

ADHD and Back to School

Presenting Problem:

A participating PCP recently consulted WI CPCP via email regarding the challenges children with ADHD face when transitioning back to school after the summer break.

Consultant's Response:

Children with ADHD thrive on predictable routines. However, during the summer, these routines often loosen. As a result, parents must plan a smooth transition before the new school year begins. Here are some key recommendations:

1. Sleep:

- **Adjust Sleep Schedules Early:** Begin adjusting sleep schedules two weeks before school starts. Gradually shift bedtime earlier by 15 minutes each night until reaching the desired school bedtime.
- **Morning Preparation:** Parents can set their alarms 15 minutes ahead to ease morning preparations.

2. Medication Management for ADHD:

- **Reintroduce Stimulant Medication:** If the child hasn't used stimulant medication regularly over the summer, reintroduce it a week before school starts to re-establish routine and adjust to its effects.
- **Non-Stimulant Medication:** Non-stimulants like guanfacine ER (Intuniv) and atomoxetine (Strattera) may require four weeks or more for full effectiveness and should not be used sporadically.
- **Monitor and Adjust:** A few weeks after school begins, parents can use feedback from their child and their teacher, along with their own observations, to decide if the current medication is appropriate. Discuss the effectiveness throughout the day and any side effects with the child's prescriber.

3. Additional Preparation:

- **School Calendar:** Create a comprehensive calendar that includes holidays, vacations, half days, no-school days, and extracurricular activities. Include contact details for teachers, coaches, etc.
 - Allow space for the child to list assignments, test dates, and due dates for significant projects.
- **'Out the Door' Checklist:** Develop a checklist for morning routines, including tasks like dressing, eating breakfast, and organizing school materials. Conduct a practice run before school starts to determine the **absolute** times when the list needs to be completed.
- **Pre-Select Clothing:** Choose outfits the night before and ensure backpacks are packed and ready.

- **Communication with Teachers:** Discuss seating arrangements and review any existing Individualized Education Program (IEP) with the new teacher. For older students, inquire about recording lectures for the child to review at home.
- **Homework Organization:** Establish a distraction-free study space at home and maintain organization with weekly planners. Prioritize assignments with color-coded materials. Utilize tools like white noise apps to aid focus during study sessions.
 - Regularly clean out workspaces, backpacks, and desks to stay organized.
 - Remind children working on important papers or projects on a computer to use programs like Google Docs, which frequently save and back up work to online servers.

Teaching Points:

To facilitate a smooth return to school, establishing consistent routines for sleep and medication is crucial for children with ADHD.