

GIVING ATTENTION TO ALL CHILDREN IN THE CLASSROOM

Children with ADD or ADHD need lots of compliments and one-on-one time with their parents. They are also very challenging and, very often, in trouble. How do we invest the extra time or attention without the other children thinking that we're rewarding bad behavior? They don't understand that one child is ADHD, and why he or she is getting much more attention than they do. They are getting great marks and behave beautifully, yet the other children get more attention.

I have seen students grow extremely frustrated from this. How can we explain to them- especially the younger ones- why this is fair?

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I don't see this question as an ADD or ADHD problem because the same situation arises if, for example, a student is going through a hard time because of sickness in the family, a divorce, the student is extremely shy, physically challenged, has low self-esteem, is anxious, and the list can go on and on to include every student in the class. Everyone needs special attention and that attention should be directed toward their own personal needs which will not lead to resentment of others receiving theirs.

It is crucial that from a very young age, every child realize that he is receiving attention which is addressed to his needs completely. Only then will jealousy become less of a factor in the equation. For example, if one child receives a multi-colored coat and the other receives none, clearly there will be jealousy. However, if the child who did not receive the multi-colored coat, receives a coat in a color of his choice, then everyone is happy.

I also think that children, even very young children, recognize the differences in their peers and classmates which may sometimes lead to unusual behavior followed by special corrective attention. As parents, we do not treat all of our children the same, recognizing the differences in their needs; the same should be applied in the classroom. We must be very careful not to treat unequals equally, just as the same dose of medication does not help every malady.

Every teacher must instill in his students the concept that we are all different with many different desires and needs. To reinforce this message, the teacher could elicit from his students examples of obvious differences among their peers and the reasons why each should be treated in a different and special way. Let the students create scenarios that clearly show differences among the class and how the teacher and the class should react to each one. Playacting or examples (with older children) certainly help bring the point across. We all have to have what each of us really needs and we must bring home the point of not having the attitude of "why him and not me?"

Any teacher worth his salt knows that he cannot be successful with children unless he has mastered the art of making each child in his charge feel that his emotional needs are

being addressed and understood. I therefore think that the question is answered in Education 101. Every good teacher is quite aware of the special needs of the students in his entire class and certainly works at providing for their individual needs

When speaking to a group of Seminary students, the question arose as to what if one is unable to attend to the varying individual needs of every child in the class. My response was “Don’t go into *Chinuch!*” The student’s reaction was that there would be a lack of teachers in *Klal Yisroel* as not every teacher is able to accomplish this goal. Again I answered that *Klal Yisroel* is the *Ribono Shel Olam*’s concern; the teacher’s concern is the students who were assigned to his class. I think that every teacher who strives to that goal will certainly attain it and serve the *Ribono Shel Olam* to the best of his ability. Avi Shulman, one of the foremost educators of our time, advocates that every teacher have a notebook with a page for every student. Once a week, the teacher should write into the notebook how he will recognize the needs of that particular student during the following week.

Every teacher is a *shaliach d’rachmono*, *Hashem*’s messenger. In other words, he is doing *Hashem*’s work and if it is done with sincerity, perseverance and enthusiasm, the “*Melamed Torah L’Amo Yisroel*” will certainly see to it that he is *matzliach*.