

# Home-School Colla

It's Important for Children with ADHD



# collaboration



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**A**N EVIDENCE-BASED psychosocial treatment for children with ADHD is behavior therapy. It uses a behavioral approach to provide support on how to change antecedents (such as effective instructions or routines) and consequences (such as rewards or loss of privileges) to decrease challenging behavior and enhance positive behavior on the part of the child.

Positive effects from such programs can be difficult to maintain across settings such as home and school, for example. Teacher involvement in these programs may lead to more positive outcomes at school than parent involvement alone. Parent-teacher collaboration can be especially helpful for improving child outcomes for children with ADHD.

## **Parent-teacher collaboration for children with ADHD can be challenging—but it's important**

Research shows that teachers and parents need to spend more time and energy when supporting children who have ADHD. Studies also show that teachers and parents may experience more negative interactions with their children who have ADHD. In addition, it has been found that parents of children with ADHD may feel less supported and welcomed by their children's teachers.

Studies also suggest that on average, teachers of children with ADHD report lower levels of self-confidence in managing their own stress and more difficulty feeling connected with their students' parents. These teachers also report low confidence with making accommodations and behavioral plans for children with ADHD. In addition, it is possible in the midst of stressful circumstances, that there may be a mismatch between parents' views of their child's behavior compared to teachers' views.

Behavioral treatment of ADHD can be improved by incorporating classroom accommodations. For instance, consistency in implementing behavioral management plans across home and school can be critical to child functioning across these settings. Such consistency in implementing treatment programs is dependent on effective communication and partnerships between parents and teachers. Greater parent-teacher collaboration can help ensure that parents and teachers are on the same page with respect to their understanding of ADHD, their child, and how to best support the child.

## Four strategies for improving parent-teacher collaboration

### 1. Prioritize open communication and trust-building.

Parent-teacher partnerships can influence child outcomes for children with ADHD. Being available and prioritizing communication with each other can be helpful. Trust can be formed by repeated authentic interactions where a safe space is provided to share concerns. Focusing on the common goal of helping best support the child can open up space for genuine communication and non-defensiveness in receiving feedback.

It takes time to develop trust between a parent and a teacher. A few positive meetings or encounters may help to begin to build the foundation of the parent-teacher relationship. It is also important for parents and teachers to “sandwich” feedback when providing it to each other. This means providing positive feedback first, growth-based feedback next, and finally another piece of positive feedback.

### 2. Appreciate the uniqueness of the other’s perspective.

Parents likely have an incredibly significant understanding of their child that is informed by their history and multitude of interactions with their child. Teachers are likely to have a broad perspective of same-aged peers and can view a student in the context of their past and current classmates. Both parents and teachers have unique perspectives to bring to the table. Open communication with respect for each person’s unique perspective is important to sharing knowledge to understand the whole child across settings.

### 3. Notice any negative thoughts or assumptions about self and others.

In context of the greater stress that may be more likely to be experienced in supporting children with ADHD, parents and teachers may be at higher risk of thinking more negatively both about themselves and each other. An initial step toward not letting these thoughts affect mood and behavior is to notice these thoughts in the first place. It may be helpful to write these thoughts down in a personal journal to reflect upon what thoughts may be occurring, and how to find areas of strength within the student, parent, or teacher.

### 4. If such negative thoughts arise, work on understanding them.

Taking time to examine where these negative thoughts may be coming from may be helpful. These thoughts may or may not be reflective of reality, and finding the evidence for and against these thoughts can aid in understanding what the next steps could be. Trying to understand the perspective of the other person can be helpful in deciding if thoughts are reflective of reality.

Thinking about evidence for and against the truth of the nega-

tive thought can help determine how true it is. Continuing to openly interact with the other person can help provide more information and context to support or disprove specific thoughts. It may be the case that negative thoughts (such as “I’m not capable of working with this teacher”) may be more extreme than the situation warrants or untrue, in which case reflecting on where these thoughts are coming from may help reduce the negative intensity of these thoughts.

Sometimes negative thoughts of blame can come from feelings of frustration, sadness, and/or hopelessness. It may be helpful to make time for self-care to build up personal resources for resilience. Thinking of a more positive, balanced, and realistic thought to counter the negative thought can be helpful as well.

If it is the case that negative thoughts are more reflective of reality, then the next step may be to decide how to proceed in finding a solution (for example: deciding objectively what the problem is, brainstorming different approaches to finding a solution, deciding on the pros and cons of each approach, implementing an approach, and deciding if it worked). The process of monitoring thoughts, testing the realism of a thought, and possibly changing a thought comes from cognitive behavior therapy (CBT).

Relationships are unique and develop at their own pace. There are multiple barriers (resources, time, energy) to effective parent-teacher collaboration. Given the significance of home-school collaboration for children with ADHD, we hope that the above strategies are some ways of improving such home-school partnerships. 🗨️

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## ADDITIONAL READING

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