

ADHD Parenting > School & Learning

ADHD/LD SCHOOLS

How to Find the Perfect School for Your Child

Looking for a new school? Essential steps for parents who are seeking the best learning environment for a child with ADHD or learning disabilities.



| By [Nicole Sprinkle](#) | ✓ [Verified](#) | Updated on May 10, 2021

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If your child has been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder ([ADHD or ADD](#)), one of your top priorities is finding a school that matches his learning style. It may seem like a scavenger hunt, but armed with the right tools, you can find the prize: a school that understands ADHD.

The key to finding the right school is to start early and to do your research. If you know what to look for in a school — and the right questions to ask — you'll be up to the challenge. Here, we tell you everything you need to know to [find the right school for your child with ADHD](#). Consider it a little help with your homework.

Step 1: Understand Your Child

Look deep into [child's behavior](#) before you consider prospective schools. First, take a few minutes and write about who your child is as a student:

— Is he a listener or does he learn better through touch?

— Does he volunteer or does he need to be drawn out?

— Does he work well independently or would he do better in a group?

Next, make a list of your child's specific needs: Frank needs a classroom where he can sit away from the windows. Barbara needs a school that's light on homework. Jim needs a teacher who will give him step-by-step instructions. Your list should contain the things you hope to find, but it should also be realistic. Include your child's strengths and weaknesses, both academically and socially. Often, exceptionally bright kids enter academically challenging programs, but fail because the stress levels are too high. Lay out the whole picture, so your child isn't set up to fail.

Above all, focus on your child's needs. Just because a school is considered top-notch — and the whole neighborhood is vying to get in — does not necessarily mean it's an ideal fit for your child.

Step 2: Interview the School

You'll read stacks of literature, watch countless school promotional tapes, and listen to everything administrators have to say. But that's just the tip of the iceberg. To understand what a school's really about, you'll need to conduct a little Q+A of your own.

Interview principals, primary teachers, speech therapists, teacher's assistants, and [other special-needs providers](#). And don't forget the parents of kids who are enrolled in the school. Show up when classes are letting out, and ask other moms and dads to share their insights on classes, teachers, and homework — they'll give it to you straight. Don't know what questions to ask? Start with these:

1. How big is the school? Obviously, you'll want to know how many grade levels a school has — and how many students are enrolled in each. But don't stop there. Ask about the physical size of the school as well as the layout of the building. If your child has spatial and memory challenges — as children with ADHD often do — you'll want to know that he can find his way around.

2. How large are the classes? A class of about 15 students is probably your best-case scenario, although such small numbers are tough to find in a public school. But don't give up on the system just yet. In larger public-school classes, a "shadow" teacher may be provided, who will give your child the extra assistance he needs.

3. What's the level of teacher training? "Be sure there's a fair share of experienced career teachers," says Colleen Berge, an educational consultant in New York City. While you'll find many fine entry-level teachers working throughout the school system, your child needs a school where he will be adequately mentored.

How flexible is this school? Will it adapt to your child's learning style? Provide accommodations like letting him use a tape recorder in class instead of taking notes or getting extra time for tests? Don't settle for a simple "yes." Ask the school for specific examples of how it has adjusted to other students in the past. Typically, kids with ADD do not lack smarts, but they often lack skills necessary for academic success — organization, study skills, and test-taking ability.

4. What role do parents play? If the school's mantra is, "You are entrusting us with your child," this may be code for, "We don't want you involved," says Meyer. On the other hand, a philosophy that the primary concern is the student can mean, "We want your help."

Step 3: Go on the Open House Tour

Once you've narrowed your choices, you're ready for the open-house school tour — a see-for-yourself

experience that will prove invaluable. Most parents visit about five schools before deciding on one. Some things to keep in mind:

Good schools let you observe classes in progress — not just a slide show in the auditorium. At an open house, a school is on its best behavior. If you feel uneasy about it then, chances are, the uneasiness will only get worse. As you roam the halls, step inside classrooms, and talk to teachers, keep an eye out for the following:

Bulletin Boards. These brightly-colored displays do more than just liven up classrooms and hallways — they showcase the standard work of particular age groups. Read the essays. If the student’s writing isn’t on par with your child’s, the school may not be the best choice for him. If he’s touring with you, ask him if he has already learned about the things he sees on the walls.

Classroom Structure. Kids with ADHD are more likely to thrive in a structured environment because they often struggle with memory and focus. But don’t confuse a controlled atmosphere with mere rigidity. Teachers who assign homework verbally and write it on the board, use specific language when giving instructions (“Sit in your seat with your hands folded and your book on the floor”), and combine gestures with an expressive voice can help your child tremendously.

Mainstreaming vs. Special-Needs Classes. It’s virtually impossible to know if your child will do better in a regular classroom or a special-needs class until he’s tried them both. Some parents lean towards mainstreaming to avoid stigma, but learn that their child isn’t thriving. Others opt for special-needs classes, only to find that their child isn’t challenged.

Before you decide which set-up is right for you, find out how the school runs each one. If your child is mainstreamed, will he get special help in the classroom? If he’s in a special-needs class, will he still get the core curriculum? What types of students will he be grouped with? Observe both settings on your tour.

[Should Your Child Transfer to an ADHD-Friendly School?]

Step 4: Observe the Students

Class Change. How are kids behaving between classes? Do they move along easily on their own, or do teachers have to push them on to the next room? Are children interacting in a safe and friendly way? If children are rowdy and need corralling from teachers, it could be a sign of a lack of structure — hardly an ideal choice for a child who excels in a controlled environment.

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ADHD SELF TEST

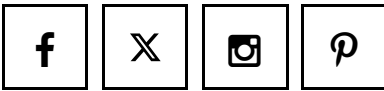
10 SIGNS YOUR CHILD HAS ADHD

ADHD SCHOOLS NEAR ME

TOP 5 ADHD SIGNS

Children are Engaged. Be it in a lesson, on the playground, or in a gym class, are kids safely engaged in learning and activities? Your red flag should go up if too many kids are goofing around, staring into space, or picking on other kids.

Tolerance. Many children with ADHD learn best through active participation, often relying on movement to keep themselves alert. Problems could arise if a teacher constantly reprimands a student who squirms, shifts in his seat, or gets up a lot.



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