

Understood

for learning & attention issues

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Supporting students with ADHD in the classroom

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Here's what we will cover today

ADHD and the
symptoms teachers
might observe in the
classroom

Strategies to support
students struggling with
these issues

Free resources that can
help parents and
educators

**What are learning
and attention issues?**

1 in 5

have brain-based learning and attention issues that cause them to struggle in school, socially and with everyday skills.

Learning and attention issues include:

- ADHD
- Dyslexia
- Executive functioning issues
- Dyscalculia
- Dysgraphia
- Dyspraxia
- Nonverbal learning disabilities
- Auditory processing disorder
- Sensory processing issues
- Visual processing issues

Learning and attention issues do not include:

- Intellectual disabilities
- Developmental disorders, such as Down syndrome
- Autism spectrum disorders (ASD)
- Sensory impairments like blindness
- Physical and motor impairment, congenital or acquired
- Social/emotional disorders
- Emotional disturbance or effects of trauma

- Note: Individuals can have an issue listed above *as well as* learning and attention issues. For example, people with autism can also have ADHD.

Common myths



Learning and attention issues are not common.



Learning and attention issues are linked to IQ.



There's a cure for learning and attention issues.



Kids grow out of learning and attention issues.



Bad parenting causes learning and attention issues.



Watching too much TV can cause learning and attention issues.



Eating poorly can cause learning and attention issues.



Vaccinations can cause learning and attention issues.



Corrective eyewear (glasses) can fix learning and attention issues.



People with learning and attention issues are just being lazy.



People with learning and attention issues can't have successful careers.

Poll Question #1

Which of the following is a myth about children with learning and attention issues?

- a) Learning and attention issues are more common than you may think.
- b) Learning and attention issues are unrelated to a child's IQ.
- c) With the right support, kids can outgrow these issues.
- d) Individuals with learning and attention issues can have bright futures.

Chat box question:

Is there a misconception about kids with learning and attention issues that you think is especially harmful?

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a complex condition

- Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) isn't a learning disability, but it affects learning. ADHD can make it hard for kids to sit still, concentrate, focus and control impulses and emotions.
- This isn't because kids with ADHD are lazy—it's because they have a brain-based medical condition. The cerebral cortex, or the brain's self-management system, takes longer to mature in kids with ADHD and might not be organized as efficiently in adults with ADHD.
- While the exact cause of ADHD isn't known, research shows that genetics and differences in brain development and in how the brain processes neurotransmitters (brain chemicals) play a role.
- Kids with ADHD can have a delay in development of about three years in some specific parts of the brain. This is why kids with ADHD may act one to three years younger than other kids their age.

Executive function: The CEO of the brain

- Executive functions consist of several mental skills that help the brain organize and act on information.
- Executive functioning skills enable people to plan, organize, remember things, prioritize, pay attention and get started on tasks. They also help people use information and experiences from the past to solve current problems.
- Having issues with executive function can make it difficult for kids to do things like keep track of time, make plans, make sure work is finished on time and multitask.

Poll Question #2

Which of the following is true about ADHD?

- a) ADHD is a brain-based issue.
- b) Students with ADHD can also struggle with executive functioning skills.
- c) ADHD can make it difficult for students to sit still and focus in the classroom.
- d) All of the above.

Chat box question:

What behaviors have you observed in the classroom that may signal a student is struggling with attention issues?

Hyperactivity and impulsivity

Moving nonstop

What it looks like:

The student:

- Moves nonstop, even when sitting
- Moves through the classroom quickly, often knocking things over
- Is constantly fidgeting
- Struggles to stay on task

What you may think is happening:

The student:

- Has too much energy
- Needs to learn to concentrate without distracting himself or others with his movement
- Needs to slow down

What research tells us is happening:

- The student's symptoms are common signs of hyperactivity.
- This brain-based issue can cause a student to move and talk continuously.
- The default mode network plays a key role in resting the brain. With ADHD, the brain takes longer to develop the mechanism that "switches off" when focus is needed.

Moving nonstop

What you can try:



Include short “brain breaks” such as stretches, simple games, and movement songs between lessons that allow students to stand up and move.



Suggest activities like yoga and martial arts to the physical education teacher or to the students’ caregivers and family.



Work with students to agree on a signal you can use to let them know when they’re off task. Similarly, come up with a signal they can use to let you know they need a break.



Provide “approved” fidgets like stress balls. Be sure to teach students how to use fidgets so they don’t merely play with them.

Interrupting and seeking attention

What it looks like:

The student:

- Blurts out answers to your questions
- Consistently interrupts and speaks over others
- Monopolizes conversation
- Is rarely on task and tries to find ways to make peers laugh

What you may think is happening:

The student:

- Is the center of attention at home and expects to be at school, too
- Likes to be in the spotlight, a “show-off”
- Needs to do more listening rather than talking

What research tells us is happening:

- Students who are impulsive lack the ability to self-regulate.
- The cerebral cortex, the part of the brain that manages impulse control, develops more slowly than usual.
- Students with this issue speak before their brains process the need to think through consequences.

Interrupting and seeking attention

What you can try:



Encourage students who struggle with waiting to be called on to take short notes to remind themselves of what they want to add to the discussion.



Use “wait time,” a three- to seven-second pause after you say something or ask a question. Research shows that students process what you have to say better—and respond to it appropriately—when they let it sink in.



Teach students to “stop, look and listen” during conversations. They should stop every few minutes to see how their discussion partner is reacting.



Help students acknowledge the issue when they catch themselves interrupting or calling out.

Struggling to follow rules and acting aggressively

What it looks like:

The student:

- Is in trouble frequently
- Breaks classroom rules and acts aggressively toward other students
- Acts out when he makes a mistake or is criticized
- Struggles to wait his turn or to wait in line

What you may think is happening:

The student:

- Is being “a typical boy”
- Is physical and immature for his grade
- Doesn't have enough supervision or is spoiled at home

What research tells us is happening:

- This student is showing signs of impulsive behavior.
- The student's brain is unable to control impulses; as a result the student does the first thing that comes to mind.
- Differences in the frontoparietal network, or “executive control circuit,” may help explain issues such as impulse control.

Struggling to follow rules and acting aggressively

What you can try:



Observe and take notes of when students are impulsive, what causes a behavior and what happens after the incident. This can provide valuable information to you, other professionals and students' families.



Point out inappropriate behaviors. Students may not realize when they're being impulsive. Take the student aside and calmly point out in private what you noticed. This may help some students to catch themselves before they act.



Catch students being good. Most students with poor impulse control genuinely want to behave, especially when they see other students receiving positive attention for good behavior.



Offer praise when you see students managing their impulses. Discuss how it makes them feel and how the positive behavior affects classmates.

Rushing to get things done

What it looks like:

The student:

- Rushes through assignments and is the first to hand them in
- Doesn't check over his or her work, which is sometimes messy and incomplete
- Often forgets to bring homework assignments home

What you may think is happening:

The student:

- Doesn't care about the quality of his or her work
- Procrastinates and then rushes to complete the assignment

What research tells us is happening:

- Students who struggle with hyperactivity and impulsivity can have difficulty slowing down.
- Students with these issues can also struggle with executive functioning skills.
- Research shows that individuals with ADHD can struggle to attend to tedious, repetitive work.

Rushing to get things done

What you can try:



Make assignments more manageable by breaking them into sections for students to do one at a time. Impulsivity may increase when a task seems overwhelming.



Create a packing list for students to consult at the end of the school day. Have them check off each item as they place it in their backpacks.



Set aside a specific amount of time to complete assignments, with structured options (such as reading or journal writing) for what students can do when they finish. Students who struggle with impulsivity do not tend to manage “free time” well.



Create contextual assignments for students using real-life interests.

Chat box question:

How do these types of behaviors affect your classroom? You? Other students?

Inattention and distractibility

Struggling to follow directions

What it looks like:

The student:

- May frequently say she doesn't understand the directions or didn't hear them
- May often turn in incomplete homework

What you may think is happening:

The student:

- Isn't listening to your directions
- Needs to try harder to pay attention

What research tells us is happening:

- Students who struggle with inattention and distractibility may forget what comes next.
- This can be a result of trouble with working memory, or the ability to keep information in mind and then use it in some way.
- Students with these issues can struggle to keep track of multi-step directions and can have difficulty focusing on different steps in a sequence.

Struggling to follow directions

What you can try:



- Specifically ask for your students' attention before giving directions. To keep the focus on you, say things like, "I'm going to talk about your assignment now, so I'll pause for a moment to make sure I have everyone's attention."



- Number your directions for students who tend to miss instructions. Tell them, "There are three things you need to do," or use transition words like *first*, *second* and *third*, or *next*, *then* and *last*.



- Provide written directions as a handout.



- Write the steps on the board and have students take a picture on their phones (if they have them and are allowed to use them) for reference.

Needing constant supervision to stay focused

What it looks like:

The student:

- Struggles to stay on task
- Gets easily distracted, seems to daydream or “space out”
- Can be forgetful and scattered

What you may think is happening:

The student:

- Is deliberately tuning out or being rude
- Is choosing to pay attention to other things

What research tells us is happening:

- Students who have focus problems can easily get derailed in the middle of what they’re doing because their attention is easily shifted.
- Their brains do not filter extraneous information well, so these students get distracted by noises, sights and their own thoughts.

Needing constant supervision to stay focused

What you can try:



- Discuss with students what you're seeing and agree on a subtle, but recognizable, signal you can use to let them know when they're off task. Likewise, come up with a signal they can use to let you know they need a break to regroup.



- Set clear guidelines for what you expect the student to contribute to a group project. For instance, "I expect each group member to share an idea with the class when you're done."



- Use a token board or other type of behavior chart to incentivize the student to stay on task. Start with one or two targeted behaviors.



- Provide "approved" fidgets like stress balls. Be sure to teach students how to use fidgets so they don't merely play with them.

Starting a task without finishing it

What it looks like:

The student:

- Misses or skips over key instructions
- Begins an assignment, gets distracted and doesn't complete it; this happens frequently

What you may think is happening:

The student:

- Lacks motivation and isn't trying hard enough
- Doesn't care about his or her work

What research tells us is happening:

- The student may start off listening and following instructions, but isn't able to sustain attention for a meaningful amount of time.
- This may be because the attention center of the student's brain, the frontoparietal cortex, is developing at a slower pace than that of his or her peers.

Starting a task without finishing it

What you can try:



Minimize distractions. Seat your inattentive and distractible student away from windows, doors and high-traffic areas.



Be very clear about your expectations. For instance, say, “We’re going to work on these five problems for the next 20 minutes.” Then set a timer for four-minute intervals so the student can keep track of and budget time appropriately.



Check in with the student directly and ask him or her to repeat the directions to you, or to explain the directions in his or her own words.



Use “wait time,” a three- to seven-second pause after you say something or ask a question. Research shows that students process what you have to say better—and respond to it appropriately—when they let it sink in.

Seeming not to listen

What it looks like:

The student:

- Never listens to what you're saying
- Loses his or her train of thought easily, even while speaking

What you may think is happening:

The student:

- Is intentionally choosing what to listen to
- Isn't interested in what you are teaching

What research tells us is happening:

- The student's struggles with inattention and distractibility make it hard for him or her to select which information to pay attention to and then sustain that attention.
- Many students with attention issues want to focus on the "right" thing, but their brains may have trouble picking out what that right thing is.

Seeming not to listen

What you can try:



Stand and speak directly in front of the student who is having trouble focusing on you. A child's brain naturally focuses on what's taking up his or her immediate visual and auditory space.



Ask one question at a time (avoiding a series of spoken questions) and use “wait time” after you ask a question.



In addition to providing spoken directions, supply the same instructions in a written or visual format to give students an additional way to access the information.

Chat box question:

Which of these strategies
do you plan to try?

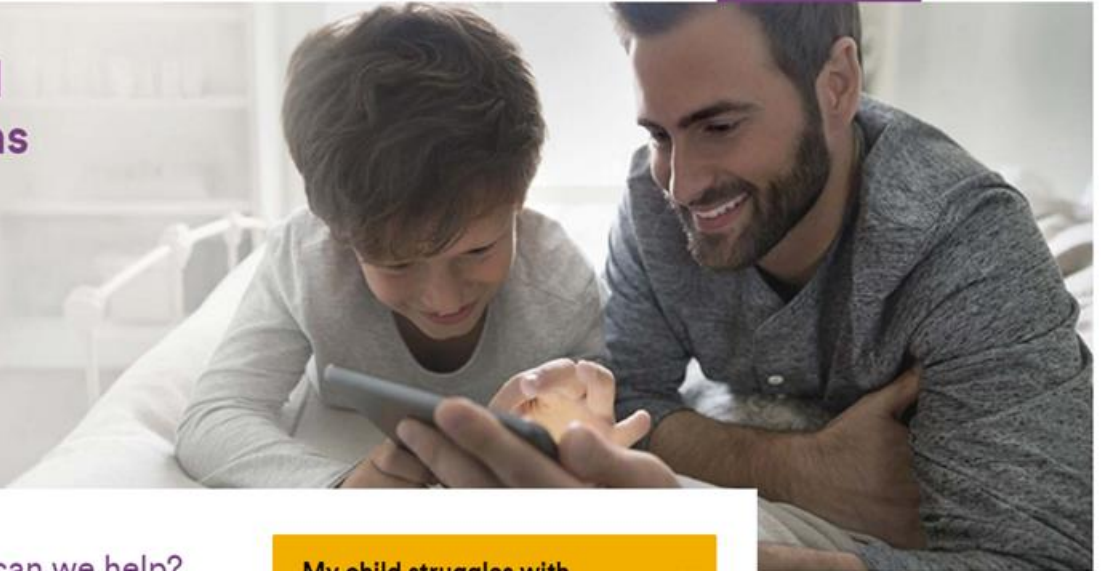
Key Takeaways

- Hyperactivity, impulsivity, inattention and distractibility can be signs of a learning or attention issue like ADHD.
- The skills we discussed today—attention, focus, self-management and self-regulation—are highly developed, brain-based processes.
- Research has shown that the areas of the brain critical for these skills can take longer to mature in children with ADHD.
- Students struggling with these brain-based issues can often be misunderstood to be lazy or not trying hard enough.
- No matter the reason for the struggles, the strategies shared today can help *all* students.

Resources for parents

Get personalized recommendations for you and your child.

Dive in.



[Reading Assist](#)



How can we help?

[My child struggles with...](#)



www.understood.org

Chat box question:

Before today, had you ever heard of
Undertsood.org?

Understood

We believe...

...an informed and confident parent, who helps and gets help as needed, can enable a child with learning and attention issues to thrive in school and in life.

We brought together...

...a diverse team of field experts, nonprofit organizations and funders deeply committed to helping families of children with learning and attention issues.

15 founding partners



Content available in English and Spanish that supports the whole child

Learning & Attention Issues	School & Learning	Friends & Feelings	You & Your Family	Community & Events
Getting started	Partnering with your child's school	Common challenges	Managing everyday challenges	Expert webinars
Signs and symptoms	Evaluations	Empowering your child	Events & outings	Expert office hours
Differences and disabilities	Special services	Managing feelings	Siblings	Questions for the community
Treatments and approaches	Your child's rights	Social situations	Your relationships	Interest/issue-based groups
Understanding your child's challenges	Choosing or changing schools	Teens & tweens	Taking care of yourself	Expert and parent blogs
Personal stories	Learning at home			Connect with other parents (like FB)
	Tutors & more			Daily expert chats
	Assistive technology			

Experience Through Your Child's Eyes



First you'll hear
from a child who
has learning and
attention issues.

Then you'll play
a simulation to
see how it feels.

Finally, an
expert will break
down what it
means.

Parenting Coach: Practical ideas for common challenges

The screenshot shows the 'Parenting Coach' website. At the top, there are navigation tabs: 'Learning & Attention Issues', 'School & Learning', 'Friends & Feelings', 'You & Your Family', 'Community & Events', and 'Your Parent Toolkit'. Below this is the 'Parenting Coach' header with the subtitle 'Practical ideas for social, emotional and behavioral challenges'. A 'Share & Save' section includes icons for Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and a printer icon. Below the header, there is a 'Get Expert Advice' section with a dropdown menu set to 'Improving Self-Esteem' and another dropdown set to 'Grade 4'. A yellow 'Get Ideas' button is next to these. To the right, a blue box contains three article titles: 'The Benefits of Observing Your Child and Taking Notes', 'Talking to Your Child About Differences and Disabilities', and 'Why It's Important to Make Simple Changes at Home'.

Work on Improving Self-Esteem

A grid of six purple cards, each with a white border, containing parenting tips and engagement metrics. The cards are arranged in two rows of three.

- Card 1 (Top Left):** "Don't give empty praise." with 0 comments and 388 likes.
- Card 2 (Top Middle):** "Discourage making comparisons." with 0 comments and 296 likes.
- Card 3 (Top Right):** "Create a wall of fame." with 1 comment and 107 likes.
- Card 4 (Bottom Left):** "Schedule quality time each week." with 0 comments and 66 likes.
- Card 5 (Bottom Middle):** "Comment on behavior, not on your child." with 1 comment and 615 likes.
- Card 6 (Bottom Right):** "Recognize and build on her strengths." with 0 comments and 45 likes.

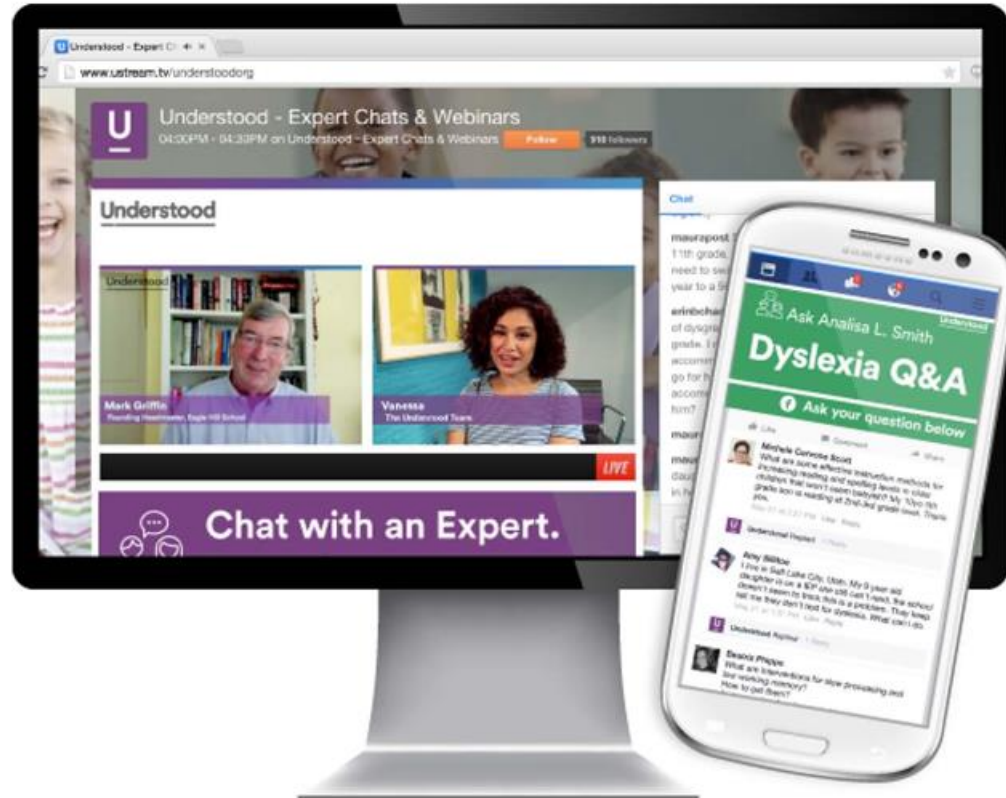
Tech Finder

The screenshot shows the Understood website's Tech Finder interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'English' and 'Español' options, and a search bar. Below this, there are tabs for 'Learning & Attention Issues', 'School & Learning', 'Friends & Feelings', 'You & Your Family', 'Community & Events', and 'Your Parent Toolkit'. The 'Tech Finder' section is active, showing '33 results' and a 'Modify Search' link. Underneath, there are two sub-sections: 'Education Technologies' with '21 results' and 'Assistive Technologies' with '12 results'. A 'Sort by' dropdown menu is visible. The main content area displays four app cards, each with an icon, title, description, and three circular metrics for Grade, Quality, and Learning.

App Name	Grade	Quality	Learning
Teachley: Addimal Adventure	1	4	4
Freefall Money	2	4	3
DragonBox Algebra 5+	1	5	5
Preschool and Kindergarten Splash Math Workbook Games	1	3	3

- ✓ 386 expert-approved apps
- ✓ Education and assistive technologies
- ✓ Sort by age, issue and device

Daily access to experts



Chat box question:

How might this resource be helpful to your students' parents?

Resources for educators



Coming soon: NCLD's education initiative



- Providing K–12 general education teachers with on-demand resources and coaching
- Empowering teachers to support all learners, including students with learning and attention issues.
- Starting with K–5

We talked to teachers and they told us:

- Serving the 1 in 5 is the responsibility of everyone in the school, but too often these students are seen as someone else's responsibility.
- Mindsets are critical in clearing the path to effective teaching.
- Teachers know their students best, but they don't always have access to the tools or resources to use evidence-based approaches to meet student needs.
- Teachers are thinking about the diverse needs of all learners in the classroom and need information that is as aligned and as streamlined as possible. They need approaches that are good for students with learning and attention issues but that support *all* students.

Chat box question:

What would be the most helpful resource or information for us to provide to you as part of our education initiative?

Help us shape these resources

Interested in participating in upcoming surveys and focus groups? Please email us at LKruse@ncld.org for more information

Q&A