

The School Supports Checklist

Identifying Support Needs and Barriers for Children With ADHD

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Children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder are at significant risk for experiencing failure in school. The School Supports Checklist helps to identify potential classroom-based supports for children with ADHD in elementary school. The checklist can be used to support planning and overcoming barriers for increasing access to the general education curriculum for children with ADHD.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) has become one of the most widely diagnosed disorders of childhood (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, 2005). Data indicate that the prevalence of ADHD is significant, affecting 5% to 7% of school-age children or about 1.6 million children (CDC; Zentall, 2006). The essential feature of ADHD is a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that is more frequent and severe than is typically observed in individuals at a comparable level of development (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). There are three subtypes of ADHD based on the predominant symptom pattern: combined type, predominantly inattentive type, and predominantly hyperactive-impulsive type. Most individuals with ADHD

have the combined type, characterized as having six or more symptoms of inattention and six or more symptoms of hyperactivity-impulsivity that have persisted for at least 6 months (Zentall).

Academic underachievement is perhaps the characteristic most often associated with ADHD (Barkley, 2002; Kline & Silver, 2004). Students with ADHD are more likely than those without disabilities to receive lower grades in academic subjects and lower scores on standardized measures of reading and math (Marshall, Hynd, Handwerk, & Hall, 1997; Zentall, 2006). Many students with ADHD are at risk for significant and chronic school failure (Carlson & Gaub, 1997; Mannuzza, Klein, Bessler, Malloy, & Hynes, 1997). Over half of the students with ADHD who are taught in general education classrooms will experience school failure of at least one grade by adolescence (Dendy, 2000), and are also much more likely to drop out of school (Barkley).

Given these risk factors it is clear that for the vast majority of children with ADHD to be successful in the classroom setting teachers must be willing to provide individualized support (Bulut, 2005) and strategies such as adapting instruction, modifying



tasks, using different materials, and making changes to classroom structure (Bulut; Thurlow, 2002). Children do not have to be identified with an educational disability to benefit from such strategies, although approximately half of children with ADHD are receiving services and have plans that guide the use of specific strategies and supports (McKinley, 2003; Zentall, 2006).

Legal Basis for Accommodations

In addition to the general desire to increase the capacity of all educators to meet the needs of more students, the need for providing supports for stu-



dents with ADHD also has a legal foundation. Children with ADHD can qualify for individualized supports through Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a civil rights statute prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability in any program receiving federal financial assistance. Section 504 requires that students with disabilities receive appropriate educational services designed to meet their individual needs to the same extent as the needs of students without disabilities are met. ADHD also may qualify a child for special education under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA; Lerner, Lowenthal, & Lerner, 1995; McKinley, 2003; Zentall, 2006), under the category of “other health impairment” or another category. If children are identified as having a disability, their individualized education program (IEP) guides the provision of special education and related services. The supports that children with ADHD can receive through IDEA and Section 504 include adaptations to classroom routines including instructional delivery, organizational support, and modification of assignments (e.g., reduced length, reduced time).

The School Supports Checklist (SSC)

The School Modifications Assessment Checklist (SMAC) is a descriptive survey that was used to collect data on the frequency that specific accommodations were used with students with ADHD (Zentall & Stormont-Spurgin, 1995). Items from this checklist represent within-classroom resources and were identified from research reviews on interventions for students with ADHD with and without co-occurring learning disabilities and from clinical experience (Zentall & Stormont-Spurgin). The original SMAC included 98 items and was used with a broad range of educators from preschool to secondary.

McKinley (2003) revised the SMAC as the School Supports Checklist (SSC) to reflect current knowledge of support needs for ADHD according to leading experts in the field and to include

Psychometric Properties for the SSC

The first review of the SSC intended to establish face validity of the scale by using the expertise of elementary school general and special educators. The two educators were instructed to provide feedback and to delete any listed support that was unclear or invalid based on their district’s curriculum—and if one educator recommended exclusion, the item would be deleted. From this review, McKinley (2003) deleted 18 items that were clearly not developmentally appropriate for a student in Grades 2 to 5. The questionnaire contained 76 items for the next level of review, to establish content validity; a panel of five nationally recognized experts in the area of ADHD reviewed the SSC items. One purpose of the review was to ascertain that the items in the SSC were recommended supports for students with ADHD. The panel was instructed to delete any listed support if it were indistinguishable from routine classroom strategies appropriate for any student. No items were deleted for this reason. Another purpose of the review was to reduce the length of the questionnaire. Items that were not clear or redundant ($n = 35$) were omitted as a result of this review, leaving a total of 41 items. To determine the reliability of the scale, McKinley ran an internal consistency analysis after teachers completed the scales, obtaining an alpha of .92, which is high (Litwin, 2002).

potential barriers for use with children with ADHD. Unlike the SMAC, the SSC includes supports that are appropriate for elementary aged children, specifically Grades 2 to 5. The items from the SSC have content validity (see box, “Psychometric Properties for the SSC”). The addition of potential barriers creates the opportunity to use this tool with teachers in planning for children with ADHD as part of an IEP or 504 plan, during teacher assistance team support, and/or as a prereferral intervention before referral for evaluation for special education.

Educators rate each support on the SSC (see Figure 1) on a 1 to 5 Likert

Figure 1. The School Supports Checklist

The first purpose of this checklist is to determine how often you have used specific supports with students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The questionnaire can be used to assess general strategies that you have used in the past with all students you have taught. The questionnaire can also be applied to a specific student you are working with now to assist with planning. The second purpose of this checklist is to identify barriers to using specific supports. All supports will not be appropriate for every student with ADHD. For items rated as not often or never used, please give the reason using the list provided.

How Often Used

- 1 = Not often used or never used (reason)
- 2 = Monthly or intermittently
- 3 = Weekly
- 4 = 2 or 3 times per week
- 5 = Daily

Reasons Not Often Used or Never Used

- a. Not enough time
- b. Need additional training
- c. Need additional resources
- d. Need additional materials
- e. Need smaller class size
- f. Students' needs require more support
- g. Not appropriate for student

Item	How Often Used	Reasons (code) "Not Often Used or Never Used"
1. Allow reduced standards for acceptable handwriting.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
2. Give fewer math problems at one time if rote material.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
3. Allow several shorter assignments in same time as other students are completing one longer task.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
4. Give more projects (e.g., build models, do experiments as homework, collect rocks or shells) instead of worksheets.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
5. Make child publicly accountable to someone else across school day for school conduct and performance goals.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
6. Point out cause and effect of behavior.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
7. Write assignments on the board, and make sure student copies them.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
8. Alternate low- and high-interest tasks.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
9. Use games to encourage attention and over-learn rote material.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
10. Use prompts for appropriate behavior.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
11. Instruct student on how to continue on easier parts of tasks (or do substitute task) while waiting for teacher help.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
12. Have a peer note taker or recorder of assignments for students.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
13. Ask student to explain back to you their understanding of the directions and/or assignments.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
14. Make student underline or rewrite directions before beginning.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
15. Use teaching activities that encourage active responding (talking, moving, organizing, working at the board).	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
16. Allow directed movement in the classroom or a change in seating that is not disruptive.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
17. Allow standing during seatwork, especially during end of task.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	

continues

Figure 1. The School Supports Checklist (continued)

Item	How Often Used	Reasons (code) "Not Often Used or Never Used"
18. Allow student-pacing of activities, rather than teacher-pacing.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
19. Encourage doodling or play with clay, paper clips, or pipe cleaners while waiting or listening to instructions.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
20. Determine student preference for working in groups, alone, with teachers, or using various learning aids, tapes, etc.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
21. Teach organizational skills and/or provide organizers.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
22. Allow individual work to be completed with partners (buddies).	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
23. Allow student to sit closer to teacher.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
24. Call student's name, touch student, use a private signal, word, move closer to student.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
25. Use written prompts or pictures for behavior/task completion.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
26. Cue student about upcoming difficult times or tasks where extra control will be needed.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
27. Restructure assignments by coloring, circling, or underlining—directions or parts of directions.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
28. Tape prompt cards in desks, on books, or on assignment folders.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
29. Use fewer words in explaining tasks (concise and global verbal directions).	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
30. Praise any effort in waiting for turns.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
31. Ignore minor behavioral disruptions.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
32. Give verbal compliments for improved work or social behavior.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
33. Give social time as reward for working independently.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
34. Do not take away recess or gym time as punishment.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
35. Give tallies for good conduct or work completed (and take them away for incomplete or poor behavior) to trade for activity/reward.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
36. Give child an activity reward such as running an errand, cleaning the boarding, organizing teacher's desk, arranging chairs.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
37. More frequent conferences with parents.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
38. Eliminate or reduce homework or specify an amount of time to be spent on homework rather than amount of work to be done.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
39. Put more difficult or demanding work earlier in the class period or school day.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
40. Implement a daily behavior report card sent home to parents for review and consequences.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	
41. Notes or behavioral ratings to family doctor about behavioral responses to medication.	1 2 3 4 5 Why?	

Figure 2. A Support Plan Template for a Student With ADHD

Items Selected for Student	Barriers	Strategies for Addressing Barriers	Person Responsible for Implementation	Data to Monitor Success
Date to review plan:				
Additional notes:				

can be used district- or schoolwide to identify professional development needs specifically related to increasing support for children with ADHD. For example, a school administrator who has identified increasing capacity to support children with ADHD as an improvement goal could ask all teaching staff to complete the survey. Results of the survey would provide a baseline of how many supports educators are using and identify the barriers to the use of other supports. The items on the SSC thus can launch a discussion of the need to increase the use of individualized supports for children with ADHD, even those not receiving special education and related services. District or school professional development committees, school psychologists, special educators, or teacher assistance teams also can drive these same types of activities.

Special educators and school psychologists can use the SSC in collaborative planning with general educators. If teachers like the idea of using a specific support but haven't because they didn't think of using it, then the SSC has served as providing insight to improving an individual student's support plan. When teachers identify other reasons for not using a support (e.g., need additional materials), the SSC can help the team identify additional resource needs. General educators who indicate they need additional training

scale, based on how frequently they use each support for students with ADHD (1 = not often or never used, 2 = monthly or intermittently, 3 = weekly, 4 = two or three times per week, 5 = daily). Teachers also code the reasons (barriers) that items are *not often or never used*. McKinley (2003) derived the list of codes from a synthesis of the literature on teacher perceptions of barriers for inclusion (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996):

- Not enough time
- Need additional training
- Need additional resources
- Need additional materials
- Need smaller class size
- Student's needs require more support
- Not appropriate for student

Thus, the SSC is effective not only for identifying potential supports for

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students with ADHD, but also for identifying barriers to using specific supports. The SSC also recognizes that not all supports are appropriate for every student with ADHD, including this as a reason for not using a specific strategy.

Using the SSC for Planning

Many general education teachers report limited educational experience in the area of ADHD (McKinley, 2003; Stormont & Stebbins, 2005). The SSC

can receive it through multiple avenues including consultation with resource personnel with expertise in ADHD (e.g., special educators, school psychologists); reading materials; professional development workshops; and Internet resources. The strategies to overcome barriers can be based on the resources available in the school and community. Figure 2 provides a sample template of a support plan that could be used with the SSC, and lists important informa-

Strategies to overcome barriers can be based on the resources available in the school and community.

tion that should be collected (such as when the plan is to be reviewed and what data will be collected to determine if the plan is successful). Some examples of data that could be collected to monitor the success of support plans include: homework completion, homework accuracy, in-class assignment completion, in-class assignment accuracy, office referrals, and on-task behavior.

The SSC can also be used to guide educators when planning for state and district testing. IDEA requires IEP teams to include a statement of individual modifications and accommodations that are needed for students to have full and equal participation in state and districtwide assessments (Landau, Vohs, & Romano, 1999). IEP teams can use the SSC to identify specific accommodations that are appropriate for individual students. Similarly, schools can use the SSC to guide them in identifying testing accommodations for students' Section 504 plans (Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2009)—such as changing the setting, response, or presentation (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009); having the test administered apart from a group setting; reading directions to the student; extending the time allowed to take the test; and allowing the use of a calculator.

It is critical to build the capacity for schools to be able to service a diverse student population. Children with ADHD represent a large percentage of the school population and have unique needs for support. The SSC is a helpful, valid tool that professionals can use to increase the use of supports for children with ADHD.

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