Letter to Your ADHD Child’s Teacher

Sample Letters Introducing Your ADHD Child Even Before Day 1

From ADDitude’s Experts
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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 ADHD or learning difficulties, you should be in touch well before the first day of school.

Write to the teacher before school starts to get the academic year off to a good start. In addition to creating a personal connection, this will allow you to present your child as an individual with likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses—not just a student with ADHD.

Identify his ADHD 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 and ADHD accommodations that have helped him succeed at school.

Discuss your child’s symptoms of attention deficit disorder (ADD ADHD), dyslexia, or other learning disabilities, and his ADHD medication, if he takes it.
Encourage your child to write a letter, too, explaining what it’s like for him to have ADHD and how he learns best. (See samples, below.)

Here are some sample letters to give you ideas for creating your own.

To Zachary’s Teachers:

Zachary Klein will be in your class this year. Over the years, we have found it helpful to give teachers some background about him, in addition to the IEP in his file. This often ensures a successful beginning to the school year.

Zach has attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). He is on medication, but it doesn’t change who he is, and it is more effective at helping him focus than at controlling his behavior. Zach has a great sense of humor, and tapping into this early in the year usually works well. Zach takes criticism personally and hates being yelled at. He won’t always let you know it, but he worries and is very sensitive. He might act cool and tough, but, if he has had a bad day, he falls apart when he gets home.

Zach is excited about the new year. He wants to settle down and “be mature and responsible.” He says this at the beginning of every year, but he can’t always succeed. Last school year was a difficult one, and Zach’s self-esteem is pretty beat up.

We have attached a list of things that have worked in some situations.

We welcome any ideas you have to keep Zach engaged in school, while boosting his self-esteem and helping him succeed. Please contact us at any time by phone or by e-mail. We have flexible schedules and are able to meet whenever it is convenient for you.

Sincerely,
Zach’s Parents

Here is the list of suggestions Zach’s parents attached to their letter:

1. **Praise.** Zach responds to praise. When he receives positive reinforcement, his anxiety decreases, and he can better stay on task. It is best, when possible, to talk to Zach about misbehavior in private.

2. **Flash pass.** In the past, teachers have given Zach a “flash pass,” so he can leave the room when he needs a break. He
doesn’t use it often, but knowing that he can helps him control anxiety. He may get up from time to time to get a tissue or sharpen a pencil, and this helps him settle down for the rest of the class. He gets anxious, almost to the point of claustrophobia, when he is in the same setting for too long.

3. **Quiet space.** Zach has difficulty focusing for long periods of time when test-taking and when reading. During these extended periods, you might move him to a quieter, private space, such as a teacher’s office or the hallway.

4. **Enlarged math problems.** Zach has trouble with taking math tests. He does better when tests are enlarged, so that one or two problems are on each page. He sometimes folds his math paper into quarters, with only one problem on each quarter, to help himself focus.

5. **Limited in-class reading.** It is nearly impossible for Zach to read in class for any extended period of time. It is best to send reading assignments home, where reading can be done quietly.

6. **Scheduling for difficult classes.** If possible, Zach’s hardest classes should be scheduled in the morning hours. Concentration becomes more difficult for him as the day progresses. Teachers in his later classes should be made aware of this.

7. **Leniency for lateness.** Unless he’s given plenty of reminders, Zach’s disorganization inhibits his ability to hand work in on time. While we strive to meet deadlines, we’d appreciate leniency for late assignments.

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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 ADHD. 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 ADHD. 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 directions 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 ADHD 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
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