



Sadly, kids who have Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are often judged by their behavior. On the surface, their actions might appear to be defiant or silly. These children might also be very quiet, appearing to “daydream.” They might struggle with impulse control, turn-taking, following directions, or staying with the group. In addition, children with this diagnosis may find it difficult to sustain attention, especially when learning new material. When discussing strategies for students with ADHD, my colleague, Child Psychologist Dr. Sherri McClurg commented, “ADHD is not really about attention deficit,” “It’s more about attention dysregulation; kids with this disorder may have a tough time focusing on the task at hand, and become overly focused on other things.” All of this can make church very stressful.

Fortunately, ministry leaders and pastors can employ some simple strategies for increasing attention and helping kids with ADHD feel successful at church. Recently, I spoke with Dr. McClurg, along with Sherri Halagan, a master teacher and consultant for Responsive Classroom, and Rebecca Hamilton, a special needs ministry leader to discuss some practical ways to accomplish this.

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Greet the children when they come in, in a fun way to let them know you are ready for some fun learning

Give positive and affirming comments when the child is successful

Keep rewards tangible

Provide a place for a child to go in cases of inappropriate behavior

Identify resources that can be put away instead of causing the child to get in trouble



### 1. Set clear expectations

Kids with ADHD respond well to structure. One effective way to create predictability is by including students in the process. When kids formulate rules, they take ownership in how the class works.

Click: Here is an example of a format you can use when setting expectations together.

During a conversation about classroom management, Sheri Halagan, a veteran teacher and consultant for Responsive Classroom suggested, “Stick to just a few basic rules, and refer to those rules during class to remind kids how to act and how to take care of each other.”

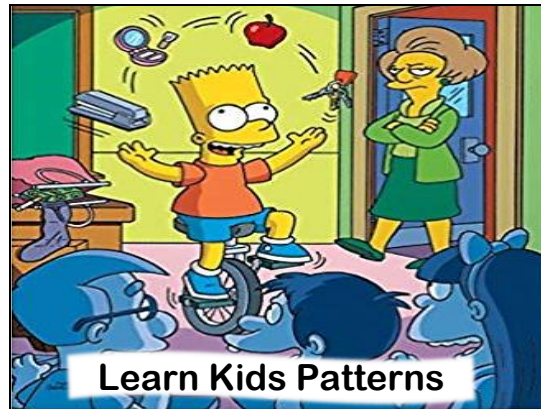
Halagan notes that students benefit from practicing procedures, such as preparing for worship time or walking down the hallway: “Teachers shouldn’t assume that kids know what to do,” she noted, “Remember that teaching them how to manage materials and relationships is an important part of the curriculum!”

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Plan to meet with them as needed to discuss common strategies that will be consistent at home and at church

Evaluate discipline measures with the parents as well. If how you are disciplining in the classroom isn't working, before changing your strategy discuss it with the parents and keep a team mentality open while being positive and sensitive to everyone involved.



. Learn kids' patterns.

Seeking to prevent behavior problems before they occur is one of the best strategies for working with children with ADHD, psychologists and teachers say.

And all it takes is a little time to notice a child's behavior patterns. Is there any behavior a child does every week in class? If so, think of ways to eliminate whatever triggers the behavior.

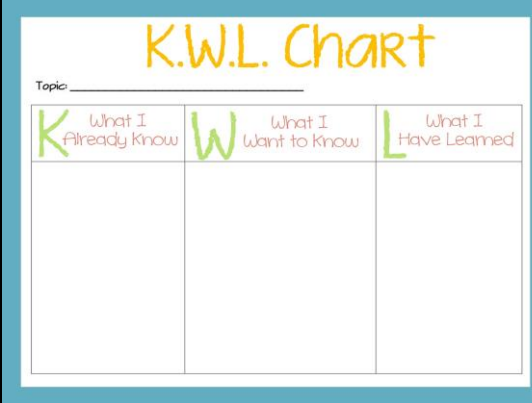
Two kids with hyperactive tendencies sitting next to each other, for example, is a nightmare waiting to happen. Try seating these students either next to calmer students to provide behavior role models or near you where direct eye contact or a tap on their shoulders can redirect their attention.

To respond to a child's recurring inappropriate behavior, Acker recommends a multisensory approach. "If a student has trouble remembering to raise her hand, a good strategy is to write the specific desired behavior on an index card and just hand the card to the child," says Acker. "This works just as well as saying, 'Mary, you forgot to raise your hand again.'"



#### 4. Tap background knowledge

As with knowing the schedule, most children learn best when they can connect new information with something they already know. In addition, kids can pay attention more capably when they have an opportunity to explore how previously learned (and familiar!) material relates novel concepts. A proven strategy: The KWL Chart!



A K.W.L. Chart template with a blue border. At the top, the title "K.W.L. Chart" is written in orange. Below the title is a line for "Topic: \_\_\_\_\_". The chart is divided into three columns: "K What I Already Know", "W What I Want to Know", and "L What I Have Learned". Each column has a large green letter at the top and a large empty space below for writing.

K What I Already Know	W What I Want to Know	L What I Have Learned

Before teaching a new concept, use this chart to get kids prepared. For example, ask children, “What do you KNOW about King David?” What do you WONDER about him?” As they give answers, the teacher can write down the information on the chart. After the entire activity is completed, have children discuss what they LEARNED, and also revise any inconsistencies in what they thought they knew. Again, this kind of activity taps background knowledge, creates anticipation for new materials, and allows learners to review new concepts.

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children don't have to be seated in chairs or on the floor to participate. Some kids prefer standing while they work on crafts or papers, while others like to lie on the floor. Offering choices can help kids with ADHD regulate their bodies and remain comfortable.

Another way to provide "wiggle room" for kids is by offering fidget toys. Easily acquired at dollar stores or websites, fidgets give kids a way to keep their hands busy as they listen to a story or sermon. One parent shares, "The fidget toy gives my child something to do while listening. (I know he's heard it because he often recounts the Bible story to me afterwards)!" For best results, allow kids an opportunity to learn how to appropriately use fidgets without throwing them or taking them apart. For a great selection of fidget toys, visit [www.therapishoppe.com](http://www.therapishoppe.com)





. Try some “screening.”

The rapidly changing stimuli in video games or movies can be captivating for kids with ADHD. When possible, include a video component in lessons. This allows kids to absorb information in a format that is both appealing and easy to process.

Although kids with ADHD may require some extra help, they also can provide a delightful energy and exuberance. By applying these strategies and recognizing the gifts of every child, ministry leaders can help kids to know the love of God. Special Needs Ministry Leader Rebecca Hamilton notes, “We believe God made these kids just exactly as they are...and we can’t miss out on the wonderful gifts they bring to our church.”

For more information on ADHD:

[www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)

[www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org)

[www.ldonline.org](http://www.ldonline.org)

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