

**LAWRENCE B. SMITH LCSW-C, LICSW**  
9305 MINTWOOD STREET  
SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND 20901

PHONE & FAX: 301 588-1933    E-MAIL: [lsmith@md.net](mailto:lsmith@md.net)    [www.attachmentdisordermaryland.com](http://www.attachmentdisordermaryland.com)

## **School Interventions**

### **INTERVENTIONS: WHAT DOESN'T WORK**

Traditional problem solving questions such as: What happened? What was your part in it? What could you have done differently? AD children will learn to spin off the "desired answers", but they will be meaningless answers. The time spent on this exercise will be wasted time.

Vague praise, such as "you are handling things well today" is generally seen by the AD child as a manipulative control strategy on the adult's part. In addition, overt praise for expected basic behavior such as sitting in one's desk is likely to provoke an oppositional switch into the undesired behavior.

Conventional behavior management plans / level systems: Such plans are based on consistency, and this consistency makes these plans easy targets for the strategic thinking of an AD child. AD children will see a behavior management plan, not as a way to change behavior, but as simply one more thing to learn "how to work" for their own purposes. Their movements up and down the levels has all to do with their own purpose at any given moment and little or nothing to do with success / failure or earning adult approval. AD children may even use behavior management systems as bait to draw the adults into useless discussions about how to sustain progress. The end result can be that it is the teacher's behavior, rather than the child's, that ends up getting "managed".

Consistent zero tolerance stances run a high risk of dragging the teacher into a cycle of escalating misbehavior followed by increasingly severe consequences. Zero tolerance also does not allow the teacher sufficient creative flexibility to approach the AD child in a useful way that the AD child could not predict.

Believing the child's tales about horrendous treatment at home by parents and offering support and sympathy in an effort to "compensate". In the case of an AD child, this is probably the worst possible thing an educational professional could do.

Challenging the AD child's perspective with "objective evidence" in order to persuade her that her thinking is somehow incorrect. This approach assumes that the teacher and child share a common view of "reality"- not true. The teacher's view will make little or no sense to the AD child. In fact, the AD child is apt to see this approach as a manipulative attempt on the teacher's part to set the child up in some way.

Setting the parents up to be the "heavies" by leaving it to parents and home to impose consequences for school infractions or work not done.

Teachers taking AD children's behavior or statements personally. This usually takes some practice as AD children are skilled at discovering adults' tender spots and going after them.

Reacting emotionally to AD children's behavior. This only reinforces the AD child's sense of being in control of the adult's emotions ( a goal they generally pursue). This really takes some practice as AD children's behavior can be relentless, day in-day out, as any parent can testify.

Looking for THE answer. There is no "The Answer". "The answer" leads to doing the same thing the same way every time. An AD child will have a field day with such an approach.

## **INTERVENTIONS: WHAT DOES WORK**

Being somewhat unpredictable on purpose. Such unpredictability is necessary to get past the AD child's vast array of avoidance maneuvers. An adult an AD child can predict is an adult an AD child will "work".

Make some rewards absolute and not contingent on anything. This effectively subverts AD children's strong tendency to sabotage themselves and thereby prove to the adults that they can't "make them succeed". (Example: AD child participates in a "fun Friday" activity regardless of their behavior, barring any safety concerns). This approach puts the child's succeeding under the complete control of the teacher.

Drilling in the concept of "choice". Choice is an idea that is often absent in AD children's thinking. It is not simply that they refuse to accept responsibility- the ideas of people making choices and having responsibility literally makes no sense to AD children. They need to have it pointed out to them, matter-of-factly, over and over, that they are making choices all the time. Then discussion can begin to move towards making better vs. worse choices.

Approach AD children with a matter-of-fact, firm, no nonsense, not hostile, tone of voice. Directions should be phrased as directions, not questions (Example: "Do..." vs. "Would you...").

Four questions never to ask AD children:

Did you...?

Why did you...?

Do you remember...?

What did you say?

AD children can compose eloquent answers to adult questions that mean absolutely nothing. A question to an AD child is too often an invitation to trick an adult., It works much better to phrase statements as guesses and let them react to the guess. (Example: rather than "Did you break your pencil ?" try "I think you broke your pencil to get out of doing your work."). AD children's reactions to guesses will tell you much more than their answers to questions.

Keep praise very concrete and specific and do not connect it substantive rewards. Use humor to deflect AD children's attempts to be deliberately provocative.

Teachers should follow the parents' lead in matters of behavior management. Parents will almost always have seen behavior far in excess of anything the school will ever see. This gives parents irreplaceable experiential knowledge about working with their child's behavior. The school needs to partner seamlessly with home and parents in order to undercut the AD child's considerable strategic wilyness. However, school and home should be kept separate in some matters. Incidents at school

should be handled at school and not referred to the parents to provide consequences at home in the evening unless this is part of a collaborative plan arrived at beforehand. In general, parents SHOULD NOT be expected to be intimately involved with nightly homework. AD children will simply use "homework" as a stage to play out their attachment related conflicts and everyone loses.

Use of the word "trick" to describe AD children's strategic behavior works better than the more loaded words like "manipulative", "lying", etc.

Become a good observer of AD children's nonverbal responses (facial expressions, body position and movements, eyes, voice tone, etc). These are the most accurate signs of what is going on inside the child. If you listen only to what AD children say, you will go in circles repeatedly, getting nowhere.

Act as historian for the AD child. As AD children live in the moment, they need adults to remind them of past events that have gone successfully to help them maintain more perspective on the present.