



## My child has ADHD. Now what? Step 4: Meeting with the School



ADHD IS AWESOME! CULTIVATING THE ASSETS OF ADHD

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## My Child has ADHD, What now? Meeting with Your Child's School

Once you have received your child's diagnosis, ensure you have a meeting with your child's school. Knowledge is power. Letting everyone know your child's strengths and needs is critical for your child's success. This article outlines specific ways to help you build relationships with teachers and navigate your child's school to promote ongoing success over the years.

### Know Your Child

Before you can advocate effectively for your child, you must understand ADHD and how it affects your child and her learning, as well as your child's strengths and challenges. You are the expert for your child, so it is important to know what works and what doesn't work for your child.

## Build Relationships



Building a solid relationship with your child's teacher is important; research has shown that a strong partnership between home and school promotes children's long-term academic success. It can be easy to fall into an "Us vs. Them" mentality; however, it is essential you see your relationship with the school/teachers as a partnership. Create bridges and allies, working with them rather than feeling like you're always fighting against them. Teachers will likely be more open to your ideas.

If you don't already know your child's teacher(s) and the school administration, get to do so as soon as possible. Building that relationship can start with small talk, chatting about the weather, sports, pets and hobbies. Casual conversations can help relieve tension and helps create a comfortable foundation to build from. Once set, you can ask how long the teacher has been teaching, as

well as about their teaching philosophy and methods. You can then move towards their experiences working with kids with ADHD. What strategies have then found to be effective? Ask for their advice on any tips they have for parents to try. This helps really establish that collaborative spirit. Once the relationship is built and mutual respect is demonstrated, then you can offer strategies that your child can benefit from.

As part of this relationship, it is important to acknowledge that yes, your child is your universe. Teachers understand that, but also have 30+ other children they need to focus on as well. Acknowledging the pressures teachers have to ensure all children are supported is helpful in sustaining a long-term alliance. Ask if there is perhaps things you can do to help the teacher in meeting your child's needs.

## Meeting with the School

Once you have received your child's diagnosis, it is important to review the diagnosis (and any assessment results) with the school right away.

### *Before the meeting*

*Prepare.* Talk with your child about what is going well at school; what are teachers already doing that help them with learning. Also ask them what would help make school better. Kids can give insight into their difficulties; perhaps the teacher talks too fast or there are too many notes to copy from the board. Perhaps your child does not feel safe asking for help. Incorporate this insight into the information you share.

If you have a report, highlight the key pieces of information you want to discuss with the teacher. The diagnosis and the nature of your child's difficulties, as well as your child's strengths. Highlight key strategies that will help motivate and support your child.

Create a list of questions to ask. You will need to find out as much about the school as possible. What are school rules? What is the school's process in supporting kids with ADHD? What is reasonable to expect in the classroom? What types of supports are available? How can the recommended strategies be incorporated into the class (strategies tend to help all kids and could be easily included as part of the regular routine)? How are problematic behaviours managed?

### *At the meeting*

Be respectful of the teacher's time. Ensure you are on time. Given there is likely more information than you can

cover in one meeting, it is essential you are organized. Talk about the most important information first.



Be sure to come out of the meeting very clear about expectations and next steps. Create an action plan that you and the teacher both agree with. What is the school going to do to help support your child? What are your responsibilities at home to help support your child for school? It is also important to establish a way to keep track of your child's progress and the effectiveness of implemented strategies. How will you monitor the effectiveness of implemented supports? Establish a timeline and criteria for success. Ensure you know when and how you will get updates on your child's progress. Schedule a formal check-in to make sure things are on track and adjust as needed.

Respect the time allotted for the meeting. If there are still unresolved items, be sure to ask the best method of contacting teachers and see what is reasonable for follow-up.

When the meeting is finished, be sure to thank everyone for their time.

### *After the meeting*

*Begin the action plan.* Get started on the things you agreed to work on at home. It can be helpful to send a follow-up email outlining the action plan with the teacher.

*Maintain regular contact.* Be sure to stay in touch with your child's teacher to maintain the parent-teacher partnership (and to show your child how important school is across all contexts). You may consider having daily report cards to get regular check-in's on your child's progress. Or have regular meetings to ensure everyone is on the same page.

## IPP's

If your child doesn't already have an Individualized Program Plan (IPP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP), be sure to ask about this for your child. This document includes information about specific goals your child will work on through the year and identifies services and accommodations your child requires in school. As an advocate for your child, it is important you are an active player in creating this document. Watch for a special edition report on how to build an effective IPP.

## Be involved



Families are not as involved in the classroom as they once were. With the change of family structure and the increase in busyness in day-to-day lives, we have become a "hot dog" community in which the only thing parents seem to do is help with fundraising efforts. While these activities are important, there is not a lot of opportunity to build relationships within the school. Being as involved as you can be within the classroom and/or school (e.g., volunteering for field trips, parties, home reading programs, and so on) helps teachers know you are involved. And opens up opportunities for increased contact with the teacher and check-in's to see how your child is doing.

## Things to Remember

Teachers do want to hear and appreciate your input about your child; you are the expert on your child's personality, strengths, and challenges. Bringing your expertise to the table is important to work together to try to find what strategies will best support your child within the context of the classroom.

Stay calm. Sometimes we may feel anxious or frustrated when trying to establish supports for our children. However, remaining calm is critical to ensure the

meeting is constructive, but also to promote your alliance with the school.

Finally, schedule a meeting at the start of every school year to establish a relationship with your child's teachers and to promote ongoing advocacy for your child's needs each year.

## Involve Your Child

Although we focus a lot on what teachers should be doing, there are things we should be doing at home as well. Do things at home as much as possible, such as learning effective strategies that will help promote their learning.



Don't take complete ownership of things – we are there to support our children, but they need to learn how to be strong advocates for your own learning as well, which will be critical once they are in high school and beyond. Teach them skills they need to be successful long-term. Teach them how to organize. Develop reminder systems so homework is successful brought to and from school. Make a system to track assignments. Have regular study routines. Identify what learning aids will help them. Watch for upcoming editions that will help give you ideas on all these key areas and more.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Feel free to contact Caroline if you have any questions  
related to this article, or other related issues!

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**One Family at a Time**