

Can We Talk?

Start collaborating with your child's teacher even *before* Day 1

Meet-the-teachers night. Parent-teacher conferences. Semi-annual report cards. Schools provide *occasional* opportunities for teachers and parents to communicate. But if your child has AD/HD or learning difficulties, you should be in touch on a more frequent basis:

■ **Write to the teacher before school starts.** In addition to creating a personal connection, this will allow you to present your child as an individual with likes and dislikes, strengths and weak-

nesses—not just a student with AD/HD. Identify his AD/HD subtype—inattentive, hyperactive, or combined—and explain how it affects his behavior and learning style. Provide information about his treatment plan, and list classroom strategies that have helped. Encourage your child to write a letter, too, explaining what it's like for him to have AD/HD and how he learns best. (See samples, below.)

■ **Plan a parent-teacher conference early in the school year.** Use this time to share information and to learn how the class is run. Inquire about classroom rules and discipline, parent-teacher communication, and how the day might be structured. If you're afraid your

child's learning or behavioral needs won't be met, suggest specific measures that might help. If you need more frequent communication with the teacher, set up a schedule. This is also the time to assess the teacher's level of knowledge about AD/HD, and to offer the set of articles you can download from www.additudemag.com/teacher_info.asp, as well as information from other resources.

■ **Keep in touch with the special education team.** The same goes for others who interact with your child—tutors, sports coaches, leaders of after-school clubs, and so on. Whether by e-mail, voicemail, or actual conversation, suggest strategies and solicit their ideas.

Keep these conversations going throughout the school year—and keep your child involved. Doing so will teach him to be his own advocate, a skill he'll need soon enough.

From Parent to Teacher

Use this introductory letter to a child's teacher as a base from which to craft your own.

Dear Ms. Smith:

My son, Eric, will be in your class this year. I would like tell you something about him to help get the year off to a good start.

Eric has attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or AD/HD. As a parent, I expect my child to behave in an acceptable manner at school and everywhere else. However, I have had to recognize that certain behaviors are characteristic of AD/HD. Some of these behaviors may be disruptive, but Eric isn't trying to be "bad." Instead, he's responding to difficulties and deficits that result from his disorder.

In the past few years, I have worked with his teachers to find strategies to help. Because Eric is hyperactive, he finds it hard to sit still for long. Permitting him to walk or stand while he's working, and providing short breaks between lessons, reduces his fidgeting. He would love to run errands for you! Eric is also easily distracted, and would benefit from a private signal—perhaps a pat on the shoulder—to remind him to attend to his work.

Eric's learning style may be different from that of other students in the class. He finds it hard to follow oral instructions; written would be better. He works slowly and often has trouble finishing assignments. Given additional time, however, he's able to do a good job.

Eric is enthusiastic about school and eager to do well. I hope you will keep his needs in mind as you conduct the class, and accommodate—or tolerate—his behavior when you can. I look forward to working closely with you to help Eric to do his best. If you like, I can provide additional information about AD/HD or about my child.

Sincerely,
Eric's Mom and Dad

From Student to Teacher

Here's a sample "getting-to-know-me" letter from an 11-year-old to his new sixth-grade teacher.

Dear Ms. Smith,

My mom and dad asked me to write you a letter to introduce myself. Even though I have ADD, I think I am a pretty smart kid. In school, I keep trying to improve. I am doing my best to listen more rather than doze off in class when it is boring. I also keep practicing not blurting out. My teacher last year never gave up on me. When I was good, she was really proud of me. Slowly I became more aware of it, and then I changed.

To learn best, I like to get straight to the point. I don't like a lot of examples. Just tell me how it works, then if I don't understand it, I'll ask a couple of questions about how to do it. It's best if you help me right then and there and not wait until after school. By that time, I will have forgotten what I was so confused about.

Each year is about getting ready for next year. So I hang in there and take it one day at a time.

Very truly yours,
Eric