

AN ADHD/ADD CHILD'S BILL OF RIGHTS

(Ruth E Harris - North West Reading Clinic - 1991: adapted by A. Cunliffe. St. Augustines High School, Billington, Lancs., 2003)

"Help me to focus!"

Please teach me through my sense of 'touch'. I need hands on and body movement.

(Although children with ADHD/ADD often fiddle with things, their sense of touch can be utilised in a very positive way. Their preferred learning style often involves touch. They find formal classroom environments, where they have to listen to teachers for long periods of time, extremely difficult to cope with. Be creative and sensitive to their needs!)

"I need to know what comes next!"

Please give me a structured environment where there is a dependable routine. Give me advance warning if there will be changes.

(ADHD/ADD children respond well to clear boundaries and structures, but NOT to rigidity. They may find sudden changes, being rushed and endings difficult. When they need to finish a task that they are absorbed in, such as being on a computer, they need to be given a pre-warning that in the next 'x' minutes, they must stop and move on to another specified task.)

"Wait for me, I'm still thinking!"

Please allow me to go at my own pace. If I rush I get confused and upset.

(Processing information can take longer. Poor working memory means that they often find it difficult to carry too much information. Instructions must not be long-winded, but clear and precise. Such children need time to process their

AN ADHD/ADD CHILD'S BILL OF RIGHTS

thoughts, but again this must be balanced with clear time structures, otherwise tasks may not be finished).

"I'm stuck, I can't do it!"

Please offer me options for problem-solving. I need to know the detours when the road is blocked.

(Children with ADHD/ADD may become de-motivated very quickly and give up on a task that they perceive to be difficult. Some become very wound up. In such cases, calmly tell them to stop, relax, take a deep breath and then help them to view the task in a different way. Learning Support Assistants are of great help here as they can work sensitively with the child to help them overcome their learning blocks.)

"Is it right? I need to know NOW!"

Please give me rich and immediate feed-back on how I'm doing.

(Very crucial! Verbal praise, a smile, a gentle touch on the shoulder, thumbs up, stickers etc are effective in encouraging the student to remain on task. It is also useful to have a pre-arranged personal cue to help students remain focused, such as a touch on their shoulder when they are off task.)

"I didn't forget, I didn't 'hear' in the first place."

Please give me directions one step at a time and ask me to say back what I think you said!

(Eye contact often helps here. Avoid overload! Even in 1:1 sessions such tactics are valid!)

AN ADHD/ADD CHILD'S BILL OF RIGHTS

"Do not place me next to other children like myself or near to windows or noisy radiators that will stop me from concentrating."

Please move me away from distractions. I cannot cope!

*(Children with ADHD/ADD cannot always filter out different sources of noise. Carry out a risk assessment of the classroom. Involve the child because they often pick up on things that a classroom teacher will overlook; this could include equipment that they may be tempted to fiddle with. Place such children near to positive role models, within easy eye-contact with the teacher. **Do not place naughty children together!**)*

"I didn't know I wasn't in my seat!"

Please remind me to stop, think and act.

(ADHD/ADD children may be very impulsive finding it difficult to put the brakes on. Do not be confrontational, but calmly and with authority remind them to STOP, THINK and then ACT.) Do not say, 'how many times have I told you not to...')

"Am I almost done now?"

Please give me short work periods with short-term goals.

(Try to break tasks down into achievable, meaningful goals. Difficult work may be followed by an interesting, easier piece of work. 'Traffic lights' works well)

AN ADHD/ADD CHILD'S BILL OF RIGHTS

i.e. like marking the beginning of a task on a work-sheet with green and the end with red pen.)

"What?"

Please don't say, "I already told you that." Tell me again in different words. Give me a signal. Draw me a symbol.

(Be patient!! If the child has not heard, it is because they were unable to follow instructions because they were too wordy or has something or someone in their immediate vicinity distracted them. Be observant and reflective! Make sure all the class is quiet, equipment is place on the desk and eye-contact is given by all before instructions are given. If instructions are to be given on a 1:1 basis or to a group, the same principle applies. When giving out homework, check they have written it down correctly. Don't presume!)

"I know it's all wrong, isn't it?"

Please give me praise for partial success. Reward me for self-improvement, not just for perfection.

AN ADHD/ADD CHILD'S BILL OF RIGHTS

(If a child with ADHD/ADD has tried their best and the results are not good, make sure praise is given for trying, or for work done correctly. Such encouragement will help them to move forward in their learning.)

"But why do I always get yelled at?"

Please catch me doing something right and praise me for my specific positive behaviour. Remind me (and yourself) about my good points when I'm having a bad day.

(Even though, a child may be having a particularly bad day. Try not to focus on the negative. Sometimes it helps them to have 'time out' to help them re-focus. Actively praise, for being on task or for following instructions for even brief moments.)

"Finally, please let me know you like me because often I don't like myself."

Make it clear to me it is my behaviour that you do not like, rather than me.

(Such children often have very low self-esteem. They need to know that they are liked however much their behaviour winds people up. Avoid labeling them as difficult. Be careful of your own body language. Look for the good in them - there is plenty of it! Please realize that their condition is real and can cause much anguish. Be sensitive to their parents - be supportive and work in partnership.)

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