



**WHAT WE KNOW**

## **Succeeding in College**

**W**hether you are a recent high school graduate or an adult returning to college, the path from enrollment to graduation can often be daunting. This path may be especially challenging for those with AD/HD.

This sheet provides assistance on handling the specific challenges faced at the post-secondary level by college students with AD/HD. To achieve success at this level, students with AD/HD must possess an understanding of AD/HD and how the condition uniquely affects them. This information and resource sheet also provides tools for achieving greater success and satisfaction at college.

This sheet will provide information on:

- selecting the right college for a student with AD/HD
- obtaining help at the college for a student with AD/HD
- helpful interventions and accommodations for college students with AD/HD

### **CHOOSING A COLLEGE**

Choosing a college or university can be a complicated process for an individual with AD/HD. By law, all colleges and universities receiving any federal funding must provide “reasonable accommodations” for students with AD/HD. There are important differences, however, in the supports available at various schools. Some schools have very minimal staffing to provide support services and only adhere to the “letter of the law,” while other schools provide extensive support and encouragement to students with AD/HD. Finding a school that can offer the appropriate support usually takes careful research. While there are a few catalogs listing colleges with good supports for learning disabilities, no such guide yet exists for students with AD/HD.

The best approach is to contact the Student Disability Support Office of a prospective college and ask the following questions:

- Is the head of student disability services a specialist in AD/HD and LD issues?
- If not, is there an AD/HD-LD specialist on the staff of student disability services?
- How long has the individual in charge of AD/HD-LD support been employed at your school?
- Has there been an organized program to educate faculty members about supporting students with AD/HD and LD?
- How many students with AD/HD are registered with your office?
- Is there a study skills program at your school specifically designed for students with AD/HD problems such as organization, time management, and planning?
- Is there an AD/HD student support group on campus?
- Do members of your staff actively advocate for students with AD/HD when they encounter resistance to accommodations from a faculty member?
- Does a member of your staff participate in freshman orientation, helping students with AD/HD and their families better understand and access services from your office?
- Does your office provide specialized registration assistance to students with AD/HD?
- Do students with AD/HD automatically receive priority registration privileges at your school?
- Is there a physician affiliated with student health services who can prescribe stimulant medication for students with AD/HD?
- Do you maintain a list of appropriate, experienced professionals in the community who can provide extra support such as counseling, psychotherapy, or AD/HD coaching?
- In general, would you describe your institution as having a welcoming and supportive attitude toward students with AD/HD?

Very few schools will attain a “perfect score,” but the more AD/HD-friendly answers you receive in response to these questions, the better are the chances that a student with AD/HD will succeed at that school.

As a general rule, schools that focus on quality teaching—with small class sizes, classroom participation, and faculty members who take an individual interest in students—work best for students with AD/HD.

## OBTAINING HELP

The first step to minimizing the negative effects of AD/HD at college is obtaining a thorough assessment that delineates the student’s strengths and weaknesses. If, as a student with AD/HD, you will be requesting services from the disabilities office, it is important to document your needs and how weaknesses affect your functioning in the learning environment. An AD/HD assessment for college accommodations usually includes an assessment of intellectual functioning, learning style, and academic

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strengths and weaknesses. Even if you decide against disclosing your disability and requesting formal support services, an evaluation is still useful in determining the path to take in order to achieve success at the college level. Recent high school graduates may want to informally review strategies that worked well for them at the secondary level. Adults returning to school may likewise want to review what worked, as well as what didn’t work, for them during previous schooling.

Part of the college selection process should include visiting the school’s Website to evaluate information about the general admissions process and documentation requirements for special education students. Not all colleges share a similar process of reviewing documentation during the admissions process. Students previously diagnosed with AD/HD will need to decide whether to disclose their disability during the admissions process. This is voluntary and cannot be required by the college. However, providing documentation during the admissions process can be beneficial. A review of these materials will assist the college in making an informed decision about the student, taking into consideration not only the applicant’s strengths, but also any weaknesses that can be understood by the AD/HD diagnosis.

When making a decision to disclose information about a disability, it is important to know what documentation

to include. Some common requirements for submitting documentation during the admissions process are:

- a letter disclosing the disability and clarifying current academic impact;
- psychological evaluations diagnosing a disability and the date of diagnosis; and
- a current IEP/504 plan and records from high school documenting any accommodations and services received.

If a student decides to provide documentation of AD/HD, it is imperative that he/she asks who will review the documentation, what are the credentials of the reviewers, and what happens to the documentation after it has been reviewed. By no means should the applicant assume that because he/she has submitted documentation that he/she is automatically eligible for special services upon enrollment in the college. In many colleges, there are two separate procedures to follow—one for admission and one for qualification for the disabilities services program. Students with AD/HD should consider applying to the disabilities services program at the same time they apply for admission to the university or soon after they are accepted into the college.

## **ADDRESSING AD/HD SYMPTOMS**

Consequences of AD/HD at the college level include procrastination, poor organization and time management resulting in academic underachievement, poor self-esteem, and difficulty keeping current with assignments and reading. Problems also arise in personal relationships and mood stability. Distractibility and difficulty focusing can lead to problems with reading comprehension, note-taking, and completing assignments and tests in a timely fashion. Impediments to success at the college level include issues that are both academic and/or personal.

Academic issues may include:

- poor organization and time management skills
- reading problems resulting from difficulty concentrating and focusing
- poor note-taking or writing skills

Personal issues may include:

- high frustration levels or poor self-esteem
- inappropriate social skills or too much time socializing
- confusion about goals and the future

- lack of perseverance or procrastination
- lack of sleep and difficulty getting up in the morning

A common pitfall for students with AD/HD is the feeling that they are instantly cured upon graduating from high school and no longer require supports and/or treatment at the college level. Unrealistic expectations may also lead a student with AD/HD who has been successful in high school to take on too heavy a load at college, failing to take into consideration the multiple demands upon his or her time. Poor time management may lead to a “crash and burn syndrome,” with the student staying up all night and sleeping all day after studying or partying or both.

There are several ways that a student with AD/HD may address these issues. Some of the most effective include seeking accommodations (such as note-takers, extended time for tests, and the use of the writing center), developing supportive strategies (e.g., practicing good self-care, getting enough rest and exercise, and learning ways to reduce stress), establishing supportive relationships (e.g., working with a coach or a peer study group), taking medication for AD/HD, and setting appropriate goals and priorities. Success is insured when a team of professionals including a physician, counselor or coach is available to assist in addressing needs, setting goals and priorities, and developing a plan to carry them out. This process should lead to a new way of thinking and dealing with AD/HD symptoms with the student eventually taking responsibility for his or her medication and other daily life activities.

## **MEDICATION FOR AD/HD**

Careful monitoring of medication is an integral part of any such program to achieve both personal and academic success. AD/HD is an omnipresent disorder, and the student will need to work with his or her physician to establish a treatment regime that reduces symptoms of AD/HD and optimizes functioning, while minimizing any side effects. Consult the sheet on medication for more details on this topic.

## **USE OF A COACH**

Having an individual to act as a “coach” for the student can be a very helpful intervention for college students. Consult the fact sheet on coaching for more details about how it works. Coaching is frequently done online or by phone so this individual may be a parent, sibling,

relative, friend, or a professional coach. If a professional coach is preferred, students should determine whether professional coaching is available at their institution or whether they can get a referral to a professional coach within the community. If not, they can contact a coach that specializes in working with college students anywhere in the country.

## ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

Assisted technology refers to the use of any item of equipment or product that helps an individual cope with a disability. College students with AD/HD may find that assisted technology can be helpful in coping with the challenges imposed by AD/HD. Examples include voice-activated software, personal organizers, books on tape, and outlining computer programs.

## CONCLUSIONS

By addressing many of the negative aspects of AD/HD early on, a college student has a better chance to develop a plan of action with coping strategies that provide a greater opportunity for success. Students who have greater access to learning services and academic support to help manage AD/HD issues tend to experience lower levels of stress and frustration. Working with an AD/HD coach can play an integral role in helping to foster both academic and social success for students with AD/HD. When students are aware of and involved in addressing AD/HD issues, they are better able to deal with both the academic and social pressures of college. College is a time of extraordinary growth and an opportunity for increased self-awareness and positive feedback. It can also be a time of pressure, poor decision-making, and hopelessness. If the student with AD/HD is well prepared, receives support and encouragement, and continually makes choices in his or her best interest, there is a greater chance for a most positive outcome. All students deserve that chance.

## SUGGESTED READING

Bramer, J.S. (1996). *Succeeding in college with attention deficit disorders: Issues and strategies for students, counselors and educators*. Plantation, FL: Specialty Press.

Kravets, M., & Wax, I., (2002). *The K & W guide to colleges for the learning disabled*. New York: Harper Collins.

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Mooney, J., & Cole, D. (2000). *Learning outside the lines: Two ivy league students with learning disabilities and AD/HD give you the tools for academic success and educational revolution*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Nadeau, K., (1994). *College survival guide for students with ADD or LD*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Quinn, P. (2001). *ADD and the College Student-Revised*. Washington, DC: Magination Press.

Quinn, P., & McCormick, A., (1998). *Re-thinking AD/HD: A guide to foster success in students with AD/HD at the college level*. Silver Spring, MD: Advantage Books.

Quinn, P., Ratey, N., & Maitland, T. (2000). *Coaching college students with AD/HD: Issues and answers*. Silver Spring: MD: Advantage Books, LLC.

## SUGGESTED VIDEOTAPES

George Washington University, (1996) *ADD: The Race Inside My Head*. 614-488-1174.

Quinn, P. (1993). *ADD and the College Student and Approaching College for Students with ADD*. Washington, DC: Pediatric Development Center. 202-966-1561.

ADDA, (2001). *ADD: Transition to College – Passport for Success*. Silver Spring, MD: ADDvance Seminars. [www.add.org](http://www.add.org)

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For further information about AD/HD or CHADD, please contact:

**National Resource Center on AD/HD  
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Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder**  
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800-233-4050  
[www.help4adhd.org](http://www.help4adhd.org)

Please also visit the CHADD Website at  
[www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org).