

How to Handle Students With ADHD

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ADHD is a “hidden disability.”

—Maryln Appelbaum

The first step in working with students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is to understand that this is a real disability. You can't see it as easily as when you see someone wearing a pair of glasses, using a hearing aid, or sitting in a wheelchair; however, it is still very real. It is a disorder that is often invisible, buried beneath what appears to be misbehavior, sloppiness, laziness, and even stubbornness. I call it the hidden disability.

ADHD has been around a long time. Over one hundred years ago, the medical community focused attention on a combination of deficits in attention, learning, motor skills, and motivation (Gillberg, 2003). The name for this combination of deficits changed over the years, and today it has come to be called ADHD. It is the most common mental disorder of childhood (Stolzer, 2007) and affects 7.5 percent of school-age children (Fine, 2002) in the United States. The ADHD diagnosis accounts for 50 percent of the children in child psychiatry clinics in America (Leslie, Weckerly, Plemmons, Landsyerk, & Eastman, 2004). It is a very real disorder.

When I think of an executive, I think of someone who is in charge of a large company. That person performs many functions to organize employees and ensure that the company operates smoothly. The brain also has executive functions—functions to ensure that operations are organized. There are several executive functions that may be affected in children with ADHD (Stearns, Dunham, McIntosh, & Dean, 2004).

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A very important executive function is nonverbal memory. This is the child's ability to keep representations—pictures of events—in the mind. These pictures then become part of children's memories. These pictures are very important because they help children see what will happen if they engage in an action. Students with ADHD often have a deficit with this executive function, and because they cannot see what will happen, they act impulsively.

Another very important executive function is working memory (Biederman et al., 2000, as cited by Stearns et al., 2004). Working memory stores and manipulates information to do tasks. Students need working memory to not only do their schoolwork, but also to remember the rules of behavior and problem solving. When students have a deficit in working memory, they do not remember to stop engaging in inappropriate behaviors. That is why students with ADHD often engage in the same inappropriate behaviors repeatedly, even though they have experienced consequences. Teachers have said to me, "I don't understand. They get in trouble every time. Why do they just keep doing it?" It is because it is not in their working memory.

Students with ADHD generally have problems following rules. This is because of another deficit in executive function—self-regulation. Self-regulation is important because this is the function that gives students the self-discipline they need to set goals and work toward those goals. They need this so they can sustain attention to tasks, even when they are disinterested, bored, or tired. When this function is operating, they learn to set a plan in motion, and they follow through until it is finished. They do not need anyone to look over their shoulders to ensure they are moving toward their goals.

All of these functions are internal. You cannot see these functions, so it is easy to forget they are there. Instead, you may think, "Petey is lazy." "He hates following rules." "He never follows through." "It's in one ear, and out the other." "He loses everything." "I never know what he will do next."

A huge problem is that students start believing they are not as good as their peers. I met Sherry, an adult with ADHD, while I was giving seminars on ADHD. Sherry told me that she always felt different from other children. She never fit in with her peers, and she felt like she never could get anything right. She compared herself to her older sister who did not have ADHD. Sadly, her parents also compared her to her sister, and Sherry came up short! No one knew she had ADHD. Everyone, both at school and at home, thought she was deliberately not following through when asked to do something. They thought she was lazy and stubborn and not very smart. Actually, Sherry had an above-average IQ, but it was not readily seen because of her lack of follow-through on assignments and tasks.

Unfortunately, no one diagnosed her until late into adulthood. By then, her self-esteem had been severely affected.

There are ways to help students with ADHD (Brown, Ilderton, Taylor, & Lock, 2001). One method is the medical model of giving them medication, usually a stimulant. Medicating children does not always solve the problem. There are children who need medication but do not get it, and other children who take medication but do not need it. There are also students who get medication, but the dose may not be appropriate. Teachers speak repeatedly of overmedicated students acting like “zombies.”

I will never forget one man who spoke to me about medication. I was in a small town in New Mexico. I had just completed a morning session for a large group of parents of students with ADHD. I was taking a break, and then I was going to do the same session for teachers. As I stood near my computer sorting through my PowerPoint presentation for the next session, a tall, slim, fair-haired man came up to me. He introduced himself to me as a dad whose son had been diagnosed the year before with ADHD. He told me that he had been very upset with the doctor when his son was placed on Ritalin because he did not want his son medicated. His ex-wife had custody, so it was her decision. But then something amazing happened; his son began to act totally differently. He could focus. His grades dramatically improved. The dad was very impressed, and it made him start thinking about himself. He had had problems his whole life both in learning and in relationships. He decided to go to his son’s doctor to see if he, too, had ADHD. The doctor did a full workup, diagnosed him with ADHD, and put him on Ritalin. This dad had a look of amazement on his face as he told me that up to the day he started taking Ritalin, he had never read a book from cover to cover. Once he started taking Ritalin, he got a library card and started reading book after book. He could focus. He could concentrate. I can still picture the look of awe on his face as he shared his story of how medication had helped him.

The American Psychiatric Association (2000) identifies several types of ADHD. All types have in common a chronic and persistent pattern of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.

ADHD INATTENTIVE TYPE

Students with this type of ADHD have many symptoms of being inattentive. (See Figure 1.1) One of the key symptoms is that they have trouble listening and following directions and have difficulty focusing and sustaining attention. They may start out listening to what the teacher is saying, but their minds drift off to other topics. This happens all the time, not only

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when in class. It can happen when students are reading a book or listening to a friend. Their minds wander, and they are easily distracted. The distraction can be auditory like an airplane flying outside, raindrops on the window, or even air conditioning or heating vents. It can be visual like a fancy bulletin board at the front of the room or even something about the teacher's appearance.

Gardner was a third grader with ADHD Inattentive Type. He was a quiet, shy boy, the type of child who could easily fall through the cracks. He did not misbehave or dress in any unusual way. His teacher, Mrs. Jenkins, was a first-year teacher. She put most of her attention on students who were misbehaving. One day, however, Mrs. Jenkins did notice Gardner. He was looking at her in a peculiar manner instead of responding to instructions about group work the students were to begin. She walked over to him and asked if something was wrong. He said, "Mrs. Jenkins, I'm sorry. I couldn't hear you talking because I was watching your hands—your red nail polish." He had become completely distracted by her nail polish. From that day on, Mrs. Jenkins never wore bright nail polish.

Because of this inattentiveness, students may start a task and not finish it. Their schoolwork is often inconsistent. Some days they may be able to focus better than others. On the days that they can't focus as well, they may look "spacey." Their attention just wanders from object to object and situation to situation. They may forget from moment to moment what they were doing.

Students with ADHD Inattentive Type have a tendency to procrastinate. They wait until the last possible minute to do an assignment. Waiting until the last minute actually stimulates the brain. When they feel rushed, they feel stimulated to focus and get the job done. It's their way of attending to a task. Of course, sometimes, the task doesn't get done at all because the student totally forgets about it. This difficulty completing tasks affects their grades adversely (Reiter, 2004).

While students with ADHD generally have difficulty focusing, there are times when they can hyper-focus on a task and tune out everything and everyone else. A great example of this is when students use the computer or watch television. Everything is tuned out for hours at a time. When a project is interesting at school, this same hyper-focusing characteristic can help students work for hours at a time.

Another characteristic of inattentive students is that they are often disorganized. They may lose or forget their belongings. These are the students who come to school without homework and truly did forget it or misplace it. They cannot find their belongings like paper, pencils, or books. Their desks and lockers may be total disasters with papers scattered everywhere and items upside down. All of this contributes to these children feeling like, "I can't get anything right. Why even try?" Once this type of

learned helplessness occurs, it will be even harder to help students succeed (Valas, 2001). This child can be helped. It simply takes new tools.

Strategies for Succeeding With Students With ADHD Inattentive Type

The Edutainer

An edutainer is a word that I made up many years ago. An edutainer is both an educator and an entertainer. You have to do this to hold the attention of students. Be so engaging that students want to listen to you as much as they want to watch their favorite television show or play a video game. There was a time when children came to school, and even if they had ADHD, they sat still and listened as best as they could. They had

Figure 1.1 Checklist of Behavioral Characteristics of ADHD Inattentive Type

- Difficulty listening
- Difficulty attending to tasks
- Difficulty focusing
- Easily distracted
- Procrastinates
- Problems concentrating
- Inconsistent performance in school work
- Disorganized
- Loses belongings
- Cluttered desk and room
- Poor study skills
- Forgetful
- Problems working independently

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that old fashioned R-word, “respect.” They learned at home that when they came to school, they had better pay attention. That is generally not the case anymore. Instead, students come to school with an entirely different attitude: “Entertain me.” They are used to watching television, playing video games, seeing entertainment. Now, as part of educating, teachers have to entertain, too. That is what it means to be an edutainer.

At seminars I show an awesome video clip that illustrates this point. A man is standing on a stage and starts to play his trombone. He hooks his audience’s attention immediately by swinging his hips and rolling around on stage as he plays the trombone. He has zest; he has spirit. Soon, the audience members stand up and start swinging to the beat. He has captivated their attention. Everyone in my own audience laughs as they see this, and some get up and start swinging around just from watching it. He is an edutainer.

Brain research shows that there are different ways to engage the brain (Jenson, 2000). One fun way is to do something novel. For example, the first time I got on a plane after 9/11, I was feeling frightened. Usually, flight attendants give a tedious speech about seatbelts and oxygen masks right before the planes take off, and typically, passengers tune it out because they have heard it so many times before. This time, when many passengers were uneasy, the flight attendant greeted us all with a smile and instead of droning on, she sang the safety information. She deliberately made funny voice inflections as she sang. She was an edutainer and held our attention totally. This is a technique you can use. Laugh and have fun. Burst into song unexpectedly. Edutain and help all students in your class focus and pay attention.

Eliminating Distractions

Because students with ADHD are so easily distracted, seating is crucial (Carroll et al., 2006). Noises can be extremely distracting. If they sit near an air conditioning or heating vent, they may find it very difficult to concentrate, listening to the noise of the air from the vent rather than you. If they sit near the door, they can hear the sounds from the hallway. It’s not only sounds that are distracting, but also sights. Students sitting near a window will be easily distracted by the sights outside the window. If students with ADHD are sitting near the back of the room, all of the students in front of them will distract them. They will notice what the other children are wearing, what they are doing, and how they are sitting, instead of putting their attention on you.

Your clothing makes a difference. Even scents you wear can be distracting. Strong perfume or aftershave may distract students. Some students

have said that long earrings worn by teachers distracted them because they swung around while the teacher spoke. Others have reported that they were distracted by the walls behind the teacher. There were all kinds of posters, writing, and messages on those walls that held their attention more than the teacher did. Students with ADHD notice everything (Carroll). Their attention can be caught by sights and sounds you take for granted. If a student starts showing symptoms of inattentiveness, something as simple as changing the student's seat can totally change the student's behavior.

Headphones or ear plugs are another way of blocking out distractions. These are especially beneficial for students who are extremely sensitive to sounds.

Private Offices. An effective device to maintain attention is to give students "private offices." Open two manila file folders side by side. Slide one of the folders partially into the other folder so that the folders overlap, creating three "walls." The "private office" can stand up on a desk. Have students individualize the offices by decorating the outsides of the folders, but the insides remain blank. When students need to concentrate on their work, they get out their "offices" and work at their seats in privacy.

Staying on Task

It can be very difficult for students with ADHD to stay on task. There are several ways you can help them (Parker, 2005). One way is for you to use sticky notes as reminders on their worksheets or homework. Another way is for them to write their own reminders. Have them make a list of all the things they need to remember. They then write each reminder on separate sticky notes. Now they are ready to take the sticky notes and pop them on the pages of their assignments.

Erasable Highlighters. Students enjoy working with erasable highlighters, and the highlighters help them stay on task. Students highlight the information they need to remember. Later, they can erase what they wrote. Erasable highlighters can be found at most office supply stores. Different colors can be used for different reminders. For example, when studying parts of speech, nouns can be highlighted using yellow and verbs highlighted with pink.

Underlining. If you don't want to use erasable highlighters, teach students to put a line under all completed work. They learn that anything without a line underneath it still needs to be finished. This is another way of helping them to stay on task.

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Visual Task Cards. List the items students need to do on a sheet of paper. Call it a visual task card. As students complete each item, they check it off. This is an effective strategy that can also be shared with families. Some parents report great success when they put task cards on the refrigerator. Every time children get something from the refrigerator, they are reminded of tasks that still need to be completed.

Proximity Control. Proximity control is an excellent method for helping all students, not just those with ADHD, stay on task (Gunter & Shores, 1995). When you see a student talking to other students or not doing an assignment, walk over to the student's desk. Touch the desk, smile at the student, and point to the work or put your finger on your mouth to indicate it is time to "shhh." This is an effective strategy for nipping problems in the bud before they develop into classroom management issues.

Dividing Work. Students with ADHD often become so overwhelmed when they look at a paper filled with assignments that they may freeze before they even get started. Mrs. Sloan had that problem with Daren. She solved this problem by taking a blue file folder and cutting the front flap of the folder into three horizontal equal parts. She numbered the parts one through three from top to bottom. She then put the assignment sheet inside the folder. She told Daren to first open up section one, the top section, and do the problems. When he was finished, he closed the top section. He then opened up section two, the middle section, and worked those problems. When he finished that section, he closed it and opened section three, the bottom section, and worked those problems. When he finished section three, he opened up the top two sections to make sure that he had finished the entire sheet. This was a great way for him to do his classwork without feeling overwhelmed.

Organizing Tools

One of the characteristics of students with ADHD Inattentive Type is disorganization. The more organized students are, the more effective their work will be. Look at the areas of disorganization and then focus on finding strategies to help students succeed, like color coding and labeling.

Color Coding. Color coding is an effective strategy to help students with ADHD stay organized and keep track of their work (Brown et al., 2001). Use different colors for different subjects. For example, the math book has a red paper book cover, a red folder to hold all math papers, and little red dots on the backs of all math equipment, which is stored on shelves with

red tape on the edges. Other subject areas have other colors; you can use different colors like red for math, blue for language, yellow for social studies, and green for science. Color coding not only helps students stay more organized, but it also serves as a great reminder of where to put things when finished using them.

Label. Have lockers that are clearly labeled. Put a picture at the top of the locker showing where everything goes. This serves as a visual reminder every time students put anything in their lockers.

Use the same technique for desks. Have a photo inside the desk lid showing where everything needs to go. Have a set time each day in which students do their daily desk checks to make sure everything is in the correct place. It is important that this is done daily because it doesn't take long for a mess to accumulate inside desks.

Names on Work. Students with ADHD often forget to put their names on their papers. I have used several strategies very effectively to help them remember. One way is to highlight papers ahead of time with yellow highlighter in the area on the page for the student's name. At the beginning of each class period, have the students write their names where the yellow highlighter is marked on their sheets.

I have another fun method for having students write their names, called "pencils in the air." When it is time for students to do their assignments, I have them get out their sheets of paper, and we play a "Simon Says" type of game. They love games. They have to do everything that I tell them to do. I give them a bunch of silly instructions like "Touch your nose," and then I tell them, "Pencils in the air." The students all hold up their pencils. The next instruction is "Pencils down on the top of the paper." This is followed by, "Write your names on the paper." After that, there are usually some more fun instructions like having students smile at someone sitting next to them, putting their hands on top of their desks, clapping their hands, and even saying, "I love this assignment." Students laugh and have fun. Anxiety is reduced, and names are on the papers.

Peer Support

Assign students with ADHD who are forgetful a "remember partner." The remember partner is a student who is very organized and enjoys being a helper (Parker, 2005). The remember partner's job is to remind the student of important assignments and lessons. Choose the remember partner carefully because it is important that the two students are compatible.

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Pocket Folders

Students often forget or become confused about bringing work back to school after they have finished it at home. They sometimes bring back assignment sheets over and over again that they no longer need, sheets that really can stay home. An easy organizing strategy to help students with this situation is to use different-colored folders for each subject area. Each folder needs to have two pockets when opened, one on the left and one on the right. Mark the pocket on the left to say, “Left at home.” This means that papers in this pocket go home and stay home. Mark the pocket on the right, “Right back to school.” This means that students are to complete those pages in that pocket and return them to school.

Clipboard

If there is anything really important that you want parents to see, attach it to a clipboard. It’s difficult for students to forget or lose a big, hard clipboard.

Launching Pad

Students often forget to bring pencils, pens, homework assignments, and sometimes even their lunch. Suggest to parents to create a “launching pad” area at home. It can be a chair or a small table. The student puts homework, special shoes, a sweater, pencils, pens, books, and anything else that needs to be brought to school on the launching pad. These items are with the student’s backpack but not in the backpack. Things that go into the backpack frequently get lost. The last thing the student does before going to school is to place every object on the launching pad into the backpack. Ideally, the backpacks can be color coded with one bag for morning classes and another for afternoon classes.

ADHD HYPERACTIVE-IMPULSIVE TYPE

Just as the word hyperactive implies, students with this form of ADHD are very active and need to move around (Frank, 2001). They are often restless and cannot sit still for long periods of time. They are in constant motion. These are the students who tap their pencils, get up from their seats to roam around the room, and sometimes even fall out of their chairs. When they are sitting, they may be moving their hands, tapping their fingers, or swinging their legs back and forth. Their mouths are in motion too, talking, blurting out inappropriately, or chewing on a pencil or other object.

They are often frustrated, and may become angry at others and say things they do not mean. Sometimes, they don't even remember what it is they said that got someone upset. They just said what popped into their minds without thinking through the ramifications. This causes hurt feelings and sometimes failed relationships.

While it is easy to become upset with these children, it's important to remember that they do have a disorder. It is as real as diabetes. Underneath all the hyperactivity and impulsive behavior may be a very lonely child. See Figure 1.2 below.

Figure 1.2 Checklist of Behavioral Characteristics of ADHD Hyperactive-Impulsive Type

- High activity level
- Appears to be in constant motion
- Plays with objects
- Puts objects in mouth
- Talks excessively
- Difficulty waiting for turn
- Roams around classroom
- Great difficulty staying in seat
- Often fidgets with hands or feet
- Impulsive and lacks self-control
- Blurts out verbally
- Engages in impulsive behaviors
- Gets in trouble frequently
- Difficulty in personal relationships
- Often interrupts others
- Difficulty with transitions
- Easily frustrated

Strategies for Succeeding With Students With ADHD Hyperactive-Impulsive Type

The strategies you will be learning in this section are all designed to provide appropriate ways for students to move within the classroom. They need to move. It helps them concentrate and stay focused. It is not something that they *want* to do, but rather something that they *have* to do.

Mouse Pad

Students who are hyperactive often fidget with their hands. They often tap their fingers, pens, or pencils loudly on their desks. Give these students something else to tap—something that does not make noise. A computer mouse pad is perfect. When students feel like tapping their fingers or pencils, they tap onto the mouse pad, and no one is disturbed. Students get to tap, and the classroom gets to be quieter.

Kenzie was in constant trouble for making too much noise in the classroom from kindergarten through fourth grade. He couldn't sit still; he was in constant motion. He continually tapped his pencil or pen on the desk. It was so loud that it distracted the entire class. In the fifth grade, everything changed for Kenzie. His teacher, Ms. Saven, taught him a new strategy. She told him it was OK with her if he tapped his pencil or pen. She gave him a computer mouse pad and told him that anytime he felt like tapping, he was to tap the pen or pencil on the mouse pad. He continued to tap, but now he was not disturbing anyone. He had learned an appropriate behavior to substitute for the inappropriate behavior. This method, along with others in this section, helped Kenzie to thrive in his classroom and as he progressed into middle school. He had learned new behaviors to replace the old, inappropriate behaviors.

Energy Ball

You will need a stress ball for this strategy. Call it an “energy ball.” Students take their excess energy and use it to squeeze the ball. They squeeze and squeeze the ball until they feel better and are able to keep their hands and bodies still. In one classroom that used this technique successfully, quiet, shy Megan came up to her teacher one day with a question. She said, “Mrs. Patterson, if the other kids can put their energy into the ball, can I use it to get some energy? I'm really tired today because I couldn't fall asleep last night.” Mrs. Patterson said, “Sure,” and Megan squeezed it and squeezed it until she felt better!

Stress Bucket

Some teachers have a “stress bucket” filled with different-shaped stress balls. They add to the bucket cut-up squares of soft fabric like velvet and even small squares of cut-up shag carpeting. This is effective because children like to squeeze different textures.

Velcro

There are some students who may become embarrassed when classmates see them holding a stress object in their hands. Place a small square of Velcro under these students’ desks. When students feel like moving their hands, they can rub the Velcro.

Doodle Pad

In their need for movement, some students doodle all over their assignments. By the time the assignments are turned in, they are unreadable. Give these students a doodle pad, a separate pad of paper that students can doodle on so assignments are turned in clean and easy to read.

Twist Bracelets

Some students who move their hands excessively develop a habit of twisting and pulling on their hair, and they actually can pull their hair out from their scalp. Teach them a different strategy for their hands when they feel like twisting something by giving them a small rope bracelet. Whenever they feel like twisting their hair, they twist the bracelet instead. Be careful that students do not twist the bracelet so strongly that they harm their wrists. If you see this happening, suggest that they hold and twist the bracelet rather than wear it.

Errands

It’s readily apparent which students need to move their entire bodies. They fidget and sometimes even fall out of their seats. They need strategies that will allow them to move their legs without disrupting the class. One effective strategy is to give these students errands within the classroom. They can empty the trash, help clean shelves, or carry something from one end of the room to the other.

Empty Desk

When you have students who need to move their entire bodies, use the empty desk strategy. Have an empty desk up at the front of the room.

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When students need to move, they move quietly to the other desk without touching anyone or talking. There are some students who go back and forth between the two desks every 10–15 minutes. As long as students do it quietly without disrupting the class, this is allowable.

Standing Room Only

Another effective strategy for students who cannot sit still is to have the student's desk in an area of the room that won't be disruptive to the class. Use colored masking tape to mark a large square around the student's desk. Within this "standing room only" area, the student is free to sit or stand or move about quietly without disrupting the class.

BOTH ADHD INATTENTIVE AND ADHD HYPERACTIVE-IMPULSIVE TYPES

Strategies for Succeeding With Students With ADHD Inattentive Type and Students With ADHD Hyperactive-Impulsive Type

Deadlines

Students with ADHD generally have no innate concept of time. They only see *now*, not the future and not the past. They generally tend to overestimate or underestimate how long it will take to complete specific tasks. They are task oriented rather than time structured. If interested in a task, students start it and work on it until it is finished or until they have collapsed from exhaustion. However, if the task is not interesting or if there is no deadline pressure, students will typically avoid beginning the task at all.

The key is to make each task interesting and relevant. Make assignments come alive so that students are excited. The more relevant it is, the more they will want to do it.

Each day, count down to the due date of an important assignment so that the deadline remains in students' minds. Have the date due written on the board so that they have the visual assist as well as the auditory one.

Self-Monitoring

Students need to learn how to work independently. Teach them self-monitoring skills (Harris, Friedlander, Saddler, Frizzelle, & Graham, 2005). Show them how to break assignments into smaller chunks. Teach

them to set a time that each chunk of work will be completed. Students monitor themselves to ensure that they have completed the work in the designated time period.

A stopwatch or timer is an effective way to help students self-monitor. Students set the timer for the time they are scheduled to work on a task. They work hard to ensure that what they are doing is completed before the time on the timer or stopwatch runs out.

Homework Checklist

Homework checklists are tools for families and schools to ensure that students complete their homework. Have a special sheet of paper (see Figure 1.3) to record the homework that is due for each subject under the appropriate day of the week. Students take the checklist home nightly. Students do the homework in each subject, and parents initial the checklist, confirming that the homework has been completed. Students then put their homework and the homework checklist on the launching pad so they remember to bring it back to school the next day.

Clear Directions

I have found that students with ADHD often do not follow directions because they do not fully understand them. The good news is that there are ways to give them directions so that they do understand (Frank, 2001). Give only one direction at a time, and demonstrate what you want them to do. Students need that visual explanation. Once you have demonstrated, have them take a turn rehearsing the directions. Keep directions brief. Use words that are easy for them to understand. Here's an example of clear directions: "I have a really fun assignment for you to do in class today. Here's how you will do it. Everyone take out a sheet of paper." Wait until they all have paper out. "Write your name right here." Hold up paper and show them where to write their names. "Put numbers one through five on the paper right here like this one on the overhead." Show them a paper on an overhead that is numbered one through five. Walk around the room as they are writing the numbers to be sure they understand.

Traffic Light Signals

Most students are embarrassed to say that they do not understand something being taught or cannot figure out how to work a problem. To constantly monitor whether your class understands, make traffic light signals for each of your students. Take a white sheet of paper and fold it

Figure 1.3 Homework Checklist

Homework

Student's Name _____ Week of _____

Subject	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Parent's Initials					

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vertically into three equal sections. On each section, draw a huge circle. Fill in the circle on the top section with green to make the “green light.” Fill in the middle circle with yellow for the “yellow light.” Fill in the bottom circle with red to be the “red light.” Fold the paper back into three equal parts so it can stand up with one side facing the front of the classroom. Pass out the traffic light signals to your students to place on their desks. When students fully understand the task or what is being learned, they have the “green light” face the front of the room. When they are not quite sure, they set the traffic light on “yellow” to face the front of the classroom. When they have no idea what they are supposed to be doing or learning, they have the “red light” face the front of the classroom. It’s an effective way of continually assessing students so you know who needs your help.

Frequent Support and Encouragement

Your smile is worth riches to students who struggle. Affirm students when they act appropriately (Bowman, Carr, Cooper, Miles, & Toner, 1998). Let them know that you believe in them. Your positive words and comments can make a huge difference in the lives of your children. You just never know the difference you make. Kasinda was a really tough student I had early in my teaching career. She was taller than any other student in my class, very slim, with a long, dark ponytail and huge, hardened eyes. She had a hard time concentrating, forgot to do her assignments, and would retreat into her own world. She was angry often, talked back when asked to do anything, and treated me and all the other students with disrespect. I checked into her background and learned that her dad had left before she was born, and her mom had left a few years later. She was being raised by an elderly grandmother who was exhausted. The grandmother felt like a failure because of what had happened with her daughter and now had just given up on Kasinda.

I resolved that I would help Kasinda. I set aside a special time each day to meet with her alone for five minutes. I told her that I wanted to get to know her and mostly listened as she talked. The early sessions were frequently for her to vent anger. She talked about how she hated her mother, her dad, and even her grandmother. Slowly, she began to trust me. She said she had no friends and told me that she really didn’t know how to get friends. I asked her if she would like me to pair her up with a “learning buddy.” She thought about that for nearly a week before she told me to go ahead. I did, and soon she and her learning buddy became friends. It was amazing to watch Kasinda that school year, as I met with her daily. Her eyes became brighter, and she went from an unhappy, sullen child to becoming a happier child. What a joy!

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One day, many years later, I was leading a seminar, and a tall, attractive woman came up to me and introduced herself. It was Kasinda! She had on her great smile. She was now a teacher and loved her work. She thanked me for taking the time to be there for her when she really needed it and she said that she became a teacher so she could do the same thing for other children. You just never know the difference that you make each day in the lives of your students.