

NEW



# BACK TO SCHOOL GUIDE

for Canadian Families of Children with ADHD

Back to school is an exciting, busy time for many families, but for families dealing with ADHD it can be a particularly stressful. Summer is a great break from school anxieties and rigid routines. However, those last few weeks in August and September can become overwhelming with things to be considered, booked, organized and set into place to ensure that the new year begins as successfully as possible. This complete guide will help you through the thought process of assessing the past school year, organizing the start of the new year, and implementing strategies to make sure this year is your child's most successful yet!

## Transition to School

**Scheduling a meeting with your child's new homeroom teacher is a great start, but you should arrive prepared for this meeting to be effective. Here are some questions to ask yourself and discuss with your child to help you make the most out of your appointment, as well as things to consider during the appointment.**

### Look back at Last Year and Review

- How did the year go generally? Was it a successful year, academically and socially?
- What were your child's successes – in your opinion, your child's opinion, and the school's?
- What were the highlights of the year for your child?
- What seemed to decrease your child's stress level and make school more enjoyable?
- What were the tools used or implemented that helped to increase your child's self-esteem?
- Did your child have a mentor at school (someone they could go to for support and assistance)?
- What were the stumbling blocks to your child being successful? Please be specific.
- What were the issues reported by the school?
- Were these legitimate issues, and were they in your control or the child's control to do something about?
- Was there a team, including parents, working on strategies to implement and evaluate?

### Review your child's individualized educational plan, their special education designation (if applicable), report cards, and communications from school

- Review areas that the school identifies as your child's strengths and weaknesses.
- Do these align with yours? If not, objectively review and decide whose are more accurate.
- What was implemented as an accommodation or strategy in the classroom or school?
- What were the strategies that were not implemented?
- What accommodations or strategies worked and helped your child to be successful academically and socially?
- Were there certain small strategies and/or accommodations that made a big difference for your child?
- What strategies failed or made your child/family more uncomfortable or stressed?

## Get to know your child's teacher/team



- How knowledgeable are they about ADHD?
- Are they willing to allow you to provide information to them?

## Allow your child's teacher/team to get to know them and not just their ADHD

- Describe your child's strengths and the things that endear them to you.
- Share your child's quirks, or anything that will assist the teacher in understanding them.
- Discuss strategies that helped to increase your child's self-esteem.

## Work with your child's teacher to set up strategies and/or accommodations

- Share your insights on what worked and did not work last year.
- Review the existing IEP and/or classroom strategies being used.
- What can and should be implemented?
- Decide on the first goals of the year.
- Set up a system of frequent communication with the teacher and request that assignments and important communication be sent directly to you.
- Book another meeting a few weeks into the school year to assess what is and is not working.

Check in with your child frequently for updates on how things are going, both socially as well as academically. Take your child's concerns seriously and assess what can be done to improve the situation sooner rather than later

## Restarting Counselling and/or Treatment Review



Make a “back to school” appointment with your child’s doctor or treatment provider to review their complete health and progress managing their ADHD.

### Elements for discussion should include:

- How the past few months have gone since the child's last appointment
- Point out any changes in your child's medical condition
- Point out any height and weight changes
- Treatments that the child has been receiving, such as counselling, coaching or tutoring. How successful were they?
- If the child was not on medication or other forms of treatment, are any of these treatments now an option?

### Discuss any issues around medication during the summer or the last school year:

- Was the medication as effective as it could be, consistently throughout the day, without gaps?
- Was the medication lasting long enough into the evening to allow the child to complete their homework or be engaged in extracurricular activities, such as clubs, sports or driving?
- Did the medication begin to work as quickly as the child required in the morning?
- Did side effects occur that were bothersome?
- Are there any issues with when and where the child needs to take the medication?

### Develop an action plan with your child's physician by asking:

- What counselling, therapy and treatment options may be right for your child?
- Do you wish to begin or continue certain treatments?
- What resources for these treatments exist?
- Does the medication need to be increased, decreased or changed to another medication?
- Do you wish to begin a medication trial?
- Should a trial period be initiated before school begins, at the start of school or after a base line of symptom control on the current medication has been established for comparison?
- Will the school need to be involved in filling out rating scales and how do we initiate this?

**Book a follow-up appointment before leaving – to consistently track your child’s condition**



### Organizing Before- and After School Routines

**This is the time to start fresh and put all those organizational strategies that you read about in place.**

- Brainstorm strategies with your child and other family members to assist with last year's challenges. Including the entire family in the discussion will make them more cooperative when it comes time to implement the strategies. Try and make the plan a "win" for everyone.
- Negotiate appropriate morning and evening routines with the agreement that 15 minutes will be added or subtracted from bedtime and/or wake time if the kids have difficulty getting out the door or into bed on time.
- Start to adjust the sleep schedule so wake and sleep times are closer to school times.
- Decide on where and when homework will be done.
- Declutter and organize their homework workspace as much as possible, and buy the necessary tools to assist with this.
- Think about how you are going to ensure that homework and assignments get home and back to school. Use an agenda or an electronic calendar.
- Have a designated place for backpacks and other things that need to go back and forth to school, and ensure that the backpack is packed with all necessities and in place the night before.
- Set a time to get clothes laid out the night before.
- Organize last year's school supplies and purchase needed supplies (you may wish to purchase certain supplies from a list provided, in case this year's teacher has preferences).
- Prepare a family calendar to help keep everyone on time and organized – colour code each member's commitments.
- Use posters or post-it notes with lists of reminders or routines (pictures can be used for younger children) posted in the appropriate place, such as the bedroom door, bathroom mirror, at the front door, or on the kitchen fridge, to catch the child's eye.
- You may wish to decide on a regular family meeting time to discuss and tweak these strategies along the way.

### Discuss and re-evaluate extracurricular activities

- How many activities can the family realistically handle?
- What would these activities require in terms of time commitment, driving and costs?
- What activities would be the most beneficial for your child – i.e. does the child need to burn energy in a highly active sport?
- Does your child do better at individual or team sports?
- Does your child have a specific talent that would benefit his/her self-esteem to nurture?

**Make sure schedules are explained and visible for your child so that he or she understands the day ahead and what will be expected.**