



The Arc
Community Advocates

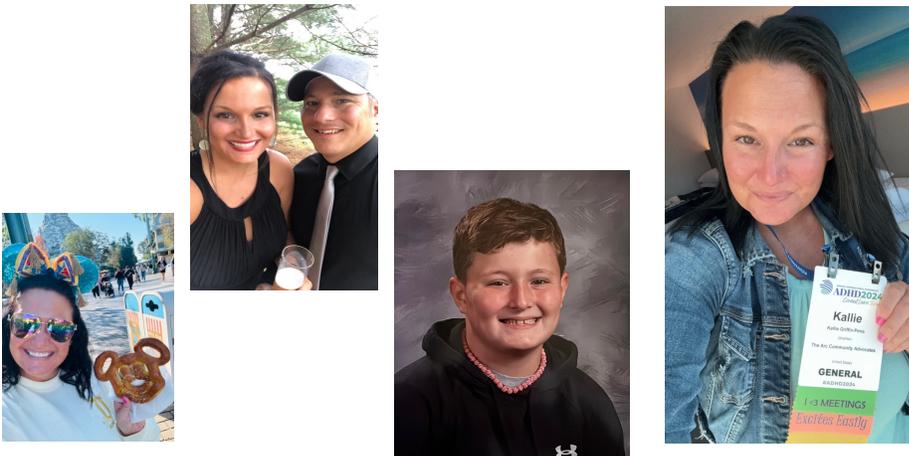
*Understanding ADHD in Education: Fostering
Success Through Collaboration*

*DEFINING ADHD, SUPPORTING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE, AND CREATING
INCLUSIVE HOME & SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS*

Kallie Griffin-Pena, The Arc Community Advocates

1

Who am I? Why am I here?




Community HERO
PRESENTED BY LITTLE LEAGUE

KALLIE GRIFFIN-PENA
Challenger Division Coach, Mattawan (Mich.) LL



CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION
KALLIE GRIFFIN-PENA
ADHD COACH

2

Objectives for Today:

1

Gain a better understanding of ADHD

2

Begin to recognize the emotional impact

3

Explore effective accommodations and strategies for home and school



3

ADHD Simulator

(35 seconds)



What ADHD Feels Like



4

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects the brain systems responsible for:



Attention
staying focused



Executive Function
planning & organization



Impulse Control
regulating actions



Emotional Regulation
managing reactions

Important: ADHD is not a lack of intelligence or effort.

What is ADHD?

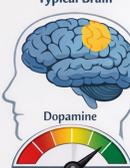
5

The Science of ADHD

The ADHD Brain Works Differently

Research shows differences in several brain systems that affect learning and behavior:

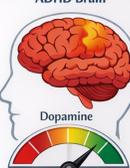
Typical Brain



Dopamine

- **Dopamine Regulation**
Needs more interest, urgency, or reward.
- **Executive Function**
Problems with planning and impulse control.
- **Working Memory**
Difficulty holding information in mind.
- **Emotional Regulation**
Struggles managing stress and emotions.

ADHD Brain



Dopamine

ADHD is not a lack of intelligence or effort—it's a difference in how the brain manages attention, motivation, and regulation.

The Science of ADHD

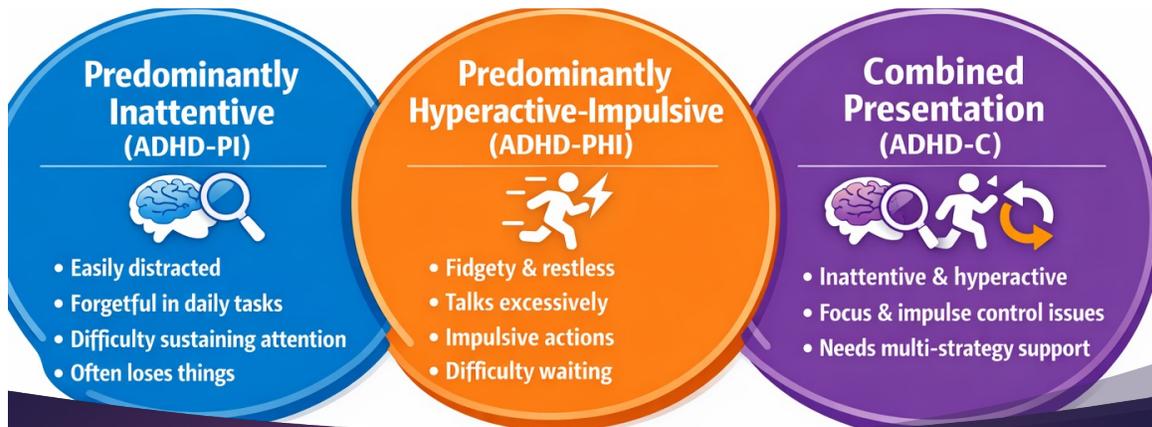
6

Common Misconceptions About ADHD

Myth	Reality
✗ ADHD is just bad behavior	✓ ADHD is a brain-based condition
✗ Students with ADHD just need to try harder	✓ ADHD affects task initiation and regulation
✗ ADHD only affects hyperactive boys	✓ Many students, especially girls, are overlooked
✗ Medication fixes everything	✓ Support strategies and environment matter too.

Understanding ADHD changes how we support students.

7



Predominantly Inattentive (ADHD-PI)



- Easily distracted
- Forgetful in daily tasks
- Difficulty sustaining attention
- Often loses things

Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive (ADHD-PHI)



- Fidgety & restless
- Talks excessively
- Impulsive actions
- Difficulty waiting

Combined Presentation (ADHD-C)



- Inattentive & hyperactive
- Focus & impulse control issues
- Needs multi-strategy support

Types of ADHD

8

Commonly Seen in Boys	Commonly Seen in Girls
Hyperactive	Inattentive
Fidgeting, constant movement	Daydreaming or zoning out
Blurting out, interrupting	Quietly losing focus
Acting out or disruptive	Appears shy or withdrawn
Difficulty staying seated	Struggles with organization
Risk-taking or impulsive behavior	Perfectionism or overcompensating
More likely to be referred for evaluation	More likely to be overlooked

ADHD: Boys vs Girls



9



How ADHD Shows Up In the Classroom

10

How ADHD Shows Up in the Classroom			
			
Inattention	Hyperactivity	Impulsivity	Executive Function Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easily Distracted • Forgetful • Difficulty Following Instructions • Loses Materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fidgeting & Restless • Can't Stay Seated • Talks Excessively • Always "On the Go" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blurts Out Answers • Interrupts Others • Acts Without Thinking • Takes Risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disorganized • Poor Time Management • Struggles to Start Tasks • Emotional Outbursts

11

20,000 more negative comments by age 12!

12

Strengths of Learners with ADHD

Creative, divergent thinkers	Strong problem-solving skills	High energy and enthusiasm	Resilient and persistent
Capable of hyperfocus on topics of interest	Often entrepreneurial, curious and eager to explore	Strong sense of fairness and justice	Quick thinkers under pressure

13

Students with ADHD often face challenges that affect learning, behavior, and social interactions.

Attention & Focus

- ✓ Difficulty sustaining attention during lessons
- ✓ Easily distracted by sounds, movement, or thoughts
- ✓ Trouble following multi-step directions

Task Completion & Organization

- ✓ Forgetting assignments or materials
- ✓ Losing papers or supplies
- ✓ Difficulty starting or finishing tasks

Common School Challenges with ADHD

Task Completion & Organization

- ✓ Forgetting assignments or materials
- ✓ Losing papers or supplies
- ✓ Difficulty starting or finishing tasks

Impulsivity & Self-Control

- ✓ Blurting out answers or interrupting
- ✓ Acting before thinking
- ✓ Difficulty waiting their turn

Hyperactivity & Restlessness

- ✓ Fidgeting, tapping, leaving seat
- ✓ Need for frequent movement
- ✓ Excessive talking or noise

Social Interaction & Transitions

- ✓ Trouble reading social cues
- ✓ Difficulty maintaining friendships
- ✓ Impulsivity affecting peer relationships

14

ADHD & Emotional Regulation

ADHD doesn't just impact attention and organization.
It also affects how the brain *manages emotions*.

- Big emotions that escalate quickly
- Difficulty pausing before reacting
- Frustration that builds faster than peers
- Challenges calming down once upset

When emotions take over...

Thinking Brain
(Executive Function)

Emotion Brain
(Amygdala)

When we understand emotional regulation as part of ADHD, we shift from asking:
 "Why are they overreacting?"
 to
 "What support does this student need to regulate?"

15

ADHD & Rejection Sensitivity

For many students with ADHD, rejection feels *unbearably painful*.

Small moments like criticism, correction, or feeling left out can trigger *big emotional* reactions.

For students with **Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria**, the brain **amplifies** feelings of rejection like.

Minor paper cut

Feels like a major wound

- Perceiving a small **critique** as **extremely hurtful**
- Connecting **poor performance** to feeling **worthless**
- Experiencing **intense fear of failure** or abandonment

This isn't about drama. It's about how the ADHD brain processes **perceived rejection**.

This isn't about drama. It's about how the ADHD brain **processes perceived rejection**.

16

Redefining Accountability for ADHD Learners

<p>⚠️ What we often assume</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They just need to try harder. • They forgot again. • They're not taking responsibility. • They know better. 	<p>What may actually be happening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty starting tasks. • Working memory challenges. • Trouble organizing steps. • Emotional overwhelm after mistakes
<p>Result</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ More reminders ✓ More consequences ✓ More frustration 	<p>Effective Accountability Looks Like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Breaking tasks into steps ✓ Visual reminders & checklists ✓ Guided practice before independence ✓ Encouragement + clear expectations

**Accountability is not lowered expectations.
It is building the skills students need to meet those expectations.**

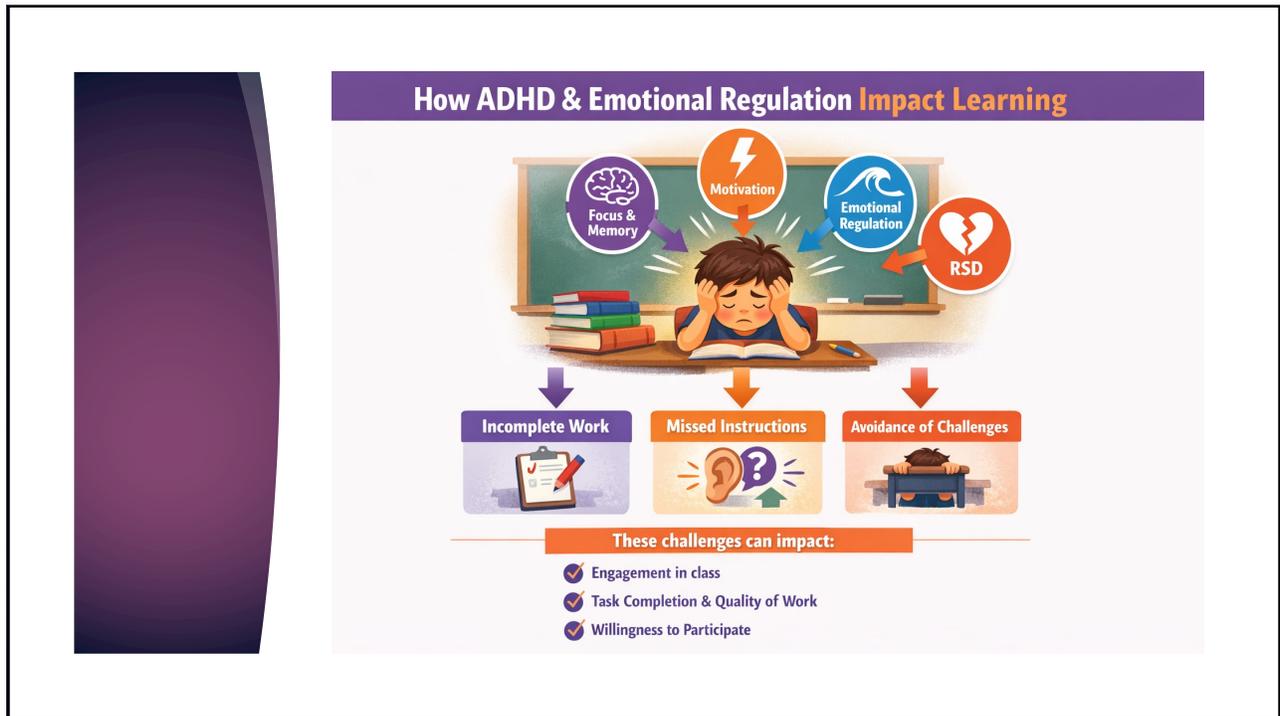
17

The Skills Behind the Struggles

Executive Function Skills Impacting ADHD Learners

<p>Starting Tasks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard time getting going • Trouble following through 	<p>Focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easily distracted • Loses track of work 	<p>Time Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor sense of time • Misses deadlines 	<p>Organization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loses materials • Messy backpack 	<p>Emotional Regulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big feelings, quick to frustrate • Difficulty managing impulses
---	--	--	--	---

18



19

**We can't effectively stop
undesired behavior if we don't
understand it**

20

ADHD Is An Executive Function Challenge



ADHD IS NOT A LACK OF INTELLIGENCE OR EFFORT.



IT IS LARGELY A DIFFERENCE IN THE BRAIN'S **EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SYSTEM**, WHICH HELPS US:



- START TASKS
- STAY FOCUSED
- MANAGE EMOTIONS
- REMEMBER DIRECTIONS
- ORGANIZE WORK
- FOLLOW THROUGH

21

What Teachers See vs. What's Actually Happening

👁️ What Teachers Often See	What May Be Happening in the ADHD Brain
 Not starting work	 Task initiation difficulty
 Forgetting directions	 Working memory overload
 Messy desk or backpack	 Organization challenges
 Blurting out answers	 Impulse regulation difficulty
 Giving up quickly	 Cognitive overload
 Emotional reactions	 Emotional regulation challenges

Behavior is often a signal of a skill that is still developing.

22

Cognitive Load: When the Brain Is Overloaded

When cognitive load becomes too high, the brain moves from learning mode to survival mode.

Cognitive Load: When The Brain Is Overloaded

23

Reducing Cognitive Load in the Classroom

Instead of Overloading the Brain	Try This Instead
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Giving multiple directions verbally ✗ Large assignments all at once ✗ Expecting students to remember steps ✗ One-time instructions ✗ Fast transitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide written directions ✓ Chunk tasks into smaller steps ✓ Use visual checklists ✓ Repeat and model directions ✓ Allow processing time

What Reduces Cognitive Load?

24

What Parents Can Do at Home

Children with ADHD don't need more reminders.
They need **external structure** that supports their brain.

Parents can help by:



-  Making routines visible & predictable
-  Breaking tasks into small steps
-  Reducing overwhelm during homework
-  Supporting emotional regulation
-  Celebrating effort, not just results

What parents can do at Home

25

Support Executive Function at Home

Make the invisible skills visible.



Visual morning and bedtime routines



Helpful tools include:

- Visual morning and bedtime routines
- Homework checklists
- Timers for work and breaks
- Backpack and school prep stations
- Planning tomorrow the night before




Planning tomorrow the night before

If the brain struggles to hold it, the environment should support it.

Support Executive Function at Home

26

Make Homework ADHD-Friendly

Homework struggles often come from **overwhelm, not laziness.**

Helpful strategies:

- ✓ Break homework into short work blocks (10-15 minutes)
- ✓ Use timers for work and breaks
- ✓ Start the first problem together
- ✓ Use body doubling (working near your child)
- ✓ Reduce distractions in the workspace



Visual morning and bedtime routines



Small structure can prevent big battles.

Make Homework ADHD Friendly

27

Protect Your Child's Confidence

Children with ADHD often hear **far more corrections** than encouragement.

Parents can help by:

- ✓ Noticing effort, not just results
- ✓ Celebrating small progress



Confidence is a powerful learning tool.

- ✓ Reframing mistakes as learning
- ✓ Teaching skills instead of punishing struggles
- ✓ Reminding them that ADHD also comes with strengths

Protect Your Child's Confidence

28

**Remember:
ADHD Brains Need Different Supports**

Make the invisible skills visible.

ADHD children are not:

- 🦥 ❌ lazy
- 💡 ❌ unmotivated
- 😡 ❌ disrespectful

They are often struggling with:

- 🕒 ✅ task initiation
- 📖 ✅ working memory
- 🧠 ✅ emotional regulation
- 🧠 ✅ cognitive overload

When we support the brain, behavior improves.

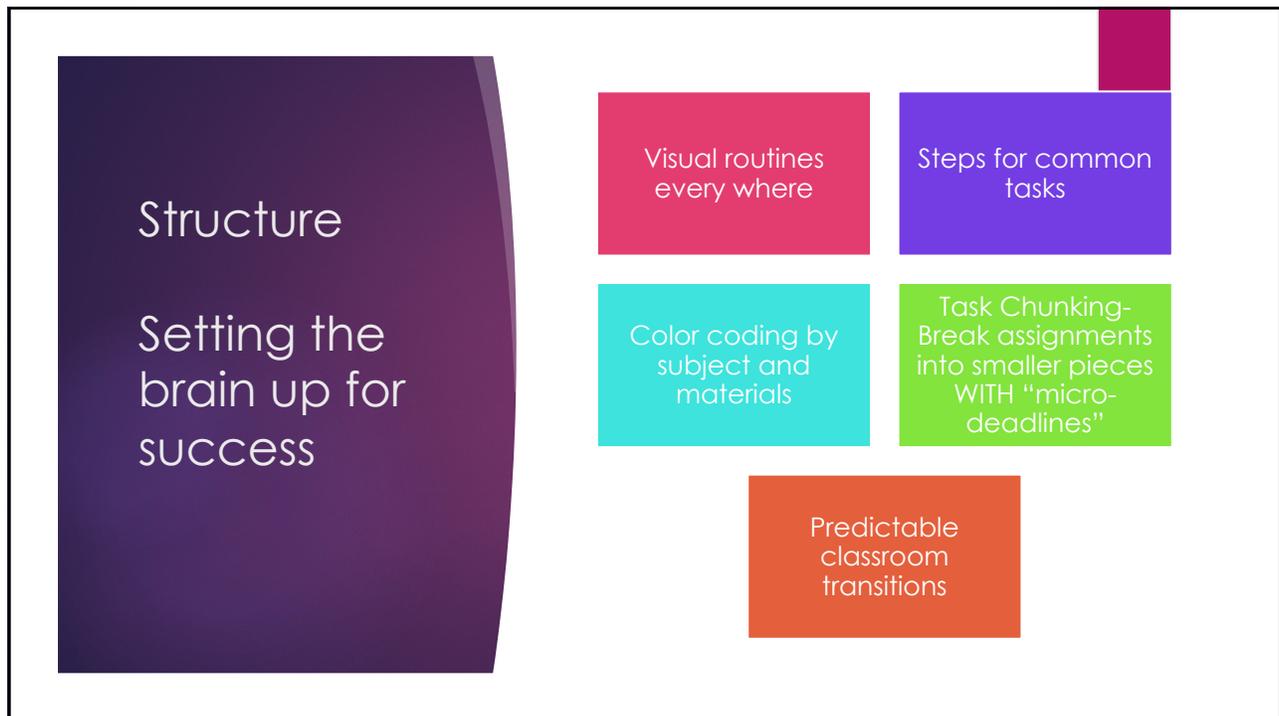
Remember:
ADHD Brains
Need
Different
Support

29

**Creating
Supportive
Classrooms**

- 🏢 Structure
- 🔗 Connection
- ✅ Consistency

30



31

Externalize Executive Function

Students with ADHD benefit when **the structure is outside the brain instead of inside it.**

Helpful supports include:

- visual schedules
- step-by-step checklists
- timers and time prompts
- written directions
- assignment trackers

If the brain struggles to hold it, the environment should support it.



32

Connection

- ▶ Relationship first- Students with ADHD respond best when they feel known and valued
- ▶ Pre-corrections- Before a challenging activity, quietly say: "Hey, this is a part that gets tricky. Let's try _____ to try and help your brain staying focused."
- ▶ Behavior-specific feedback- Catch the RIGHT behavior early and specifically.

33

Motivation to Collaboration: Avoiding Power Struggles



Motivation alone isn't enough when students resist.



Power struggles drain energy and reduce learning opportunities.



Small changes in **how we communicate** can prevent escalation.



Declarative language helps guide students without triggering defensiveness.

34

Consistency

- ▶ **Movement built into lessons-** stand and talk, rotate stations, write on whiteboards around the room etc...
- ▶ **Sensory tools available-** fidgets, chair bands, wobble stools, quiet corners
- ▶ **The 2 minute reset-** short breaks that don't remove instruction (water break, breathing, walk a note to the office)
- ▶ **Two choice options**
- ▶ **Start together strategy-** Sit with student for the first 1 minute of independent work (body doubling) and motivation kicks in

35

Structure, Connection, Consistency



Structure

Clear routines and expectations.



Connection

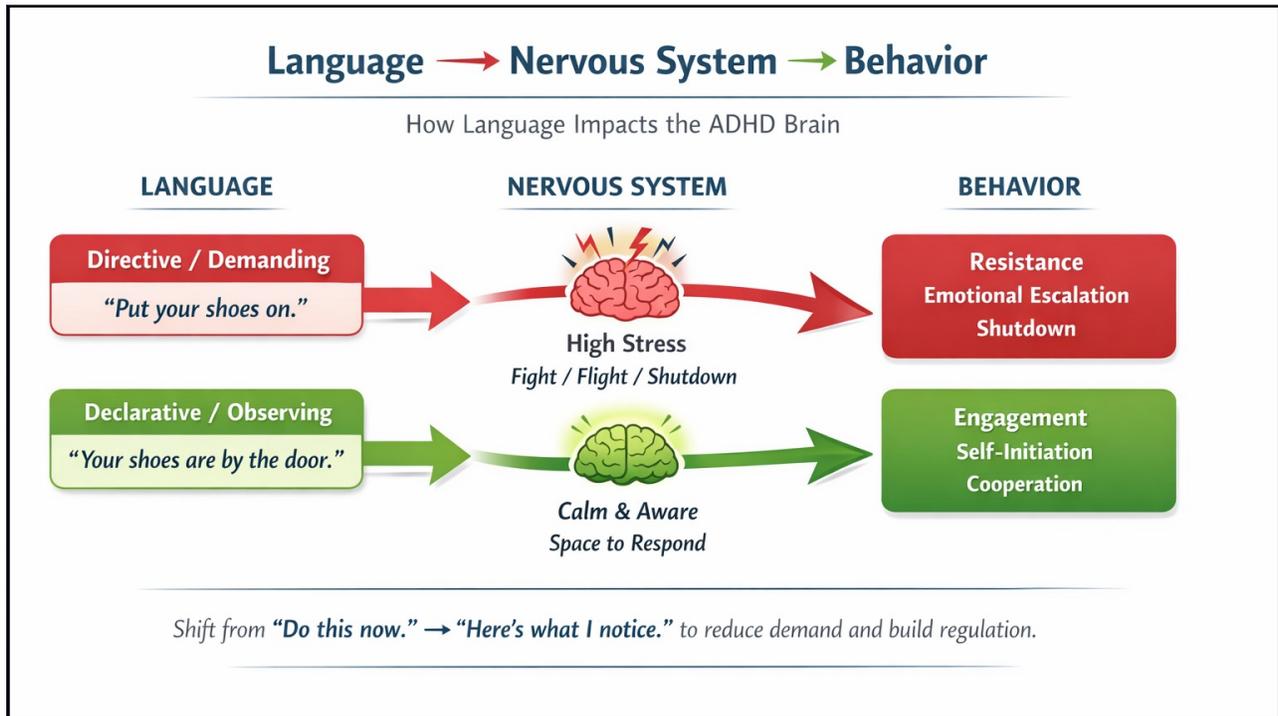
Trusting and supportive relationships.



Consistency

Steady response and follow-through.

36



37

Connection Over Compliance

Why it Works
A connection-centered approach enhances engagement, reduces resistance, and helps students thrive academically and emotionally.



38

“
Kids don't learn
from people they
don't like.”

RITA PIERSON
EVERY KID NEEDS A CHAMPION

Every Kid Needs a Champion

39

Working Together for Student Success

Parents

Teachers

- ✓ Ensure students feel supported and understood
- ✓ Help students achieve academic and social success
- ✓ Promote consistent expectations and routines
- ✓ Encourage emotional regulation and confidence

40

What We Can All Remember

When conversations become difficult about:

- behavior
- academic struggles
- emotional regulation
- school performance

Pause and remember:
Everyone in the room cares about the same child.

Collaboration in Action



How We Can Support Each Other:

- Communicate openly and regularly
- Share strategies that work in the classroom and at home
- Celebrate progress and adjust supports as needed
- Approach challenges with empathy, not blame

41

Key Takeaways: Advocating for Students with ADHD

Understand the Brain Difference

ADHD affects focus, memory, motivation & emotions

- Knowledge is power!

See Behavior as a Message

- Unmet needs, not defiance
- Guide, don't punish



Provide Consistent Supports

- Routines & clear expectations
- Scaffold & chunk tasks

Collaborate Intentionally

- Parents & Teachers as Partners
- Build Trust & Consistency

Lead with Empathy & Advocacy

- Recognize triggers & feelings
- Set realistic goals for success



Small shifts in understanding + collaboration = big wins for students.

42

21

Every Student With ADHD Needs One Adult Who...

- understands their brain
 - sees their effort
- teaches skills instead of punishing struggles
- believes they can succeed

43

Thank You!

Kallie Griffin-Pena
Individual and Family Advocate, ADHD Coach
Kgriffinpena@communityadvocates.org

269-342-9801
www.communityadvocates.org

FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!


The Arc[™]
Community Advocates

44

Resources

- **ADHD Resource List for Further Exploration**
 - **CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder):** Offers resources, support groups, and advocacy information.
 - **Understood.org:** Provides tools, articles, and resources for both families and educators.
 - **ADHD Coaching and Advocacy Programs:** Information on finding trained ADHD coaches or advocates for students and families.
 - **Local and National Support Groups:** List of local and online support groups for ongoing guidance and community.



45

Bibliography

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). *What is ADHD?* Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/index.html>

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD). (2023). *Understanding ADHD*. Retrieved from <https://www.chadd.org/>

DuPaul, G. J., & Stoner, G. (2016). *ADHD in the schools: Assessment and intervention strategies* (3rd ed.). The Guilford Press.

Hallowell, E. M., & Ratey, J. J. (2021). *Driven to Distraction (Revised): Recognizing and coping with ADHD from childhood through adulthood*. Ballantine Books.

Meltzer, L. (2018). *Executive function in education: From theory to practice* (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press.

National Institute of Mental Health. (2023). *Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder*. Retrieved from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/>

Understood.org. (2023). *ADHD accommodations for the classroom*. Retrieved from <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disorders/adhd-in-schools/academic-accommodations-for-adhd-in-schools>



46