



# Targeting Home-School Collaboration for Students with ADHD

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"One key to my child's success in school and at home is the consistency that his teacher and I have through regular communication," comments Carol, the parent of Mark, an active fourth-grade boy with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Mark's teacher comments, "Although it takes time and effort to actively involve many of the parents of my students in regular home-school communication, I have found that setting up a system at the beginning of the year and being consistent is well worth the effort, both in terms of the students' success in school and my being an effective teacher. Working with Mark and his family is a good example."

Collaboration and communication between home and school facilitate successful education for all students. For students with ADHD, it is essential to have effective parent-teacher communication, collaboration and consistency on goals and rewards across settings, and collaborative planning and monitoring of interventions. As Figure I shows, this collaborative home-school relationship is ongoing, reciprocal, mutually respectful, and student centered. This relationship encompasses many areas, including parent input on assessment and behavioral plans, medication monitoring, and homework. In each area the key to the home-school collaboration is establishing systems that promote communication.

This article presents many ideas and formats for facilitating home-school collaboration (for additional resources and ideas, see [Figure 2](#)). Many of the ideas are based on what we learned when working with teachers at four elementary schools in Tucson, Arizona. These teachers participated in a professional development project focusing on educating students with ADHD and other attention and learning problems (Bos, Nahmias, & Urban, 1997). Teachers with whom we worked consistently indicated that home-school collaboration was critical for students with

ADHD and that strategies for facilitating home-school collaboration that they learned and shared with parents made a difference in their effectiveness with these students. In fact, these teachers generated many of the ideas presented here. As teacher educators and as parents, we have found these tools invaluable for promoting success.

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## Parent involvement in assessment and behavior plans

With the 1997 reauthorization of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), parental involvement is included in all stages of assessment, identification, and the development of behavior plans. Whereas parents have always been included as participants on their child's multidisciplinary and individualized education program (IEP) teams, they are now to have input during pre-referral and eligibility meetings and to plan positive behavioral interventions.

Parents have much to offer, whether it be information about a child's medical, developmental, and educational history, ratings for behavior and attention levels, or information about interests and reinforcers. When a concern arises, using an efficient problem-solving process that highlights parent-teacher collaboration can be beneficial for all involved (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989). The following format for the process and conference addresses specific concerns, incorporates a positive plan of action, and offers specific means for follow-up communication. The components include:

1. Identify Task Headline (2 minutes)

Sentence, positively stated, about a concern or problem.

2. Analyze the Problem (3- 5 minutes)

Why is it a concern? Give a brief history. Whose responsibility? (teacher, parent, student)  
What has already been used or thought about to handle the problem? Is it similar at home and school?

3. Clarify Specific Goals (2 minutes)

I wish..., I want to..., How do...? Select one or two statements for discussion.

4. Brainstorm (8 minutes)

Generate, write, and clarify possible solutions.

5. Select Solutions and Make a Plan (10 minutes)

Teacher and parent select preferred solution(s) and specific way(s) to implement.

6. Follow-Up and Ongoing Support (3 minutes)

Specify times for follow-up and collaboration.

Figure 3 below presents a collaboration plan that was generated for Kenny, a second-grade student who is having difficulty staying in his seat and completing his work at school and his homework at home. Several aspects of the plan account for its success:

### **Figure 3. Kenny's collaboration plan**

**Student:** Kenny Browne Grade: Second

**Teacher:** Susan Washington

**Date:** October 6, 1998

**Parent:** Cliff Browne and Wanda Clark

#### **Identify task headline:**

Develop a plan for Kenny to stay in his seat and complete his work.

#### **Analyze the problem:**

Kenny stays in his seat about 1-3 minutes when doing seatwork. He misses instructions, walks around the classroom, gets a drink, talks to friends, etc. At home when doing homework, he stays in his seat for 3-5 minutes, then gets up and does other things such as playing with the dog or toys.

#### **Clarify specific goal:**

Kenny will listen to directions, stay in his seat, and do his work for at least 10 minutes at a time.

#### **Brainstorming:**

- Talk with Kenny about importance of staying in his seat/desk area and completing work
- Give Kenny stickers or extra playtime for staying in area and completing work
- Appointment for physical with pediatrician
- Use masking tape on floor to outline Kenny's desk area
- Set up a behavior monitoring plan for staying in seat, listening to directions, and doing work

#### **Select solutions and make a plan:**

Parents and teacher set up a behavior monitoring plan for listening to directions, staying in seat/area, and doing work at school during morning seatwork and at home during homework. (See Kenny's behavior monitoring checklist). With his teacher or Mom, Kenny monitors his behavior. Each day that he receives an "X" (Hit the Target) for all three behaviors, he will

receive a "Target" sticker. If he receives stickers 3 of 5 days at school, he gets a "special treat" at home. If he receives stickers 3 of 5 days at home, he gets 10 minutes of free time at school on Friday. Checklist goes back and forth from home to school in his student folder.

### **Follow-up and ongoing support:**

Ms. Washington telephones the Brownes tomorrow to check on how it is going. Then Ms. Washington calls the Brownes on Oct. 9, 13, 15, and then weekly for a month. Number of days needed to get stickers will increase as Kenny is successful.

- Ms. Washington, Kenny's teacher, and the Browne family were consistently communicating and had similar expectations.
- Kenny was actively involved in self-monitoring using a home-school behavior checklist that was titled "I'm on Target" (Figure 4 below).
- When Kenny received his reward for schoolwork at home and vice versa, Kenny got a "double dose" of praise and, when needed, additional support.

[Click to see Figure 4: Kenny's homeschool behavior checklist](#)

Although this plan was helpful for the teacher, the student, and the parents, Mrs. Browne was particularly pleased because it provided daily feedback about Kenny's work and behavior at school. She commented, "This way, I'm never in the dark about Kenny. In the past, sometimes it would be a week or more before I learned of a concern, and then it was too late to make a difference."

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## **Monitoring medication**

Medications are often an integral part of treatment for students with ADHD. Medication therapy can be a beneficial component of a treatment plan for some students with ADHD, and teachers are in an excellent position to judge effectiveness of medications on behavior and learning. Therefore, parents and teachers will want to provide collaborative feedback to physicians regarding these students' behavior and performance when on medication. Information about students' performance before and when receiving medication is critical for determining the overall effectiveness of medication, its dosage and timing, and side effects. Some of the side effects that teachers and parents can observe and note are nausea, loss of appetite, headaches, stomachaches, lethargy, moodiness, and irritability.

Behavioral, learning, and other side effects noted by teachers are best reported to parents, who, in turn, will present this information to physicians. Parent permission is required for any direct communication between teachers and physicians. Teacher-parent communication regarding medication monitoring may take the form of telephone calls, notes, or forms. In working with parents, it is important to let them know that frequent communication is invaluable when students first begin medication or adjustments are made.

When medications are given at school, the school nurse or health assistants maintain a medication log and administer medications per physician's orders. The school nurse or other health personnel involved in medication administration and monitoring should be included on the parent-teacher team when monitoring medication.

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## Coordinating homework

Homework is frequently an area of difficulty for students with ADHD and may be the subject of the majority of home school communication. In our work with parents and teachers, we find that they often report that students are not aware of assignments, have left books or homework at school, or completed work is not returned or submitted for grading. How can home-school collaboration assist with homework issues?

At the beginning of the school year, it is important for students, parents, and teachers to understand homework policies and their individual roles and responsibilities (Urban, 1999). How often will homework be given? How much time will be required to complete assignments? What is the parents' role?

It is equally important for teachers to obtain information from parents about their schedules, other children, and household routines. Many parents of students with ADHD find that assisting their child with homework requires time, organization, and patience, which can be challenging for them to muster after a day with job and family responsibilities. When teachers and parents communicate their expectations and situations, they can develop and monitor successful homework plans.

During elementary school years, the faculty at one school with whom we have worked (Manzanita Elementary School) has developed communication folders and homework plans that foster home-school collaboration. Though these specific folders and plans vary by grade with homework requirements increasing each year, the principles and policies are consistent across the grade levels. For third grade, all students have a communication folder that goes back and forth from school to home each day. Announcements, notes, weekly school newsletters, and weekly homework packets are put in this folder. The front cover of the homework packet, "Weekly Figure 4. Kenny's Home-School Behavior Checklist Schedule" (see Figure 5 below), has a weekly class schedule, list of upcoming school events, and a list of spelling/writing words. Also in the packet is a Homework Schedule (see Figure 6 below) with suggested assignments for each day. Parents communicate with the teacher by signing and returning the bottom half of the weekly schedule along with any comments. The folder is given to the students on Friday and is returned to the teacher the following Friday. Keeping the homework packet in the communication folder is particularly helpful when students participate in after-school study or childcare programs or have homework assistance from others.

**Figure 5. Weekly Schedule**

Teacher: <u>Boiling</u>				
Looking ahead to the week of <u>11-9-02</u>				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Art	Computer	Music	P.E.	

Special information to remember:

11-11 Holiday / No school.	line	cat
11-16 to 19 Book Fair	own	under
11-26 to 27 Holiday / No school.	read	last
12-6 Arizona State Museum Field Trip	never	us
* Field trip permission slip included.	left	and
Sign and return!	their	there
* Book order included. Due 11-22		

(Please detach and return the bottom portion to the classroom teacher on Monday 11-9.)

**F.Y.I.**

Student: Ana

Teacher Comment: Ana has had a good week. She really likes cursive writing.

Parent Comment: Ana likes practicing cursive at home.

Parent Signature: Maria Pauela



**Figure 6. Homework Schedule**

Suggested Homework Schedule

Name Ava Week of 11-19

Day	Assignment
Friday	Reading Log
Saturday	Reading Log
Sunday	Reading Log
Monday	Reading Log Spelling Journal Page
Tuesday	Reading Log Math Handwriting
Wednesday	Reading Log Spelling Journal Page
Thursday	Reading Log Math Handwriting

*Homework - DUE FRIDAY*

Ideas for journal pages are below. Choose one for Monday's and Wednesday's assignments.  
Be sure and check your spelling words.

 Write a story about the first Thanksgiving

 Write a list of things you are thankful for

 Your choice

For some students with ADHD, teachers make accommodations by varying the homework that is included in the packet, particularly if their achievement levels are substantially below that required of the homework. Whereas it is important for all students that they are practicing skills and doing work that is at their independent or instructional levels, this is particularly true for students with ADHD, for whom focusing on too challenging academic work after a day at school can be particularly difficult.

For Marcos, a third grader with ADD and learning disabilities, and his mother, this homework folder provided a way to structure the homework so that it was spaced over the week. Marcos and his mother agreed that by Sunday evening Marcos was to have read at least 60 minutes and done two homework pages. This kept the amount of homework time during the week reduced so that Marcos had some time to play after school. Ms. Friedman, Marcos's teacher, also provided Marcos with a modified spelling list and reduced the number of math problems so that the work was at Marcos's instructional level and was reasonable, given his special needs. Marcos provides a good example of the type of home-school collaboration that can occur. Our work in this school indicates that both parents and teachers think of ongoing collaboration as an asset to the students' education.

In middle and high school years, students must deal with several classes and teachers. For students with ADHD, managing homework assignments may require assistance from an advocate or "coach." The coach is often a special education teacher or counselor who meets daily during "homeroom" or "study skills" class with students to collaboratively build organizational, study, time-management, and self-advocacy skills. The coach mentors and supports the student and communicates with content teachers at weekly team meetings to discuss and monitor student assignments and projects. The coach serves as a contact person for parents and teachers of each student and provides consistent communication and collaboration between home and school for academic and behavioral growth. This collaborative role of "coach" is effective for many students. As one student, Josh, said, "Mr. B. really helps me stay on target for my big projects and due dates."

Students with ADHD often have difficulty planning ahead for longer assignments or class projects. To assist with lengthy assignments, students with ADHD benefit from having a contract for the assignment so they are aware of their timelines and responsibilities. Figure 7 presents the Book Activity Contract. The book activity is one way that third graders at Manzanita select and report on a book that they have read. In addition, it is helpful to provide students with a sequence of steps for complex or multistep assignments and a checklist to monitor their completion of the steps (see Figure 8 for the Book Activity Checklist). This list can be created by the teacher or by the teacher and students as they think through the steps in the process. Lack of motivation by students with ADHD is often a factor in starting and completing school assignments. When teachers offer students multiple ways of demonstrating their learning, students can explore their interests and creative talents, thereby increasing their motivation and effort (Bos; in press). Figure 9 offers a menu of activities students can use to share information about the books they have read. For Kathleen and her parents, this book project allowed them to select an activity that let Kathleen, a third grader with ADD without hyperactivity, shine. As Ms. Mills noted, "We can select a fun activity such as reading a book about American Girl dolls, and Kathleen can bring her collection. She writes a book summary so that she can tell about the book and her collection. This makes the whole learning experience fun for us, yet she's reading and writing and learning."

Figure 7. Book Activity

**My Contract for My Book Activity**

Name Jon Date 9-20-98

Book Title Pirates Past Noon

Author Mary Pope Osborne

Book activity I selected is I make a treasure box.

My plan for completing the activity is I make a treasure box with wild life inside.

To do my best I will need A box, paper, and a pencil.

I promise to complete this activity to the best of my ability.

I will complete this project by Sept. 25th

My Signature Jon

Approved by Mrs. C. on 9-2-98

Figure 8. Book Activity Checklist

**Checklist for my Book Activity**

My book activity is due on Sept. 25th

So far, I have:

- chosen a book to read
- read the book
- chosen an activity to complete
- turned in my application
- received application approval
- started my activity
- finished my activity
- practiced telling about my book
- set a presentation time with my teacher
- presented my book and activity to the class

Signed,

Jon

Figure 9. Ideas for demonstrating learning about a book

- advertisement
- letter to the author
- diorama
- poem
- oral reading
- write about one character

- story frame
- brochure
- dramatization
- oral report
- survey
- children's book
- editorial
- photo essay
- timeline
- choral reading
- fact file
- picture
- travelogue
- collage
- fairy tale
- picture dictionary
- TV news report
- collection
- game
- videotape
- vocabulary list
- comic book
- cooked concoction
- map or web
- portrait
- write a new ending
- diagram
- poster
- project cube
- written report
- debate
- mobile
- puppet show
- your idea
- demonstration
- mural
- skit
- detailed illustration
- museum exhibit
- song
- diary entry
- newspaper story
- rewrite part of book

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## Take action

Home-school collaboration is an important key for the success of students with ADHD. Communication fosters common language and consistent expectation and engages students, parents, and teachers. Communication and collaboration are particularly critical for input during assessments, when developing behavior plans, when monitoring medication, and in coordinating homework. Whether you are working with a team of teachers to establish an effective school-wide, home-school collaboration and homework system or designing a specific home-school behavior plan for one of your students, always set a positive tone. Positive home-school collaboration is just another way in which you can bring out the best in students with ADHD.

## What does the research say about home-school collaboration?

The consistent use of home-school notes is an important part of the communication system among parents, students, and teachers regarding student progress (Nahmias, 1975). Home-school notes promote consistency in expectations and help teachers and parents develop a common language (Bos, 1999). These notes may be simple check sheets or lists for reporting student behavior and/ or academic work. Using daily or weekly journals is helpful when more elaborated information is important (Williams & Cartledge, 1997). Teachers and parents also have

opportunities to regularly communicate through formal and informal meetings and telephone calls.

If you plan to use the telephone as one means of communication, then it is important that it be used not only to discuss concerns and when the student is not making adequate progress, but to report positive behavior and gains. Calling each parent during the first several days of school with a positive report opens the lines of communication. Particularly for students with ADHD, the key is to promote communication so that the parent, teacher, and student can become a collaborative team.

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## **Resources and read more about it**

### **Books on ADHD**

Barkley, R. A. (1995). *Taking charge of ADHD: The complete, authoritative guide for parents*. New York: The Guilford Press. Fowler, M. (1992). *CH.A.D.D. Educators manual: An in-depth look at attention deficit disorders from an educational perspective*. Landover, MD: CH.A.D.D. Jones, C. (1994). *Attention deficit disorder: Strategies for school-age children*. San Antonio, TX: Communication Skill Builders. Jones, C. (1998). *Attention deficit disorders: A sourcebook for early childhood professionals and parents* (2nd ed.). San Antonio, TX. Communication Skill Builders.

### **Booklets and Articles on ADHD**

Attention Deficit Disorder: A Parent's Guide (1992). Cohen, M., Grynkevich, M., Jaffe, L., Mora, R., Nahmias, M., Powers, G., DalyRooney, R. and Schorsch, J., CH.A.D.D. of Arizona, P.O. Box 36132, Tucson, AZ 85740. CH.A.D.D. Facts (1993). CH.A.D.D., 8181 Professional Place, Suite 201, Landover, MD 20785. Stern, M.A., Ben-Ami, U. (1998). Talking to children about their attention deficit disorder. *ATTENTION. The Magazine of Children and Adults with Attentional Disorders*, 5, 2. Landover, MD: CH.A.D.D.

### **Websites on ADHD**

[www.add.org](http://www.add.org) Website for national organization for support of parents, teachers, and children with attention deficit disorder with special pages for home-school interactions. [www.chadd.com](http://www.chadd.com) National organization and source of education, advocacy, and support for children, parents, and adults with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. [www.ldonline.org](http://www.ldonline.org) An interactive guide to learning disabilities for parents, teachers, and children.

### **Videos on ADHD**

Barkley, R. A. (1993). *ADHD in the classroom*. New York: The Guilford Press. Goldstein, S. (1991). *It's only attention disorder* Salt Lake City, UT. The Neurology, Learning and Behavior

Center, 670 E. 3900 South, Suite 100, Salt Lake City, UT 84107. Phelan, T. W. (1990). All about attention deficit disorder Glen Ellyn, IL: Child Management Inc., 800 Roosevelt Road, Building B, Suite 309, Glen Ellyn, IL 60137. Phone: (800) 442-4453.

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Bos, C. S. (in press). Informed flexible teaching: A key to successful readers. Intervention in Clinic and Schools. Bos, C. S., Nahmias, N. L., & Urban, M. A. (1997). Implementing interactive profes What Does the Research colic ration?. Figure 7. Book Activity My Contract for My Book Activity sional development in a workshop course on educating students with ADHD. Teacher Education and Special Education, 20, 132-145.

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Nahmias, M. L. (1995). Communication and collaboration between home and school for students with ADD. Intervention in School and Clinic, 30, 241-247.

Urban, M. A. (1999). Homework: The family plan. In C. Jones, H.R. Searight, & M. A. Urban (Eds.), Parent articles for ADHD. San Antonio, TX: Communication Skill Builders.

Williams, V. I., & Cartledge, G. (1997). Passing notes to parents. TEACHING Exceptional Children, 30(1), 30-34.

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