



SAINT CATHERINE CENTER FOR *Special Needs*

ADD Secrets – A Letter from a Student

Dear Teacher,

As we prepare for another day of school together, can we pause for a moment? We have gone through my checklist, gathering everything I need for the day's subjects. But did we go through your checklist? Both of us need to feel successful. Since you have helped me understand how you want me to prepare for school, here is my checklist for you.

DO YOU HAVE MY ATTENTION?

It is hard to tell by looking at me sometimes, because I don't always make eye contact or sit upright, but I'm usually listening to what you are saying. If you're not sure, ask me what you just said, rather than asking me if I'm paying attention. If I respond correctly, I am paying attention. If I cannot repeat information back to you, gain my attention before you present it again.

It is a challenge for me to learn passively for extended periods of time. Sometimes all I need is repetition, once you have my attention, to learn. The more senses you involve, the more engaged I will be. Don't just tell me what to do, show me how, and then have me show you that I understand.

AM I DISTRACTED...OR NOT DISTRACTED ENOUGH?

Sometimes I don't pay attention because I am distracted. Sometimes, I need a distraction. A totally still environment can cause my ears and eyes to strain to find out where the distractions went. If I have something subtle to occupy me – two quarters to rub together or a pair of earphones to muffle sounds or to listen to music with – I am neither distracted nor seeking out the distractions. I am relaxed and alert.

DO I HAVE EXCESS ENERGY WHILE I AM SITTING STILL?

My attention span is tied to my energy levels. I know I'm supposed to get school tasks done while I am sitting at a table. But how am I supposed to go forward if my brain is always in neutral? If I cannot move while I think, my engine will stall.

If a shutdown occurs, let me stand, move, or shift gears before returning to the target subject. Sometimes a movement break – a few jumping jacks – can jump-start my progress. This works better for me than trying to buckle down and not being able to move around until a task is completely done.

ARE YOU TEACHING ME... OR INTERROGATING ME?

What I have learned in school is not always apparent, even to me. I need you to help me show what I have learned. When I have to answer a question, make the answer be a goal that I want to reach and will be proud of when I succeed.

But if you tell me that I'm not trying hard enough or not cooperating, my motivation and mindset become that of a prisoner locked in an interrogation room. Being interrogated does not motivate me, but discourages me from wanting to try. I need to feel like you're guiding me toward finding the answers.

GIVE ME THE RIGHT KIND OF ATTENTION.

I need a lot more redirection and prompting than my peers. Sometimes I draw attention to myself without meaning to, when I am fidgeting and don't realize it, or when I am staring off into space because my mind has wandered again. I need your patient encouragement, not shaming remarks. I want to succeed. I am not acting this way to annoy you or to be disrespectful. My brain works differently, but it does work and I can tell when adults don't like me. If you are on my side, I will know it and will work harder than if you are just putting up with me.

Respectfully yours,

Your Student with ADHD