



Meet Jack

Jack is a 13-year old diagnosed with ADHD. This is a brain-based condition that, among other things, delays the development of his brain-particularly his prefrontal cortex. This delay impacts his executive functioning and his self-regulation. Jack's brain may eventually "catch-up" with his same-aged peers, but in the meantime, this delayed development results in behaviours that are approximately 30% behind those of his same-aged peers. At 13-years-old, this means he demonstrates behaviours we might expect of a 9-year old. Many might think that this is willful misbehavior, which would be incorrect.

What Jack needs from the adults in his world is patience, understanding, adjusted expectations to meet him where he is at developmentally, and a willingness to coach skill development in the areas he struggles (e.g., time management, following instructions, peer interactions, etc.). With these things, Jack just might amaze you with what he is capable of!

Let's take a look of what a day in the life of Jack looks like.

7 AM

- "Jack, what do you want for breakfast?". Jack is looking at his dad but doesn't answer. "Jack! Cereal or yogurt? Which one?!" Feeling pressured, Jack blurts out "cereal", but it gets soggy before he realizes that is what he really wanted. He's still not dressed for school, though, and now Dad is annoyed that Jack might miss the bus.

9 AM

- Jack is looking forward to his class job today: helping the gym teacher set up the volleyball nets. Jack returns to class 20 minutes late, missing most of his science lesson, because he needed more think time to process through the various steps of his class job. Now Jack has to come in during gym class to catch up on science instead of playing volleyball with his classmates.

10 AM

- Mad Minute...this is the absolute worst. Jack knows his multiplication facts, but he needs more time to think of the answers. He feels bad when the teacher reminds the class that those students who finish first can have free time, because Jack knows he probably won't get through one column of math facts before time runs out. Instead of doing Mad Minute, Jack puts his head down on his desk and refuses to do any work.

12 PM

- Lunch recess is only 20 minutes, and it takes Jack awhile to decide what he wants to do. He joins the kids playing on their cells, which are banned on the playground. Jack is slow to notice that the other kids are scrambling to hide their cells from the supervising teacher. She sees Jack with his phone and he is the only one to get into trouble.

3 PM

- The end of the school day is so stressful. Jack is always the last kid in his class to finish writing down the homework that's on the board. No one can be dismissed until Jack finishes. Writing is always hard for him, but it's even harder when his peers keep shouting at him to "Hurry up!"

4 PM

- Finally...basketball practice! Jack loves shooting hoops. He's particularly good at 3-pointers. But the coach is a fast talker, and Jack can't keep up with what he's saying quickly enough. His teammates are annoyed that Jack keeps forgetting the drills. And his long pauses when someone talks to him make them feel awkward when they try to have a conversation with him.

9 PM

- Jack's homework is supposed to take half an hour, but he's been working on it for nearly 2 hours and it still isn't done. To get a good night sleep, Jack really needs to start his bedtime routine now. But Mom isn't sure what to do...*Should I help my child finish his homework or make sure he gets enough sleep?*

How do you think Jack feels at the end of the school day?

Coaching Kids with ADHD

Giving Feedback

- **Emphasize the positive.** Notice and point out the positives every day, even if you really have to search. This deposits “money in the relationship bank” and builds confidence and trust. Teach them to think positively about themselves.
- **Timing and Audience:** Who can hear you and see you? Give critiques one-on-one whenever possible
- **Timing of Feedback:** Do they need time to process or do you need to catch them in the moment?
- **Be aware of how feedback is being delivered:** Check your tone, volume, cadence, body language, etc.
- **Lead with the Positive:** Praise effort first, give feedback second.
- **Keep your speeches very short:** Lecturing doesn't work. Even with short talks, ask them to repeat back what they heard. Post or hand out visual reminders of what they need to remember.
- **Use physical proximity:** Be sure they are in your immediate physical vicinity and make sure you have their attention before you start speaking.

Consistency in Practices & Games

- **Set up familiar routines and strategies, and stick to them:** Talk to all kids about tools for staying organized and in control — e.g. calendars, lists, breathing, arriving at practice early to warm up and help. A special daily job (setting out the cones, bringing over the kickboards) can also keep kids engaged and feeling useful.
- **Keep the flow of practice the same week to week:** For games, use pre-game, game, and post-game routines.
- **Send out practice drills ahead of practice:** via email, Drill Hub, etc.
- **Allow for longer stretches in one position before changing to another:** Give these kids time to really learn a position before switching them to another one.

Giving Instructions & New Drills

- **Get them moving before:** Have all of your kids skate hard before you talk or give directions (so no one is singled out). This gets the brain ready for instruction.
- **Use visual descriptions and processes:** whenever possible.
- **Keep it brief:** short, simple and direct instructions spoken at a pace that everyone can follow.
- **Explain the relevance of the drill to the game:** this provides context to the activity and helps to make sense of things.
- **Have them demo after instructions:** Pair player with ADHD with a more mature player for practice, get them to explain the drill to another player, check for understanding.
- **Allow the players with ADHD to observe first, then act:** This helps to take the guesswork out of success by giving them time to process what is being asked of them.
- **Instruct first, then practice:** Do not give instructions DURING the drill – this only bogs down their cognitive resources.

Decrease Conflict

- **Choose your battles:** what is your ultimate goal? Mentorship, skill development, relationship building, and preserving and building the child's self-esteem should be at the top of this list.
- **Collaborate on expectations:** have a meeting when everyone is calm.
- **Avoid power struggles:** use humor, distraction, and delays to de-escalate emotional situations.
- **Tag behaviour:** identify the concern, but don't set consequences when you are upset.

Skill Building

- **Given the delay in brain development, do not assume the child knows how to perform the task at hand:** For example, a player who has done the same drill several times but still doesn't get it right; adjusting to a new position and the responsibilities/skills that go along with it; players who constantly go to the back of the line for drills (this gives them additional observation time).
- **Verbal reprimands, punishments, and negative consequences are common adult reactions:** Do everything in your power to NOT do these things. It does not improve performance or increase motivation and often leaves the child feeling defeated and bad about themselves. It also damages the relationship between the adult and the child.
- **Check in with the player one-on-one:** Do they actually know HOW to do the desired skill? If not, take the time to teach, review, model, etc.
- **The bottom line:** don't scold or reprimand the player for having a skill-based deficit; instead, teach the skill.

Adjust your expectations

- **Kids with ADHD CAN be successful:** Particularly when those who know and work with them understand their needs, demonstrate patience, and adjust their expectations to meet them where they are at (they are also funny, smart, engaging, creative, etc.).
- **Meet them where they are:** Let go of standard expectations for where you think they should be based on age, size or talent. We want to maintain developmentally appropriate expectations for our children with ADHD, but those will not necessarily be based upon their chronological age (30% Executive Age rule) Help them set attainable goals, broken down step by step.
- **Don't threaten or punish.** It won't work. These kids live in the moment. This can make it harder to learn from past experience and adjust their current behaviour, and to plan for the future. But they will, eventually, learn from natural consequences — "I didn't learn the plays, so I didn't get to start in the game."

Get Them Moving

- **Get them moving after issues where tempers flare:** When these kids get derailed, wait to address what happened. Get them moving instead (in a positive, not punitive way). They won't hear you anyway until they've calmed down. Once calm, talk to them one-on-one in a non-combative manner.
- **Let them fidget:** Athletes with ADHD get bored and restless really fast. Find a way for them to fidget appropriately while you're talking or while they're waiting a turn (maintaining balance on one foot, standing up in the back, fiddling with the puck). Keep down-time to a minimum.

It's All About Relationships

- **Get to know them really well:** Find out from the athletes or their parents what has worked for them, what definitely doesn't work, how to recognize early signs of frustration in the child, and how to get them back on track.
- **Address any issues in private:** Never call them out in front of the group.
- **Tone down the volume and be aware of your facial expressions and body language:** The sensitive brains of kids with ADHD can hear softly spoken constructive criticism as angry screaming and see a frustrated glance as a furious glare. Like all kids, they will model your emotional energy—calm or otherwise.