The Neurodivergent Classroom

ADHD at a Glance

ADHD affects how a person regulates attention, impulses, time and action. In class, that can make it hard to get from understanding a task to starting it, or finishing it.



What you may notice in class

- Tasks get started but often not finished.
- Materials and multi-step instructions go missing along the way.
- Performance can swing a lot day to day.
- Calling out, popping up or fidgeting gets noticed.
- Quiet daydreamers often go unnoticed.
- Big projects often get started at the last minute.
- They can be sharp out loud and still write very little.
- Younger kids may find it hardest just to get started, even on short tasks. (elementary school)
- Older students may have trouble finishing long-term assignments and keeping themselves organized. (middle and high school)

Strengths

- Often dives deep into topics that click.
- Brings quick, clever ideas to class discussions.
- Finds their own solutions to interesting problems.
- Shows what they can do when a task is well structured.
- Can work incredibly hard toward a goal they care about.

What helps

- Make time visible with a timer, sand timer or clock.
- Break tasks into written steps they can check off.
- Help them get started by naming the first small step.
- Give quick feedback at each checkpoint.
- Plan short movement breaks with a clear end.
- Give materials a fixed home and keep distractions low.
- Show a finished example next to the task.
- Break big projects into stages with check-in dates.
- Agree on a silent reminder signal.
- With younger kids, use picture steps and short work times they can see. (elementary school)
- With older students, map out stages and deadlines, and use digital planners. (middle and high school)

What tends not to help

- Lots of spoken instructions at once, with nothing written down.
- Time limits with no clock in sight.
- Reminders like “Just focus.”
- Punishing forgetfulness or a late start.

Words that carry

“What’s your first tiny step?”

“See the timer? Work until you hear the signal.”

“That part’s done. Now for the next step.”

“Let’s break it up. Just one step for now.” (elementary school)

“Which part will you have done by our next check-in?” (middle and high school)

Where to find support

CHADD chadd.org/for-educators/overview
US nonprofit with ADHD information for educators and families.

NHS: ADHD in children and teenagers
nhs.uk/conditions/adhd-children-teenagers
Clear health information from the UK National Health Service.

Understood.org
understood.org/en/articles/classroom-accommodations-for-adhd
Classroom accommodations for ADHD, written for teachers.

Local organizations
Many countries have their own ADHD association. Your school psychologist or the student’s doctor can point you to one.

More in the Teacher Portal: neurodivergentclassroom.com/teacher-portal/adhd/

Sources: WHO: ICD-11 for Mortality and Morbidity Statistics · NICE: Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, guideline NG87 · AWMF S3 guideline ADHD, register 028-045 (in German) · Iznardo et al.: Meta-analysis on daily report cards