

10 Middle School Challenges for Children with ADHD



From the ADHD Experts at

ADDITUDE

Strategies and Support for ADHD & LD

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A trusted source of advice and information for families touched by attention-deficit disorder—
and a voice of inspiration to help people with ADHD find success at home, at school, and on the job.

ADDitudeMag.com

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10 Middle School Challenges for Children with ADHD

More teachers, more homework, and a more confusing social scene: Learn the obstacles your child will face as she transitions from elementary to middle school — and what you can do to help her stay on track.

By the Editors of *ADDitude*

CHALLENGE #1: Multiple Teachers — and Multiple Sets of Rules

The jump from one primary teacher to six or more specialized teachers — and their far-flung classrooms, uncoordinated assignment schedules, and unique rules — is particularly difficult for children with ADHD who struggle with executive functions, planning, and organization, not to mention impulse control.

SOLUTION: Be Present and Proactive

Maintain relationships with all of your child's teachers — not just the ones teaching her core subjects — and discuss strategies that have helped your child in the past. Revisit and adapt these throughout the year and encourage her to share her ADHD challenges with her teachers, too — [this free handout](http://additu.de/intro) (<http://additu.de/intro>) is a good place to start.

If your child has an IEP, specific academic and behavioral accommodations can also address this challenge. Some schools allow modifications to a child's schedule to reduce the number of teachers, for instance, or to provide access to a quiet space to take a test.

APPS AHOY!

15 school apps your tween needs

<http://additu.de/bts-apps>

CHALLENGE #2: Social Cliques

As children mature into adolescents, their self-awareness grows exponentially — and rapidly. They spend a lot more time learning about themselves and searching for their “place.” Many kids find that place in a clique — a seemingly all-important and constantly shifting social group that acts like a double-edged sword. If your child is part of one, he may worry about falling out of favor; if he’s not, he likely feels frustrated and lonely.

SOLUTION: Help Your Child Build a “Team”

Discuss with your child potential social challenges — like finding a friendly table at lunch or attending a school dance — and role-play possible solutions in advance. Encourage your child to join clubs or organizations where he can meet children who share similar interests. And if he tells you he’s being bullied, take his concerns seriously, alert this school, and make sure administrators respond appropriately.

CLICK WITH CLIQUES

Help your child build a healthy social circle
<http://additu.de/lb>

CHALLENGE #3: The Backpack Black Hole

A never-ending deluge of paper, paper, and more paper — that’s what middle school feels like to most kids with ADHD. Without a well-maintained organizational strategy, your child’s backpack may devolve into a foreboding wasteland littered with broken pencils, overdue forms, and crumpled homework assignments sacrificed to the abyss.

SOLUTION: Folders and Weekly Sweeps

Before school begins, set up a simple organization system — perhaps one folder for “incoming” papers and another for those that need to be turned in, or a different colored folder for every subject. Whatever system you choose, work with your child over the summer to iron out any kinks before August. In addition, set up a time each week — perhaps just after Sunday breakfast — to go through your child’s backpack, sorting papers and finding lost assignments. You’ll teach her the power of routine, and catch lost items before they become critical.

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CHALLENGE #4: Learning How to Use a Planner

Most teachers will expect your child to write down each day's homework assignments independently — which means she will need to keep track of and master the use of a paper planner. Some teachers write assignments on the board, while others simply announce them at the end of class — either way, all that critical and time-sensitive information can easily push your child's executive function skills to the brink.

SOLUTION: Offer Supervision and Rewards

Don't expect your child to master her planner independently. Outline specific times she should check or add to her planner, and plan strategies to help her remember to write down each assignment or upcoming appointment. Check her planner every day — for at least the first few weeks of school — and consider providing rewards for each day or week that she successfully uses it to track her assignments. If your child has an IEP, ask that her teachers also check the planner to ensure she's copied down the homework correctly before she leaves class.

CHALLENGE #5: Peer Pressure

Decades of research illuminate a sobering truth: people with ADHD are more likely to engage in risky behavior — like trying drugs or having unprotected sex. Parents hope that middle school is too early to worry about these things, but the truth is that tweens who are starting to explore their independence (and navigate confusing hormonal changes) may make choices they later regret.

SOLUTION: Positive Parenting

Provide structure and routine for your child, and make sure she knows that you're her ally — research shows that children who feel supported and in control are less likely to experiment with risky behaviors. Get to know your child's friends and consider finding her a mentor — a trusted coach, older cousin, or community member — who can be another set of ears and eyes.

PLANNER PERFECTION

9 secrets to a super effective school planner

<http://additu.de/8n>

CHALLENGE #6: Getting to Class on Time

By the time your child reaches middle school, it's already very clear whether he's a meandering procrastinator. For some kids with ADHD, the thought of dashing from class to class — and getting saddled with detention for running late! — is enough to trigger a spiral of anxiety. Throw locker stops and social distractions into the mix, and time management becomes a very real challenge very quickly.

SOLUTION: Build Muscle Memory

Ask the school if you and your child can walk the path between each of these classes a few days before school starts. This dry run will ensure he knows the location of each classroom, plus potential potholes along the way. Discuss strategies he can use if he's running behind or feels lost — like asking a teacher for directions or finding a buddy who shares his next class.

CHALLENGE #7: The Dreaded Combination Lock

Your child's locker is his home base, and he needs to be able to access its contents easily and efficiently. That's probably why a survey (<http://additu.de/scholastic>) conducted by Scholastic found that a malfunctioning lock or forgotten combination is one of the biggest fears for new middle school students. Children with fine motor delays or hyperactive hands may struggle more than their peers to fiddle their locks to the correct combinations.

SOLUTION: Practice, Practice, Practice

Your child may roll his eyes at the suggestion, but taking some time to practice using a combination lock over the summer will save him many headaches. Have your child store the combination on his phone or write it in his day planner. If your child continues to struggle with his lock, consider asking the school if he can use a luggage lock instead — they're often easier to open and can be programmed with a code that's easy to remember, like your child's birthday or favorite number.

LOCKER TIPS

7 secrets to avoiding locker chaos

<http://additu.de/locker>

CHALLENGE #8: Feeling “Different”

Normal developmental timelines show that most children want desperately to “fit in” during middle and high school. The challenge, of course, is that many children with ADHD naturally stand out from the crowd, due to behavioral or academic challenges or because of unique (and sometimes unpopular) interests and hobbies. Social skills don’t come naturally, and popularity feels elusive.

SOLUTION: Listen, Lead, and Love

If your child feels like she’s the black sheep of the sixth grade, your role as a parent is to support, encourage, and gently coach her toward healthier social interactions. This doesn’t mean trying to turn your child into someone she’s not. Instead, it means acknowledging that feeling different can be painful, and providing guidance and strategies to help your child build her self-esteem and find friends with shared interests.

CHALLENGE #9: More Homework

Homework assignments ramp up in middle school; they become longer, more complex, and more frequent. Your child will also be expected to do independent research, plan, and execute long-term projects — and synthesize the information she’s learned in new and challenging ways. The pressure is enough to make a child with learning disabilities shut down at the mere mention of homework — and many kids do.

SOLUTION: Get the Right Accommodations

If your child has an IEP or 504 Plan, make sure it incorporates strategies or accommodations to help her manage a challenging homework load, like extended time for assignments or chunked-up deadlines for long-term projects. Encourage her to join a study group or take advantage of additional resources — some teachers, for instance, hold “homework clubs” after school to make themselves available to answer questions from students working through obstacles.

PERSONAL STORY

“Mom always treated ADHD as a difference, not a deficiency”

<http://additu.de/support>

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CHALLENGE #10: Independence and Self-Advocacy

Exploring independence is a natural and healthy part of adolescence. Your child may increasingly want to handle her problems without Mom or Dad's help. The drive toward adulthood, however, is complicated by the fact that many children with ADHD are as many as three years behind their peers developmentally. Your child simply may not be ready to wake herself up on time or resolve a dispute with her teacher.

SOLUTION: Loosen the Reins — Gradually

Allow your child to test the waters of independence slowly. Choose something that your child is invested in — say she wants to get to school earlier to hang out with her friends before class starts — and gradually transition control of this responsibility to her as she proves her capabilities. Get a step-by-step breakdown of what this transition looks like at <http://additu.de/independent>.

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ADDitude eBooks Available Now additudemag.com/shop

The ADHD Parent-Teacher Handbook

Forge a partnership with your child's teacher by sharing these practical learning solutions for home and the classroom..

Kids with ADHD may forget to write down assignments or drift off during lectures, but that doesn't mean they don't want to learn. Parents and teachers alike may struggle to manage these challenges on occasion, but one thing is clear: When everyone works together to provide support, children with ADHD benefit.

>> Learn more about this eBook: <http://additu.de/pth>

The ADHD Homework Survival Guide

An ADHD-friendly guide to help you (and your child) survive nightly homework battles without tears, tantrums, or fights.

After working hard to focus and remember all day long, your child fights his nightly homework with a vengeance. Parents who are tired of daily battles over vocab lists and multiplication tables agree: There has to be a better way — and now, there is. In this 50-page special report from *ADDitude*, you'll learn how to break the bad homework cycle and keep your child learning.

>> Learn more about this eBook: <http://additu.de/hw-book>

The ADHD Guide to Making and Keeping Friends

Practical advice and strategies to help children make friends, improve social skills, and defeat bullies.

Children with ADHD are routinely alienated and targeted due to their behavioral challenges. Some struggle to decipher social cues, while others act much younger than their peers. Whatever the reason, this eBook offers concrete strategies to counteract social snafus — everything from understanding and improving social skills to avoiding bullies. With a little help, your child can find friendships that last!

>> Learn more about this eBook: <http://additu.de/friendsebook>

FREE ADDitude Downloads

The Secret Power of Fidgets

Learn how fidget toys can improve student behavior and focus.

IEP vs. 504: What's the Difference?

Learn what accommodations your child might qualify for, and how to pursue them.

10 Teaching Strategies that Help Students with ADHD

Learn how to support, direct, and educate kids with ADHD.

Top 5 Homework Frustrations

Why kids struggle with homework, and what you can do to help.

10 Solutions to Disorganization at School

Keeping backpacks, lockers, and binders in order.

Does Your Child Have a Learning Disability?

Use this self-test to find out if your child's problems at school may be due to LD.

Executive Function Worksheet

Common executive function challenges and easy-to-apply solutions.

Find these and many more free ADHD resources online at:

[http://additu.de/
freedownloads](http://additu.de/freedownloads)

ADHD Webinar Replays from ADDitude:

How to Build Confidence In Your Child

>> <http://additu.de/confidence>

Research suggests that, by the age of 12, a child with ADHD will receive 20,000 more negative messages than will her neurotypical peers. Due to attention and behavior deficits beyond their control, kids with ADHD struggle daily to prove that they measure up to their classmates. Counterbalance the negativity with these positive parenting strategies that motivate your child to be the best he can be.

Start (and End) the School Year Organized

>> <http://additu.de/scor>

Kids with ADHD often forget to write down homework assignments, lose important papers, and feel overwhelmed by big projects — and end up earning poor grades, in large part because they've never learned how to get organized with ADHD. This webinar helps teach systems for organization — as well as strategies to follow-through with those systems and stay organized all year round.

How to Fight for Your Child's Rights — and Happiness

>> <http://additu.de/rights>

Do you know your child's legal rights? Do you know how to get your pediatrician to address your concerns? Do you know what to do when you're not taken seriously? If you answered no to any of these questions, you're not alone. In this webinar, hosted by veteran parent Penny Williams, learn how to take your advocacy to the next level and get your child the support she deserves.

Comeback Kids: Building Resilience in Your Child

>> <http://additu.de/resilience>

Kids diagnosed with ADHD hear negative messages throughout the day. "Stay seated!" "Be quiet!" "Are you even listening?" These messages have a profound impact on their self-esteem, and may make them less willing to try new things. But growth — and learning — requires resilience, and it's up to you as parents to show them the way. This webinar teaches you how.

How Stress Impacts Learning and Behavior

>> <http://additu.de/stress>

In today's high-pressure school environment, kids with ADHD or LD can become overwhelmed by stress. In this audio and slide presentation, hosted by Jerome J. Schultz, Ph.D., find out how school stress impacts your child's brain — and what you can do about it. Get the tools you need to help your child manage academic stress so their brain has room to grow and learn!

FREE ADHD Newsletters from ADDitude

Sign up to receive critical news and information about ADHD diagnosis and treatment, plus strategies for school, parenting, and living better with ADHD:
<http://additu.de/newsletter>

Adult ADHD and LD

Expert advice on managing your household, time, money, career, and relationships

Parenting Children with ADHD and LD

Behavior and discipline, time management, disorganization, making friends, and more critical strategies for parents

ADHD and LD at School

How to get classroom accommodations, finish homework, work with teachers, find the right schools, and much more

Treating ADHD

Treatment options including medications, food, supplements, brain training, mindfulness and other alternative therapies

For Women with ADHD

Managing ADHD on the job, running a household, dealing with challenging emotions, and much more