

APPENDIX B: “FIRST-AID” TOOLS FOR TEACHERS WITH ATTENTION-CHALLENGED CHILDREN

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Here is a list of tools for Montessori teachers to immediately begin implementing with their attention-challenged children. These tools will help the teacher manage the challenging behaviors of a child with ADHD and, in the freedom of a Montessori environment, will help the child attend better to learn to manage his/her own behaviors. For mild cases of ADHD, this may be all that is required to support a child’s success in a Montessori classroom. Children with more severe attentional challenges will require a multidisciplinary evaluation, which can take weeks or months to complete. These tools can generally provide some help to the teacher and child in their daily functioning during the time it takes to get necessary evaluations completed and to implement specific, individualized interventions recommended by medical professionals.

Visual Schedule

Written daily schedules are created with pictures and words (depending on the child’s age). These schedules give the child an overview of their entire day. By providing information through the visual sense (not just the auditory sense), the visual daily schedule helps these children understand more concretely and remember the structure and sequence of their day. Many teachers have found that the visual schedule can help attention-challenged children transition more smoothly between activities throughout their day; it can make the virtual time warp that these children live in more manageable for them.

Picture Work Plan

Even when a child is reading, pictures are powerful communicators. For some children with attention challenges, making choices among works in a Montessori classroom can produce high levels of anxiety. These children are visually or cognitively overwhelmed by

the plethora of work choices in the Montessori environment; they need to be offered a small subset to choose from. Modern technology makes it easy to take pictures of the child's menu of work options (cell phone or iPad), send to your computer, and print them out on cardstock. These pictures are laminated and attached by Velcro tabs to the child's own collection of works (stored on a piece of foam board or on a long strip of Velcro attached to the wall). The child has a laminated daily work plan that is assembled using these pictures each morning. The resulting daily work plan is collaboratively created by the teacher and child to ensure that child's preferences, as well as teacher's lesson plans, are incorporated. It is also important to include breaks in the work plan for the child. These can be breaks from work or breaks to energize focus through physical activity. Pictures of the break activity are included in the work plan. This process of including the child in the planning of their breaks is a first step toward teaching self-regulation. It requires children to think about how they are feeling, how they are functioning, and what actions or activities they can do to help themselves focus and keep working through their plan.

Picture Choice Board

A picture choice board is a simplified version of a visual work plan that can be used with children even as young as in the *Casa* (ages 2.5-6 years). The simplest form is the First-Then board, with just two large windows under the words *First* and *Then*. Helpful for younger attention-challenged children, the picture choice board lets the child know what they will do first and then what comes after. This is an effective tool to get a child to engage in a least-preferred (or avoided) activity first with the promise of a highly-preferred activity afterwards, the *Then*. A picture choice board can also be used to clearly sequence activities during the work period. It is a very simple, yet highly effective tool.

Seating Alternatives

Another quick and simple tool to help children with ADHD attend during lessons, circle time, and maintain concentration during work, is an air-filled seat cushion, ball chair, or peanut chair, to allow the wiggly child to wiggle while they sit and work. These cushions not only allow the child to move, they promote proper

alignment of the spine and provide a neurological foundation for improved attention.

Something for the Hands

Stress balls, fidgets, tactile fabrics, and other objects for the child to touch, stimulate, keep busy, and exercise their hands. For some attention-challenged children, providing something for their hands can be calming and helpful to keeping their minds focused; however, these same children may be impulsive and may need careful monitoring until they learn to use those tools appropriately at all times (i.e., not throwing them, chewing on them, or bothering other children with them).

Intensive Exercise Breaks

Groundbreaking research at the Shelton School & Evaluation Center in Dallas, TX, has demonstrated significant benefit to their attention-challenged students using rigorous exercise on stationary bikes to regulate their academic performance at school. Some students were even able to drop their medications by using the exercise bikes instead. Children with ADHD need rigorous exercise to help them regulate their ability to attend and complete tasks at school; this is a life skill that will continue to benefit them as adults. Consider designing a consistent plan for rigorous daily activity for your attention-challenged students.

Relaxation Techniques

Mindfulness, yoga, controlled breathing, and meditation techniques can be taught to help these children learn to regulate their energy and emotions. These are skills that must be age-appropriately taught and practiced daily to become useful life tools for children with attention challenges.

Social Skills Training

Social skills are basically the same as grace and courtesy lessons that have been enhanced with theory of mind perspectives, social problem-solving, and unspoken social conventions. This training connects the dots that typical children connect automatically through living in a social environment. Children with ADHD often struggle

socially because they do not pay attention to their social environment, and therefore miss many social cues. The Shelton School & Evaluation Center has developed social skills curricula for preschool through high school: four levels of “Choices: A Comprehensive Social Values and Social Skills Curriculum” and “Ethics.” These daily lessons engage students in active, multisensory, and explicit learning about the social skills they need at their age.

