

### **Motivating students with ADHD.**

People with ADHD have much lower levels of dopamine in the pleasure and reward system part of the brain compared to their neurotypical counterparts. This can make it incredibly difficult for those with ADHD to get started on tasks or activities that they find under stimulating or overwhelming. This lack of dopamine also means that there is little satisfaction when tasks are completed.

To start a task, a sense of urgency and panic is needed which releases cortisol – a stress hormone. While this helps people with ADHD get things done, it causes greater levels of anxiety and depression.

Similarly, students with ADHD often expect failure and lack self-confidence, especially if they have received and internalised a lot of criticism in the past.

### **How can we help as educators?**

Students with ADHD need more frequent and more explicit positive feedback. When we **systematically use rewards** in our lessons, students with ADHD respond positively.

Below, you will find several **reward systems** categorised by age group. When you try them out in class, keep the following golden rules in mind.

- Students with ADHD love new activities so **change the reward system you use fairly frequently** (once a month is a good rule of thumb).
- Students with ADHD **respond well to movement and touch**, so these reward systems are designed with this in mind.
- Students with ADHD need to know exactly why they are being rewarded to reinforce that behaviour so **tell students exactly why they are receiving a point** (or equivalent).
- Students with ADHD tend to have low self-esteem so try to **reward behaviour rather than academic prowess**.
- Some of the best feedback we get is from our students so **ask your students what they think** of the reward system you are implementing.

**Also remember that these techniques are useful for all students, with or without ADHD!**

Very Young Learners and Lower Primary	Very Young Learners and Primary
<p><b>Super stars</b>            Draw a star on the board and leave space underneath to write your students' names. Every time a student exhibits good behaviour, put their name on the super star board and ask the whole class to tell you why you have added it.            As an attention grabber, when the class get a little rowdier or off-task, say to them "Twinkle Twinkle Super Star, Can I See Where You Are?"            You can expand on this in any way, such as giving out star stickers and giving star students specific responsibilities.</p>	<p><b>Target trees</b>            At the beginning of the school year, display a large tree on the wall or on a website like Padlet (<a href="http://www.padlet.com">www.padlet.com</a>). This is the 'Target Tree'.            Each term or month, the class cut out an apple with a personal target written on it. This is stuck onto the tree. For online versions, they can draw their apple and upload it.            When the target is achieved, students receive 2 stickers. They then add a new apple to the tree with a new target. This is tangible, visible and a good reminder of personal goals.</p>
Very Young Learners and Primary	Very Young Learners and Primary
<p><b>Rubber band ball</b>            Any time students exhibit good behaviour, give them a rubber band to add to their rubber band ball. This is tactile and can double up as a stress ball. Over the term, students add more and more bands to their ball.</p> <p><b>How to make a rubber band ball:</b>            You need aluminium foil and a large amount of rubber bands. Rubber bands that are colourful and varied in size are better!            Give each child a sheet of aluminium foil; have them crumple it into a ball. Take 1 rubber band at a time and twist it around the foil many times to cover the foil.</p>	<p><b>Bricks</b>            Give each group of students some Lego bricks or equivalent. Each group should get five bricks in a specific colour (e.g., Group 1 gets red, Group 2 gets blue etc.). They take their five bricks work together to build a structure.</p> <p>When the groups earn a reward for behaviour, they take another brick of their colour and add it to their structure. If students do something which has a consequence, then they get a brick taken off.</p> <p>Students work as a team and see themselves as part of a group. They can get bricks for group and individual efforts.</p>

Primary and Lower Secondary	Primary and Lower Secondary
<p><b>Golden Portfolio</b></p> <p>Students receive or bring a physical file or portfolio to class. Each week, the teacher chooses a student. All the other students in the class write a positive comment about the selected child. When this is completed, they stick it in the selected student's portfolio so they can come back and read it at any point.</p>	<p><b>Gratitude journals</b></p> <p>Students bring a scrap book to their lessons. At the end of the lesson, spend at least 5 minutes for students to write messages of gratitude in each other's journals, for example, 'you really helped me understand the new vocabulary today' or 'thanks for including me in our discussion.' You can scaffold this by giving them pre-prepared notes to use. If their language level is lower, they could even draw pictures or award their partner with a star or smiley face.</p> <p>You can keep these gratitude journals in your classroom as a permanent display.</p>
Upper Primary and Lower Secondary	Upper Primary and Lower Secondary
<p><b>Tickets</b></p> <p>Use a "ticket" reward system for groups in your classroom. Tickets are awarded for good behaviour, quiet working, quick tidying, etc. The success criteria can be negotiated with the students themselves.</p> <p>Count the tickets and the group with the most tickets get a trophy which can be 'displayed' on the wall. You can negotiate the number of tickets needed to win the trophy.</p> <p>The children get quite competitive with other groups and "encourage" others in their group. Encourage collaboration rather than competition as much as you can.</p>	<p><b>Team of the Week</b></p> <p>Get students to create a 3D football shirt (children stick badges of their favourite teams over it!) using cardboard boxes and card to shape the shirt and then cut an opening at the front, like a letterbox.</p> <p>Design slips for the children to fill in to nominate their peers for good work, behaviour etc - the students write down the reason for giving the reward and then post them into the shirt.</p> <p>This doesn't need to be a football shirt of course! You can create any 3D image that responds to your students' interests or they can decide what they would like to create.</p>

**Your teacher task**

**Choose** a reward system to use with your learners. Try it consistently over several classes.

**Reflect** on how students are responding to the reward system by asking yourself the following questions:

- Do all students seem motivated by the reward system?
- Do students understand why they are being rewarded?
- How do students respond to teacher praise and peer praise?
- Do the students enjoy interacting with the reward system? Ask them!

**Further reading and resources**

For lots of resources and information on ADHD, visit <https://www.additudemag.com/>

To sign up to a course on Teaching Students with ADHD with eltonix, visit [www.eltonix.com](http://www.eltonix.com)

Hargreaves, E. (2005) *Assessment for learning? Thinking outside the (black) box*, Cambridge Journal of Education, vol 35, issue 2.

Assessment Reform Group (2002), *Research-based principles to guide classroom practice*, available at: [www.hkeaa.edu.hk/DocLibrary/SBA/HKDSE/Eng\\_DVD/doc/Afl\\_principles.pdf](http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/DocLibrary/SBA/HKDSE/Eng_DVD/doc/Afl_principles.pdf)

Dylan Wiliam & The 5 Formative Assessment Strategies to Improve Student Learning: [www.nwea.org/blog/2012/dylan-wiliam-the-5-formative-assessment-strategies-to-improve-student-learning/#sthash.KRTC7rMK.dpuf](http://www.nwea.org/blog/2012/dylan-wiliam-the-5-formative-assessment-strategies-to-improve-student-learning/#sthash.KRTC7rMK.dpuf)