



The ADHD Child in Sunday School

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Why is it that some children in Sunday School are delightful to have in class and others make you think twice about ever volunteering again? It takes just one child with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) to squelch your joy for teaching. An ADHD child can be noncompliant, moody, demanding, and noisy. The ADHD preschooler can try your patience and disrupt the best-laid plans. Yet the Lord instructs us to “consider it pure joy... whenever [we] face trials” (James 1:2). When your classroom is turned upside down by one small child, it is hard to respond joyfully. Successful ministry with a child who is inattentive, hyperactive, aggressive, and impulsive requires a supernatural response.

Physical Causes

ADHD children have great difficulty filtering incoming messages to the brain causing them to be especially sensitive to sounds, smells, activity, and colors. Numerous studies show that these children actually have a biochemical imbalance. Although the origin of this disorder

is still unknown, significant improvement occurs in most children treated with proper medication (such as Ritalin), but many children are not diagnosed until kindergarten.

The misinformed adult may conclude that ADHD symptoms



are simply the result of poor parenting and an excuse for misbehavior. Be careful not to add insult to injury. Parents of an ADHD child are probably already at their wits' end. Between the ages of three to five, it becomes apparent that the same discipline used with most children

doesn't work with the ADHD child. Sometimes parents forego family outings (eating out, shopping, even church) because of past embarrassing scenes and insensitive comments. Share your concerns with parents, and ask what approaches have been successful at home. Genuine concern for the child's well-being will encourage parental cooperation and minimize defensiveness.

Maintaining Order

Sunday School may be a child's first introduction to the educational setting. An early negative experience starts a downward spiral and a negative attitude toward learning. The child who struggles with ADHD needs a loving, but firm, approach. Structure, consistency, and routine are essential. Periodic physical release is a must. Withholding physical activity times from the ADHD child is not a wise disciplinary move. Instead, establish a neutral (non-punitive) time-out area where the child can go to regroup. Ask a volunteer to take the child for a short walk, perhaps to the drinking fountain and back. Even when staff is limited, the preschool area is not the place to

skimp on volunteers.

ADHD preschoolers often lack coordination in large or small muscle groups. Their artwork tends to be sloppy. They can be clumsy and awkward. Avoid labeling or comparing children. The ADHD child cannot be expected to perform at the same developmental level as his peers. In preschool, children move from parallel play to more interactive play. New demands to share, listen, and get along with others are extremely challenging for the ADHD child.

During organized activities,

strategically place ADHD children near the front and close to an adult. This encourages eye contact and enhances listening. Remember that these hypersensitive children live in an agitated state and may react defensively to touch. Find unobtrusive ways to make contact—a light pat on the shoulder might be the best way to greet the ADHD child.

A Curse or a Challenge?

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Mat-

thew 19:14). The ADHD child is a precious human being, created by God, and as lovable as any other child. Teachers can view ADHD symptoms as a curse or a challenge—an opportunity to expand and develop teaching skills. It is easy to love and enjoy the cooperative, neat, and easy-going child. Our ability to love like Jesus loves is tested by the ADHD child. Pray for creativity, patience, and an extra measure of grace. Ask the Lord to help you see this child through His eyes. You will be amazed how His view will alter your perspec-

Questions for Further Study—

1. Think of three creative ways you could respond to an ADHD child in your classroom when he/she is having a difficult time.

2. In what ways can you prepare lessons to help the ADHD child learn and enjoy Sunday School?