

Effectively Interacting With ADD/ADHD Youth — Part II

BY MICHAEL BURDO

Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD) youth tend to have high inattention, impulsivity, hyperactivity, and bore easily. ADD/ADHD is neurologically based. These children are not being obnoxious or willfully defiant.

The January/February column discussed characteristics, interactive techniques and effective communication tips with ADD/ADHD youth. The March/April issue discussed discipline, medication, environment distractions and involving parents. This final article focuses on specific techniques that may go far in effectively interacting with ADD/ADHD youth.

Social Skills

Children with ADD/ADHD play better when the roles are clearly defined. There is a tendency towards repeating self-defeating behaviour patterns and they do not seem to learn from experience. They may ramble and say embarrassing things. Time periods with less structure and less supervision (playground activity time), may present a problem. See if an older child is willing to lend brief support as a play buddy.

A small group of two to four youth is more effective for the development of social skills. Identifying targeted social skills with practice prior to an activity, and processing after it, will benefit ADD/ADHD youth. These youth can learn social skills through guided observation of his/her peers in play activity. Take the time to occasionally point out the way other youth initiate activities, play games and deal with rejection.

Thirty minutes of play for ADHD youth is too much; ten minutes of play is better. Suggest a five minute check-in with a leader, and then the youth may be ready for another ten minute segment of play. Prior to a structured activity, meet with the youth to review the routine and who he/she will spend time with during the activity.



Photo: Scouts Canada archives

from experience...

As a leader and mom of a child with ADHD, I recommend involving these children in the program planning. I can honestly say that my son helps me with 90% of my programming. Who else but a child with ADHD could suggest activities to keep their attention? The self-esteem that my son achieved by being able to help me, an adult, develop the colony program, was a great boost in his self-confidence. I encourage all leaders to do the same. My son is going on to Cubs next year, and I hope that his Akela will see the potential leadership qualities in him as I have come to know and see through his help with my programming.

— Rhonda Stewart, 26th Cambridge Beavers, ON passed this tip to Scouting Life Magazine after reading the first column about working with ADD/ADHD children.

Dealing with Impulsive Behaviors

These children act without thinking. They can verbalize rules but have difficulty internalizing and translating them into thoughtful behavior. Have the ADHD child think “out loud” when problem solving. You can then understand their reasoning better. Ask the ADHD child not to answer a question for 15 or 20 seconds. This is long enough for the child to think about his/her response first and not just respond impulsively.

Often, ADHD children have difficulty with interactions, or taking turns; sometimes interpreting remarks as hostile and misreading social cues. Role-play problems and possible solutions with the child.

Keep behaviour rules simple and clear. Actively reward positive behaviors with praise.

Strive to always focus on the positive. Use a kitchen timer to indicate periods of intense, independent work for five to ten minutes. Reinforce appropriate behaviour during this short time segment. Provide the child with frequent feedback on his/her progress.

You may want to discreetly use visual cues as behavioural reminders; for example, have two large plastic jars, one filled with marbles while the other one is empty. The child moves marbles into the empty jar as positive behaviours occur. When the child moves an agreed upon number of marbles into the once empty jar, he/she will receive a small reward such as a decorative pencil, small key chain, or simple craft. Ask the ADHD youth what he/she would like to strive to earn as a reward. This reward system should be kept

discreet and personal so as to not interrupt the group. Hand out the reward at the end of the meeting after the other youth have left the hall or during down time at camp.

Increasing Compliance

Ensure that the youth knows you are a friend and are there to assist him/her. Treat him/her with respect. Never belittle them in front of his/her peers.

Help the ADHD youth in their areas of strength to build up their self-esteem. A simple nod, wink, smile, or touch on the shoulder can be very powerful. Point out alternative choices for positive behavior rather than confronting negative ones. Give "cues"; for example, "I'm looking for good listeners".

Time On Task

Eliminate distractions. Break tasks into smaller segments. Schedule the most demanding tasks for early in the day in order to obtain the best attention results. Youth who take medications may see them wear off as the day goes on.

Remember that ADHD children tend to do worse on activities that require sustained attention or are boring. Be aware of the possibility

that you may be talking with the group for too long a period. Assign tasks one step at a time. This will greatly help the ADHD youth from feeling overwhelmed.

The ADHD youth have to believe that you are on their side. If they believe that you are out to get them, they will see your behavioural plans as punitive and manipulative.

It's important to convince the youth that you want them to succeed.

Consistency of Performance

Notify ADD/ADHD youth well ahead of time if changes are to occur in the daily routine; they have trouble with change. This will assist them in focusing better. They often require a place to unwind and reduce stress. Provide a place to sit alone, take a short walk, or model with clay for instance. After 10 – 15 minutes of this, the youth will likely be able to access the energy needed to better attend to the activity at hand.

Know the difference between big things and little things. A consistent plan that emphasizes reinforcements such as genuine praise and encouraging words of approval has a good chance for success.

It's important to convince the youth that you want them to succeed. Experiencing early success allows ADHD youth to "buy in" to the program.

Organization Tips

Attempt to help with the organization of the child's environment (tent – cabin area). Teach the child to organize himself/herself better. Establish a daily routine and a schedule. A visual representation of the day's schedule posted in the cabin will provide an opportunity to better internalize the routine. Break longer activities into a series of smaller "sprints". The child will then feel less overwhelmed and they will finish projects in far less time. Show that you value organization by allowing ten


minutes each day for children to organize themselves. Be aware that the child may require some assistance from a leader.

Working effectively with ADD/ADHD children may require close proximity support from you at various times. Be ready to be able to assign a skilled leader on your leadership team to carry out this role, rotate the responsibility, or involve a parent in a leadership role. All the above strategies may be effectively used at regular weekly meetings, weekend camps, outings/excursions, and weekly summer camps as well. X

– Michael Burdo, B.A., B.S.W., is a Youth and Family Counselor and Scout counselor for 92nd Ottawa Scout Troop, Ontario.

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