



## Attention and Hyperactivity/Impulsivity Problems at School

Many students will occasionally have difficulty paying attention, managing their impulses, and/or completing assigned tasks. Class-wide supports put in place, can help all students to maintain attention and optimize learning. When students show a persistent pattern of inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity, to a degree that is inconsistent with developmental levels and negatively impacts social and academic activities, additional specific classroom supports may be required.

### Creating Supportive Classroom Environments – Tier 1 Supports

**Tier 1 supports are good for all!** Predictable, organized, and supportive classroom environments enhance academic learning and social-emotional well-being for all students. When classroom routines and expectations are clearly articulated, disruptions minimized, and learning is engaging and flexible, students are more likely to maintain attention, regulate their behaviour, and complete assigned tasks, using the AIM model as a guide, the following suggestions help create supportive learning environments:

#### WELCOME

- Review general classroom-level strategies for creating welcoming environments.
- Greet each student warmly every day. Show them that you are glad they are part of your class.
- Set and reinforce expectations for student behaviour and cooperative learning
- Create a structured learning environment that facilitates routine and participation, where appropriate risk-taking is encouraged.

#### INCLUDE

- Practice inclusion in your words, examples, actions, and visual displays (e.g., culture, sexual orientation, special needs).
- Get to know your students, build relationships and develop rapport and trust with students.
- Offer a range of engaging ways for students to access information, and to demonstrate their strengths
- Create a culture of caring within your classroom, through which students know they can ask for help when needed.

#### UNDERSTAND

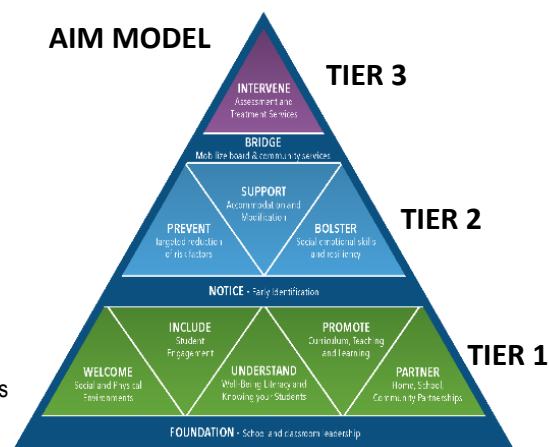
- Know your students; take time to get to know their unique stories and strengths and build on these.
- When students struggle with attention and hyperactivity/impulsivity occasionally, remind yourself that they are learning the skills of executive functioning and that this takes time
- Learn more about attention and hyperactivity/impulsivity problems from high-quality resources like Supporting Minds, ABCs of Mental Health, about kids health, etc.
- Consolidate your learning using the SMH ASSIST on-line tutorial related to attention and hyperactivity/impulsivity problems at school.

#### PROMOTE

- Have predictable routines in the classroom and announce changes in advance.
- Design environments that minimize crowding and distractions
- Explicitly teach social-emotional learning skills, like problem-solving and conflict resolution
- Explicitly teach executive functioning skills, like time management and study skills.

#### PARTNER

- Set a positive tone in interactions with parents and families
- Encourage regular home/school communication
- Review the local system of support for students with mental health problems
- When you are not sure about something related to mental health, ask!  
**Every school board has a Mental Health Leader who supports school teams.**



### Noticing Signs of Attention and Hyperactivity/Impulsivity Problems

Students who struggle with inattention, impulsivity, activity level, and/or a lack of executive skills (planning, organizing, remembering, monitoring) may have difficulty meeting the demands of school life, in spite of having the knowledge and ability to meet curriculum demands otherwise. It is therefore important to recognize signs of these neurodevelopmental difficulties early, so appropriate supports are put into place. While different signs occur at different ages, the chart below offers a listing of the most prominent signs to watch for at school.

Signs You May Observe: Elementary Age Students	Signs You May Observe: Secondary Age Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty paying attention and following instructions</li> <li>• Fidgety, excessive running, climbing, may blurt out answers</li> <li>• Difficulty with / avoids written work</li> <li>• Processes information slowly</li> <li>• Forgetful</li> <li>• Acts younger than age</li> <li>• May have difficulty with friendships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restless, distracted, may appear to daydream</li> <li>• Feels overwhelmed by cognitive and learning demands.</li> <li>• Difficulty with multistep problem solving, managing deadlines and monitoring work</li> <li>• May have more frequent negative moods (anger, anxiety, stress, sadness)</li> <li>• Difficulty organizing self and activities</li> <li>• Trouble maintaining attention to tasks and ignoring irrelevant information</li> <li>• May have difficulty with friendships</li> </ul>

If any of these signs of difficulty appear to be severe, prolonged, significantly interfere with day-to-day functioning, or if the child's family is expressing concerns, follow your school's protocol for accessing support for the student. A referral to professional mental health support within the school board and/or community may be warranted.

## Noticing Signs of Attention and Hyperactivity/Impulsivity-Related Problems

Educators are not mental health professionals and not expected to provide assessment or counselling support to students who are exhibiting signs of attention and hyperactivity/impulsivity problems. Educators are, however, in a position to observe, document and work collaboratively with families and mental health professionals to maximize student strengths and help them to be successful at school. For students with a diagnosed Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), information included in the psychological assessment report should be used to plan for and support student academic learning and social emotional development in the classroom. Generally, ADHD can affect many aspects of the student's life; social relationships, participation in sports/hobbies, sleep patterns, household / job-related responsibilities. When educators can support students with ADHD in the classroom, this can help students in other areas as well. Classroom strategies for supporting students with attention and hyperactivity/impulsivity problems may include:

Area of Difficulty	What you Might Observe at School	Some Classroom Strategies to Try
<b>Problems with Attention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Easily distracted</li> <li>✓ Daydreams</li> <li>✓ Doesn't seem to listen</li> <li>✓ Difficulty staying focused</li> </ul>	<p><b>GOOD FOR ALL:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Maintain predictable classroom environment</li> <li>✓ Limit noise and distractions when students are completing tasks requiring sustained attention</li> <li>✓ Teach in manageable chunks</li> <li>✓ Reinforce on-task behaviour</li> </ul> <p><b>NECESSARY FOR SOME:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Provide a quiet workspace</li> <li>✓ Provide preferential seating</li> <li>✓ Keep tasks short &amp; achievable</li> <li>✓ Provide visual schedules and visible timelines</li> </ul>
<b>Problems with Impulsivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Interrupts</li> <li>✓ Difficulty taking turns</li> <li>✓ Acts without thinking</li> <li>✓ Doesn't plan before thinking/acting</li> </ul>	<p><b>GOOD FOR ALL:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Remind students about mindfulness, listening, and pausing before speaking</li> <li>✓ Teach and model a planful approach to tasks and conversations</li> </ul> <p><b>NECESSARY FOR SOME:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Provide reminders to check work</li> <li>✓ Support the development of pausing skills</li> <li>✓ Reinforce on-task behaviour</li> <li>✓ Intervene at the point of performance – give reminders as required</li> </ul>
<b>Problems with Overactivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Restless</li> <li>✓ Always on the move</li> <li>✓ Can't sit still</li> </ul>	<p><b>GOOD FOR ALL:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Provide movement breaks (for all)</li> <li>✓ Schedule short brain breaks in the day to maximize learning</li> </ul> <p><b>NECESSARY FOR SOME:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Stand to work if necessary</li> <li>✓ Prompt for "stop and think" before acting</li> <li>✓ Offer opportunities for movement at points throughout the day (e.g., office errand)</li> </ul>
<b>Problems with Processing Speed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Difficulty with processing information</li> <li>✓ Trouble fluently &amp; automatically completing simple assignments</li> <li>✓ Problems performing under pressure</li> <li>✓ Difficulty making decisions quickly</li> </ul>	<p><b>GOOD FOR ALL:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Provide copies of notes</li> <li>✓ Repeat verbatim, complex instructions or concepts</li> </ul> <p><b>NECESSARY FOR SOME:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Extend time limits</li> <li>✓ Provide cues that a question/request is coming, and allow for longer response time</li> <li>✓ Shorten assignments</li> </ul>
<b>Problems with Working Memory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Difficulty retaining information</li> <li>✓ Problems remembering tasks, instructions, information</li> <li>✓ Trouble with multi-step problems</li> </ul>	<p><b>GOOD FOR ALL:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Post key information and reminders visually for all students to reference</li> <li>✓ Teach in manageable chunks,</li> <li>✓ Offer step by step instructions, particularly for complex tasks</li> </ul> <p><b>NECESSARY FOR SOME:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Provide prompts as needed</li> <li>✓ Provide memory aids (e.g., mnemonics)</li> </ul>

<p><b>Problems with Executive Functioning</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Organizational challenges</li> <li>✓ Trouble starting / completing work</li> <li>✓ Difficulty with setting goals</li> <li>✓ Problems regulating emotions</li> </ul>	<p><b>GOOD FOR ALL:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Prepare students for transitions</li> <li>✓ Set achievable timelines for tests and assignments</li> <li>✓ Chunk work expectations with intermediary deadlines</li> </ul> <p><b>NECESSARY FOR SOME:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Provide checklists and graphic organizers to support sequencing and organization</li> <li>✓ Provide extra support for organizing desk, notes, materials, etc.</li> <li>✓ Use daily home-school communication to support work completion</li> </ul>
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**Questions?** Contact us at [info@smh-assist.ca](mailto:info@smh-assist.ca).



**School Mental Health ASSIST works alongside the Ministry of Education to support student mental health in Ontario schools.**

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