dr. Candice Murray
Licensed Psychologist
B.C Children's Hospital
October 26, 2026

1

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- How ADHD impacts learning
- Strategies to help children with ADHD
- Advocacy Tips



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2

ADHD CHALLENGES IN BC



No Ministry of Education "special needs" designation (12 categories)

Children with ADHD must have another condition or learning difference

(e.g., learning disability, gifted, behaviour disorder, autism, chronic medical)

Individual Education Plan (IEP) at discretion of school

Parents must advocate

3

IEP GOALS: SHOULD BE SPECIFIC & MEASURABLE

STARTING WORK

INSTEAD OF THIS

"Student will try harder to stay on task."

TRY THIS

"With a visual checklist and teacher check-in, [Child] will begin independent work within five minutes in four out of five opportunities."

ORGANIZATION

INSTEAD OF THIS

"Student will be more organized."

TRY THIS

"Using a colour-coded folder system and daily agenda check, [Child] will bring home required homework materials four out of five days."

4

ADHD ADVOCACY

To advocate for ADHD being officially recognized by the BC Ministry of Education, write an email, letter, or meet with you MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly)

To find out who your MLA is:

www.leg.bc.ca/learn-about-us/members



5

ADHD, BRIEFLY

6

ADHD and self-regulation

Children with ADHD can have difficulty regulating:

Attention

Directing, sustaining and shifting focus

Many, but not all, also have difficulty regulating:

Activity levels and impulses



7

JOURNAL OF ABNORMAL CHILD PSYCHOLOGY

ORBAN, RAPPORT, FRIEDMAN, ECKRICH, & KOFLER (2018)

- Context influences ADHD symptoms (noise, instructional delivery, EF demands)
- Students with ADHD off-task 16% during math instruction video
- Cumulative effects: equivalent to missing 29 math lessons (45 minutes each) in the academic school year.
- (22) ADHD Study – YouTube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=167se17RNHw

8

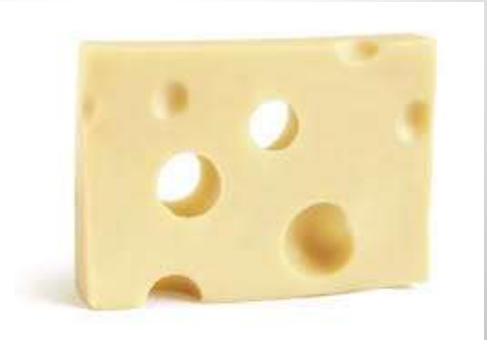
HOW ADHD IMPACTS LEARNING

9

ADHD IMPACTS LEARNING

Attention Dysregulation

- Can cause distractibility or hyperfocus
- All senses (sights, sounds, tastes, touch, smells)
- Thoughts
- Over time = learning gaps develop



10

ADHD IMPACTS LEARNING

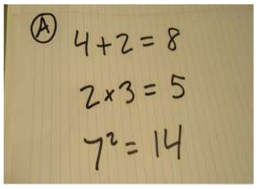
RESTLESSNESS

- Rushes work
- Gets up and wanders
- Talks frequently

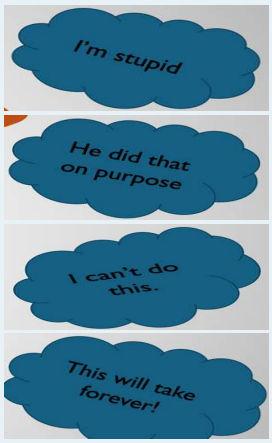


IMPULSIVITY

- Doesn't check work
- Makes quick decisions
- Gets frustrated easily



WHAT A CHILD MAY THINK



11

Executive Functions: Skills that Help us Manage School

Getting started
Activation

Organizing, prioritizing and starting work.

Starting a writing assignment.

Managing attention
Focus

Staying focused and switching attention.

Moving from reading to writing.

Keeping going
Effort

Staying alert and keeping up effort and pace.

Finishing work after interest fades.

Managing feelings
Emotion

Handling frustration and managing feelings.

Coping when an answer is wrong or a question is difficult

Remembering
Memory

Holding information in mind and recalling it.

Remembering the next instruction when given 3.

Managing actions
Action

Pausing, checking and adjusting behaviour.

Waiting to speak and checking work.

Adapted from Thomas E. Brown (2001), Manual for Attention Deficit Disorder Scales for Children and Adolescents.

12

Reading

- Skips lines/words
- Loses track
- Zones out
- Adds or replaces words

What the text looks like for most readers

The Morning Hike

Lena woke up early on Saturday morning feeling excited for her hike. The sun was just rising, and the air was cool and fresh. She packed her backpack with water, a snack, and her favorite jacket.

The trail was quiet when she arrived. Birds chirped in the trees, and the forest smelled like pine and earth. As she walked, she noticed how calm she felt. The path climbed slowly, and the view from the top was incredible.

By the time she got back home, Lena felt tired but happy. It was the perfect start to her weekend.

Clear, consistent text
Words are complete, stable and easy to follow.

What it can feel like for someone with ADHD while reading

The Morning Hike

Lena woke up early on _____ morning feeling _____ for her hike. The sun was just rising, and the air was _____ and _____. She packed her _____ with water, a snack, and her favorite _____.

The _____ was _____ when she arrived. _____ chirped in the trees, and the forest smelled like _____ and _____. As she walked, she noticed how _____ she felt. The path climbed slowly, and the view from the top was _____.

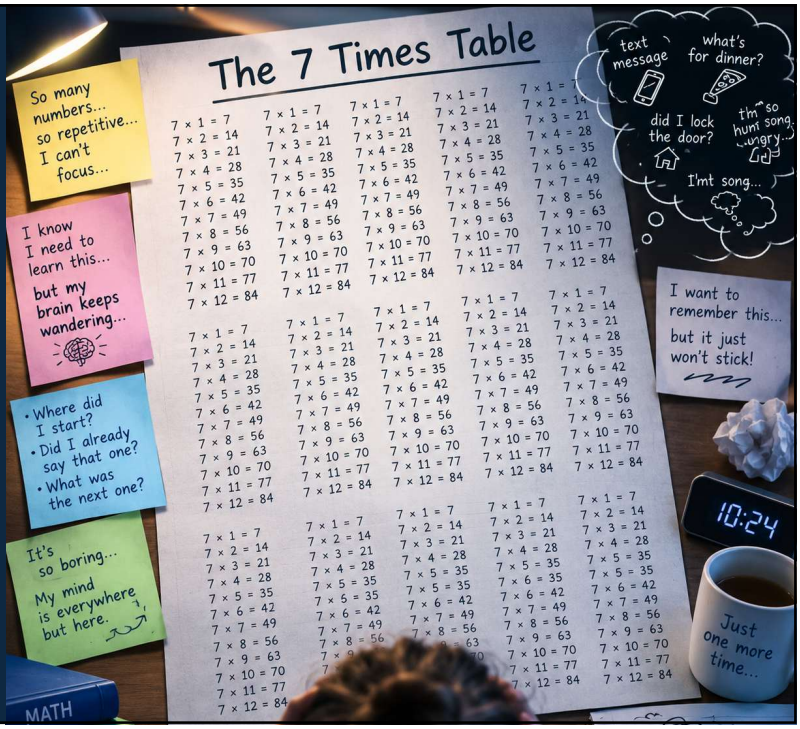
By the time she got back home, Lena felt _____ but _____. It was the _____ start to her weekend.

With ADHD, reading can feel like this
Words may be missed, blurred, or disappear. The meaning becomes hard to grasp, even though the person is trying.

13

Math

- Resists rote math
- Trouble with word problems
- Difficulty with multi-step problems



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WRITING

Missing important details

We went there on Saturday and I brought mine. Then he did it again, so we had to leave. That was the best part.

Punctuation, capitalization and spelling errors

on saturday i went to the park with my frend we played soccer then we got ice cream it was the best day ever

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STRATEGIES THAT HELP

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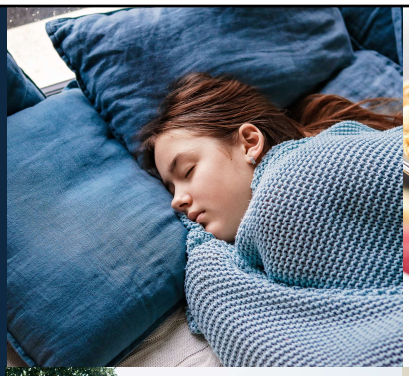
BASICS:

SLEEP

FOOD

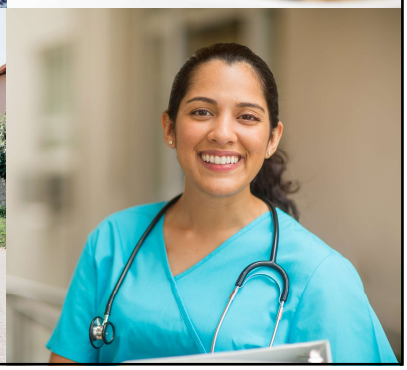
EXERCISE

MEDICINE





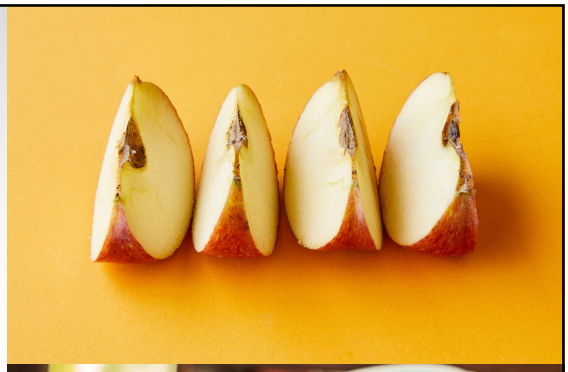




17

FOOD & DRINK

- Send "easy to eat" food
- Request supervision of food intake @ lunch
- Juice box (glucose) @ 2pm?





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EXERCISE

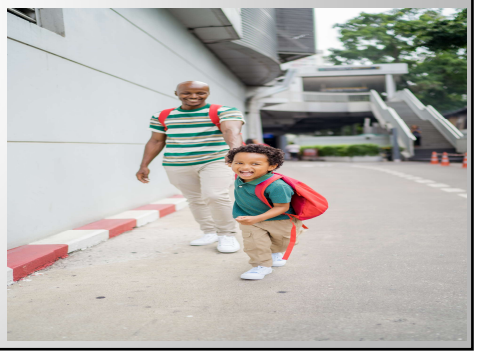




Before School:

Walk

Bike



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SLEEP & MEDICINE

Consult with your child's physician



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REDUCE DISTRACTIONS

Choose reading materials with less text and more visuals



Try graphic novels

- Fewer words on each page
- Pictures help tell the story
- More approachable for reluctant readers

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REDUCE DISTRACTIONS

Choose a workspace that matches the task

SEATING TYPE

- Individual desk for independent work
- More space between desks
- Study carrel for focused tasks



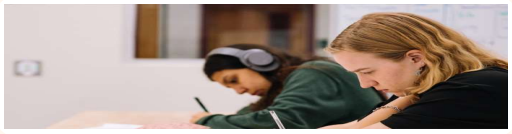


23

REDUCE DISTRACTIONS

Use seating and noise supports to improve focus







SEATING PLACEMENT

- Near the teacher when helpful
- Away from high-traffic areas
- Access to a quieter workspace

BLOCK NOISE

Headphones or earplugs

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BREAK IT DOWN

ADHD • GETTING STARTED

MOTIVATION ≠ ACTION

ACTION → MOTIVATION

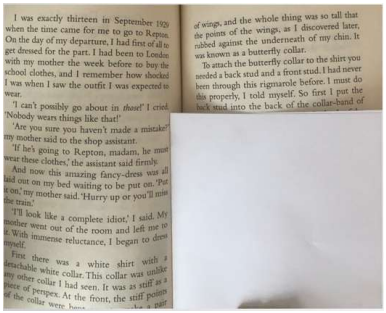
Sometimes, getting started comes before feeling motivated.

26

BREAK IT DOWN: READING

Small changes can make reading feel more manageable.

Traditional print


I was exactly thirteen in September 1929 when the time came for me to go to Repton. On the day of my departure, I had first of all to get dressed for the part. I had been to London with my mother the week before to buy the school clothes, and I remember how shocked I was when I saw the outfit I was expected to wear.

'I can't possibly go about in *those*!' I cried. 'Nobody wears things like that!'

'Are you sure you haven't made a mistake?' my mother said to the shop assistant.

'If he's going to Repton, madam, he must wear these clothes,' the assistant said firmly.

And now this amazing fancy-dress was all laid out on my bed waiting to be put on. 'Put it on,' my mother said. 'Hurry up or you'll miss the train.'

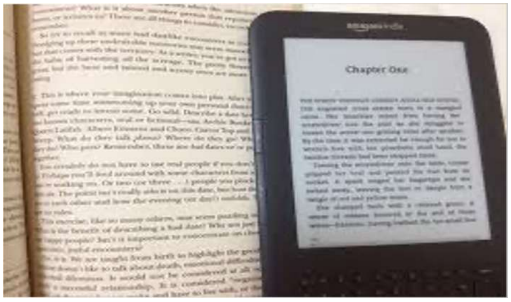
'I'll look like a complete idiot,' I said. My mother went out of the room and left me to it. With immense reluctance, I began to dress myself.

First there was a white shirt with a detachable white collar. This collar was unlike any other collar I had seen. It was as stiff as a piece of perspex. At the front, the stiff points of the collar were [illegible]

of wings, and the whole thing was so tall that the points of the wings, as I discovered later, rubbed against the underneath of my chin. It was known as a butterfly collar.

To attach the butterfly collar to the shirt you needed a back stud and a front stud. I had never been through this rigmarole before. I must do this properly, I told myself. So first I put the back stud into the back of the collar-band of

Digital reading



27

BREAK IT DOWN: Make Reading Easier to Follow

The same text, presented three different ways

01 **STANDARD TEXT**

Reading can sometimes feel overwhelming when there is a lot of information on a page. Changing how the words appear may help some people focus.

02 **BIONIC-STYLE BOLDING**

Reading **c**an **some**times **fe**el **overw**helming **wh**en **th**ere **is a l**ot **of infor**mation **o**n **a pa**ge. **Cha**nging **h**ow **t**he **wo**rds **app**ear **m**ay **he**lp **so**me **peo**ple **foc**us.

03 **EXTRA LINE SPACING**

Reading can sometimes feel overwhelming when there is a lot of information on a page. Changing how the words appear may help some people focus.

ADHD-friendly tip: Try one adjustment at a time. More formatting is not always better.

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BREAK IT DOWN: Writing Assignment Rubric

20 MARKS

Write an 8–10 sentence paragraph: Why is physical activity important for students?

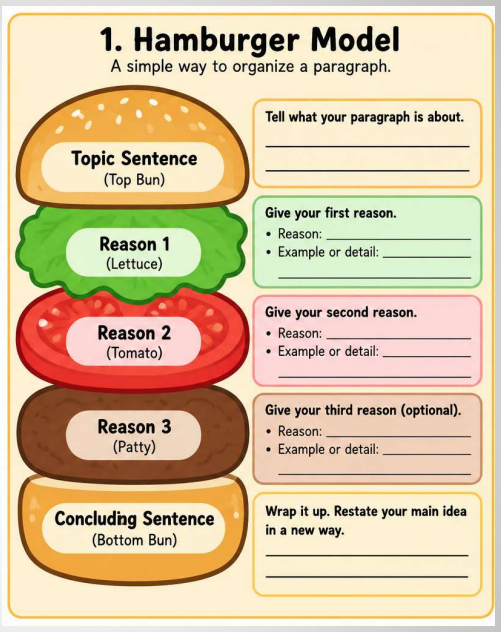
WHAT I'M GRADED ON	WHAT I NEED TO INCLUDE	MARKS
1. Ideas & Details	☐ Explain why physical activity is important ☐ Give 2 reasons ☐ Give an example for each reason	8 / 20
2. Organization	☐ Start with a topic sentence ☐ Put ideas in a logical order ☐ End with a concluding sentence	6 / 20
3. Sentence Clarity	☐ Write complete sentences ☐ Make sure sentences make sense	4 / 20
4. Spelling & Punctuation	☐ Check capital letters and periods ☐ Correct spelling mistakes	2 / 20

FIRST PRIORITY: Ideas + Organization = 14/20 marks (70% of grade)

Before handing it in: Check each box, write your name, and submit your work.

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BREAK IT DOWN | WRITING



ADHD-FRIENDLY TIP: Write KEYWORDS first. Turn them into full sentences later.

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2 | Whole Essay Brainstorming Organizer

Brainstorm your ideas first. Each main idea can become a body paragraph.

ESSAY TOPIC / BIG QUESTION
_____

MAIN MESSAGE / THESIS
_____

MAIN IDEA 1	MAIN IDEA 2	MAIN IDEA 3
• Reason / point: _____	• Reason / point: _____	• Reason / point: _____
• Example / evidence: _____	• Example / evidence: _____	• Example / evidence: _____
• Another detail: _____	• Another detail: _____	• Another detail: _____

INTRODUCTION: Hook + topic + thesis

CONCLUSION: Restate message + final thought

ADHD-FRIENDLY TIP: Start with short words or phrases—do not worry about sentences yet.

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BREAK IT DOWN | WRITING

Turn a big writing assignment into smaller, manageable steps

	WRITING TASK	TARGET DATE
☐ 01	Choose a topic	
02	Write a thesis statement	
☐ 03	Plan with a graphic organizer	
04	Write the introduction	
☐ 05	Write body paragraphs (hamburger model)	
06	Write the conclusion	
☐ 07	Complete the first draft	
08	Revise and edit	
☐ 09	Submit the final paper	

ADHD-FRIENDLY TIP Assign a separate mini-deadline to each step. Focus on one step at a time—and check it off when finished.

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BREAK IT DOWN: TESTS, ASSIGNMENTS, WORKSHEETS

Make the amount of work visible — and manageable

LONG SPELLING LIST



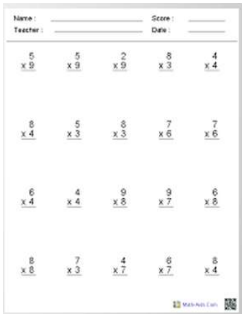
SHORTER SPELLING LIST



CROWDED MATH PAGE



SPACED MATH PAGE



ADHD TIP Reduce visual overload: show fewer questions at a time, cover completed sections, or split work into smaller chunks.

33

BREAK IT DOWN | INSTRUCTIONS

Give instructions in ways that support attention and follow-through

01 **One step at a time**
Give one clear direction before adding another.

02 **At the point of performance**
Give the reminder when and where the action needs to happen.

03 **Get their attention first**
Move close, say their name, and check that they are listening.



ADHD-FRIENDLY TIP Ask the child to repeat the first step in their own words.

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KEY STRATEGIES



Reduce Distractions



Break Things Down



Externalize Information



Allow Movement



Motivation (e.g., praise)

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EXTERNALIZE TIME



Sand timers



Visual countdown timers



Wearable reminders



Analog clocks

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EXTERNALIZE INCENTIVES

Daily Report Card

Two small goals. Two chances to succeed.

TODAY'S TARGETS	STAR + INITIALS
Write homework instructions — In my planner	★ ____
Use my backpack checklist — Check before I leave school	★ ____

★ **Celebrate success!** Notice and acknowledge each completed step.

37

EXTERNALIZE EDITING

Four quick checks before I hand it in

C	O	P	S
CAPITALS	**ORGANIZATION**	**PUNCTUATION**	**SPELLING**
☐ Start sentences with capitals	☐ Put ideas in a clear order	☐ Check periods and commas	☐ Look for tricky words
☐ Capitalize names and "I"	☐ Make sentences and paragraphs flow	☐ Add ? ! and quotation marks	☐ Sound them out and check
Aa	1→2	.,!?	ABC ✓

CHECK IT • FIX IT • HAND IT IN!

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ALLOW MOVEMENT

Small opportunities to move can help students stay engaged.



PROTECT RECESS

Keep recess and lunch breaks.
Offer active classroom jobs.



MOVE AT THE DESK

Stand, doodle, use a foot band, quiet fidgets or gum.



MOVE IN CLASS

Hand out materials, take attendance or help at the door.



TAKE A MOVEMENT BREAK

Deliver a message, refill water or use a hallway pass.

40

ALLOW MOVEMENT

WHILE READING

Small movements and active reading can help students stay engaged.



Keep hands and minds active

HIGHLIGHT
Mark important details as you read.

TAKE NOTES
Jot down key ideas or characters' names.

READ SOFTLY
Whisper or quietly say the words.

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ALLOW MOVEMENT

WHILE LISTENING

Small movements can help children stay engaged while listening.





TAKE NOTES
Write down key ideas during class.

DOODLE
Draw quietly while listening.

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PRAISE THAT HELPS

Make the helpful behaviour visible

INSTEAD OF "Good job!"

TRY SPECIFIC, ENCOURAGING PRAISE

- "You started right away on your own."
- "I like how you used your checklist."
- "Taking a break was a smart choice."
- "You asked for help when you needed it."
- "You kept going even when it was hard."

WHY IT WORKS

Shows what worked • Builds confidence • Reinforces skills



NOTICE THE SMALL WINS

44

"SHE SITS FOR 30 MINUTES BUT WRITES NOTHING"



45

"HE MELTS DOWN AFTER SCHOOL"



46

"HE RUSHES THROUGH TESTS AND MAKES CARELESS MISTAKES"



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BUILDING ORGANIZATION SKILLS

Helping children with ADHD plan, organize and follow through

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Ready · Do · Done

Make the steps visible before the child starts.

READY	DO	DONE
What materials do I need?	**What are the smaller steps?**	**What will finished look like?**
Gather supplies before starting.	Break down the task and work through it.	Show a clear picture or example.

A clear picture of "done" helps children know what they are working toward.

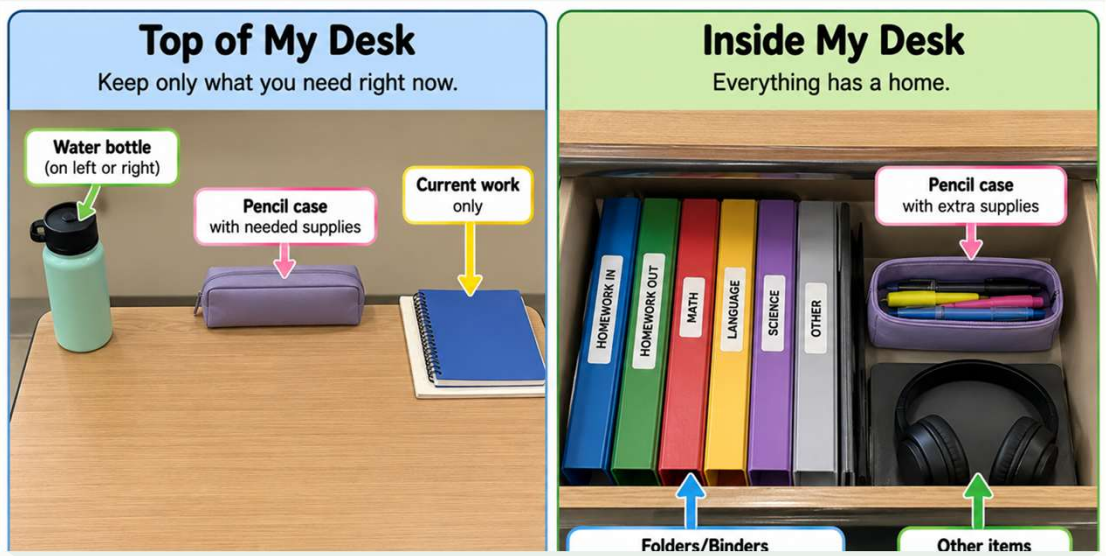
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Around My Desk



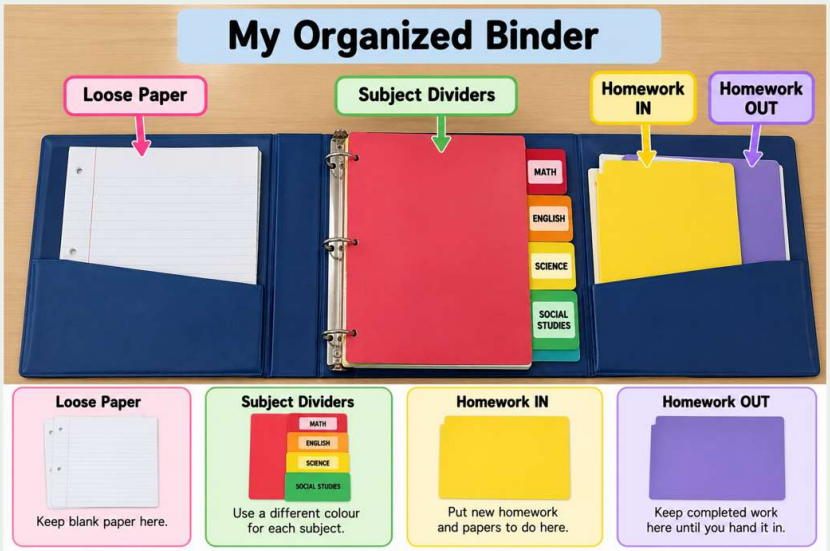
50

Top of My Desk · Inside My Desk



51

My Organized Binder



52

Weekly Planning: Make Time Visible

Weekly Plan Grade 6

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7–8 AM	Morning routine & breakfast	Morning routine & breakfast	Morning routine & breakfast	Morning routine & breakfast	Morning routine & breakfast	Morning routine & breakfast	Morning routine & breakfast
8 AM – 3 PM	School	School	School	MATH TEST (at school)	SOCIALS ASSIGNMENT DUE (at school)	Free time	Free time
3–3:30 PM	Snack & break	Snack & break	Snack & break	Snack & break	Snack & break	Snack & break	Snack & break
3:30–4:00 PM	Math review (30 min)	Math review (30 min)	Math review (30 min)	Free time	Free time	Swim (9–11 AM)	Free time
4:00–4:30 PM	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
4:30–5:00 PM	Free time	Free time	Free time	Socials work (30 min)	Free time	Free time	Free time
5:00–5:30 PM	Soccer (5–6 PM)	Free time	Free time	Socials work (30 min)	Soccer (5–6 PM)	Free time	Free time
5:30–6 PM	Free time	Free time	Free time	Free time	Free time	Free time	Free time
6 PM+	Free time	Free time	Free time	Free time	Free time	Free time	Free time

School | Sports / Activities | Homework / Study (30 min) | Test / Due Date (at school) | Break / Free Time

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What Does OST Look Like at School?

Skills improve with instruction, practice and support.



- **Dedicated skills block**
  Time to teach and practise organization
- **Resource teacher involvement**
  Consistent coaching and support
- **Regular sessions (preferably weekly)**
  Repetition helps skills become routines
- **Parent involvement**
  Practise and reinforce skills at home

OST research: Abikoff et al., 2012; Bikic et al., 2017; Langberg et al., 2017.

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HOMEWORK

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Homework: More Steps Than You Think

From getting the assignment to actually handing it in

AT SCHOOL • STEPS 1–4

1. Hear the assignment
2. Understand what to do
3. Write it down
4. Pack materials to take home

AT HOME • STEPS 5–7

5. Plan when to work
6. Start and finish the homework
7. Pack finished work back into the bag

BACK AT SCHOOL

8. Hand in the homework (or click Submit)

Each step involves remembering, organizing, planning, or following through.

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KEY STRATEGIES



Reduce Distractions

Break Things Down

Externalize Information

Allow Movement

Motivation (e.g., praise)

57

KEEPING TRACK AT HOME

Make important dates and homework easy to see.

1 MONTHLY WALL CALENDAR



See the big picture

2 WEEKLY PLANNER



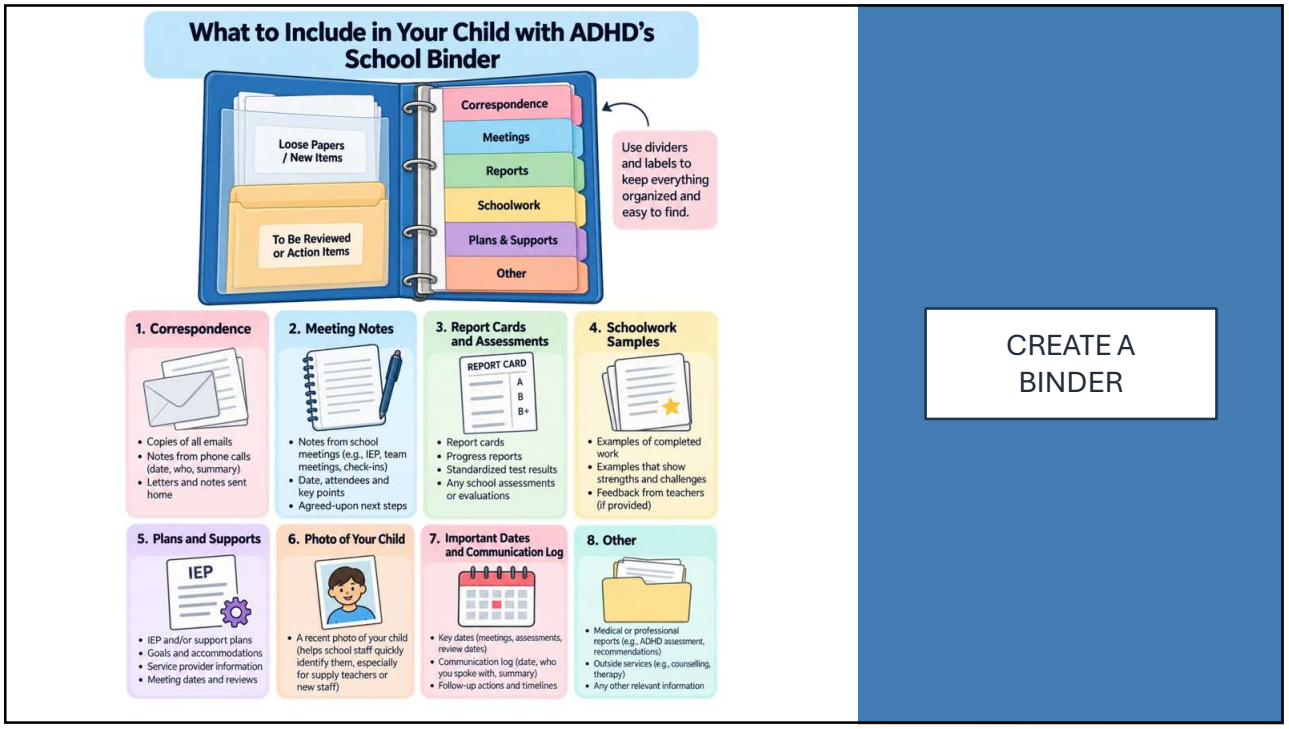
Plan one week at a time

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ADVOCACY



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CREATE A BINDER

60

COMMUNICATE EARLY

Build a partnership with your child's teacher from the start.

01 Introduce yourself

Connect with the teacher in September.

02 Share what helps your child

Discuss your child's experience with ADHD. Provide a one-page profile.

03 Agree on practical supports

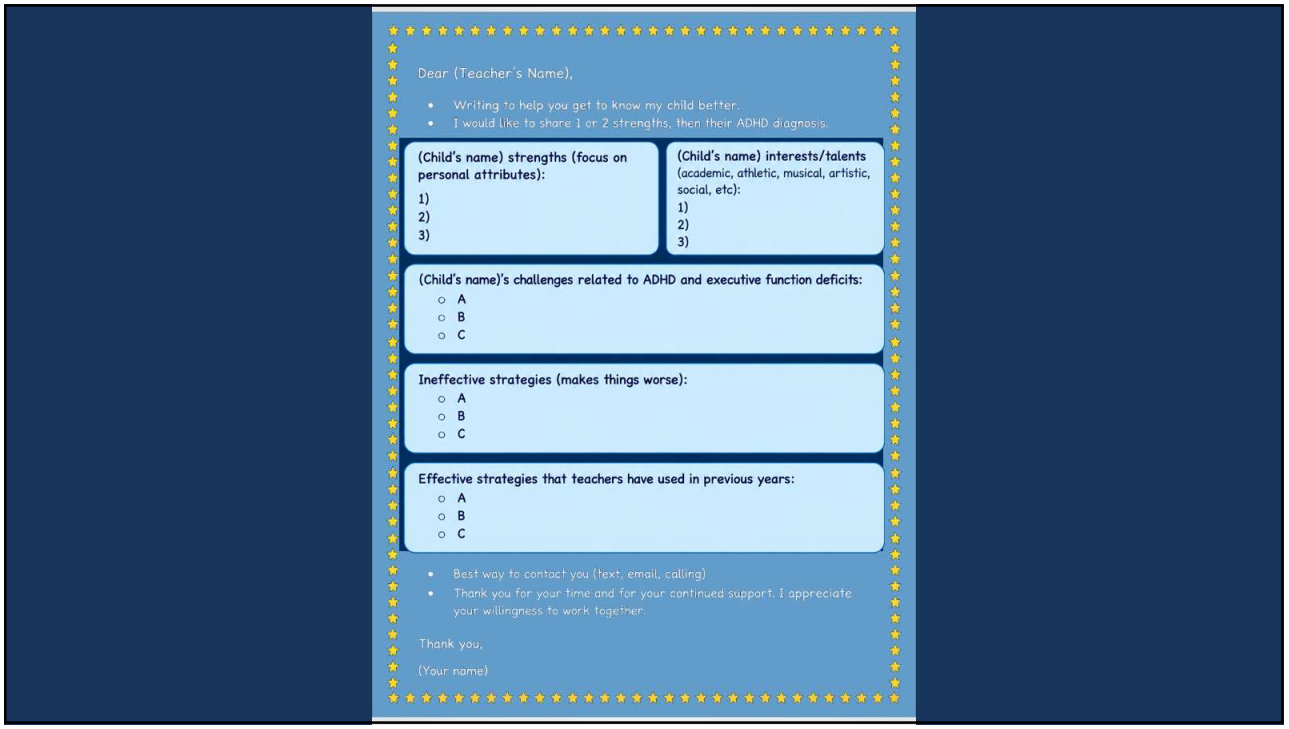
Talk about seating, homework systems and incentives.

04 Know who to contact

In high school, the resource teacher can be a key partner.

Parent–teacher collaboration is crucial.

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When the Plan Is Not Working

Ask:

- Is the strategy actually happening every day?
- Is it the right strategy for your child?
- Is the task too long, too vague, or too demanding?
- Is there another issue, such as anxiety, a learning disability, sleep difficulty, or peer conflict?
- Has enough time passed to see a change?

Example:

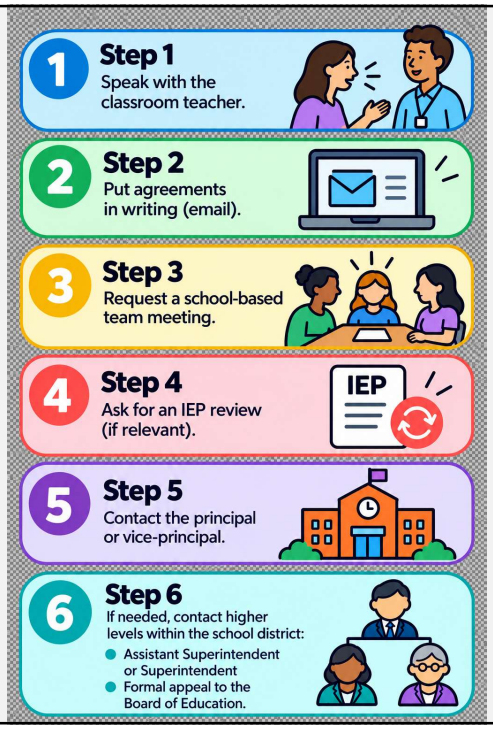
- "We agreed on a daily agenda check, but Alex is still coming home without homework written down.
- Can we look at whether the check-in is happening consistently and whether a photo of the board would help?"

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IF YOU NEED TO ESCALATE

Sample request:

"We have tried several strategies since September, and the concerns continue. I would like to request a school-based team meeting to review [Child's Name]'s needs, discuss additional supports, and agree on next steps and a timeline for reviewing progress."



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Key Takeaways



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PARTING THOUGHTS

As you support your child…

Be informed
Know the B.C School Act and your rights as a parent.

Be realistic
Focus on progress, not perfection.

Pace yourself
Small steps add up over time.

Seek support
You don't have to do this alone.

Connection matters more than perfection.

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RESOURCES

B.C School Act:: bclaws.gov.bc.ca

B.C Inclusive Education Policy: www2.gov.bc.ca

BCCPAC Parent Resources: bccpac.ba.ca

Rolling with ADHD for Teachers & Teens
healthymindslearning.ca

The Ultimate ADHD Toolkit for Parents and Teachers: additudemag.com

Centre for ADHD Awareness Canada: caddac.ca

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