



FREE GUIDE

Tips & Tools for Heading Back to School

PERTH **kids**hub

hello term one



Some children may be particularly anxious about heading back to school after the summer holidays. So might their parents. I know I am!

New teachers to get to know.
New classmates.
Changes to routines.
Increased academic and social expectations.

I'm not an expert - so I asked those who are. Perth's leading experts on child development and psychology have generously shared their tips on how to approach the new school year.

There's lots of advice. Please don't feel overwhelmed. You don't need to do it all. Choose one or two things that will make the biggest difference for your family and start there.

You also don't need to do it alone. If you need help, reach out to one of the incredible professionals listed on Perth Kids Hub.

Wishing you all a wonderful 2025,

Pia

Pia Hazelwood
Perth Mum & Perth Kids Hub Founder



team up with your teacher

Tips for creating a positive, collaborative relationship with your child's teacher.



share what helps

Share resources, tools or ideas with the school that increase understanding of learning differences.

a guide to your child

One-page handovers, communication passports or 5-scale guides can help fast track handover to new teachers.

<p>Student name Add name here</p>	
<p>Diagnosis Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) [if your child has co-occurring conditions you can list these here too and modify the information below as required]</p>	
<p>Strengths & Interests:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happy, funny with a sunny personality • Loves imaginary play and role-playing • Wicked sense of humour • Likes to give everything a go • Eager to please and tries really hard • Kind and cooperative • Loves to dance, bounce on the trampoline, sing, swim, play cafes/hotels, go to the beach and camping • G has a 9-year-old brother Jack who is in year 4 who she loves playing army (dress ups), Minecraft and Roblox with • She loves animals and has a dog (Rover) and two cats (Leo and Nifty) • G lives with her Mum (Peta) and dad (Peter) 	<p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty coordinating both fine and gross motor tasks for handwriting, self care and play. • Joint pain experienced in her lower and upper limbs • Poor postural control requiring more effort to sit • Increased energy demands resulting in significant fatigue (physical and cognitive) • Will often play alone or decline offers to play with others as she finds active play tiring. • Will often push through the pain so that she doesn't stand out. She would rather finish a task than have a rest. • Pushing through her pain and fatigue thresholds leads to a crash at home and can cause days off school to recover. It also leads to a cycle of "boom and bust" where it gradually takes less and less time for her to fatigue and school avoidance.
<p>I find it hard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete full consecutive days at school. • To dress myself including putting on my shoes or to do up buttons or zippers on my clothes or school bag. • Keep up with my friends in the playground if they are playing chase, climbing on the playground equipment or monkey bars. • Make and keep friends if I can't join in at play time with very active games or if I miss a lot of school. • Remember to fill my water bottle or to wash 	<p>What I've found that helps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case conferences with my treating therapists and teachers so we are working as a team. • Bump-in OT sessions for observation and immediate support in class or in the playground. • Approved modified attendance plan with time for rests from school and to continue physio & OT. • Slope board when writing to support hand position. • Varying my sitting positions throughout the day including using a supportive chair on the chairs in the classroom, or

Team up with your child's teacher

Psychologist Leanne Watson has spent the past 23 years in a secondary setting and has special interests in psychoeducational assessments, ADHD coaching and individual counselling. Leanne says the transition work they do with the incoming Neurodivergent year sevens is invaluable. Her top tips are:

TIP 1: Meet with the teacher before school starts

Ask for an informal meet and greet with the key people PRIOR to school starting. I would suggest the Head of Year, Psychologist (if available) and/or Form Teacher would be good people to meet prior to the first day. Show the student exactly where they will be going on the first day and even see if the Form room teacher can show them where their seat will be. This usually alleviates a lot of initial stress and provides a definite point of reference for the first day.

TIP 2: Ask for a copy of the school's daily schedule

If possible, ask for a copy of the school's daily schedule and student timetable prior to school starting, so you can both get familiar with how the school day works (bell times, period structure, names of classes). Organisation and planning is one of the trickiest parts of high school for neurodiverse kids. The increased stress that goes along with not knowing what is ahead causes additional stress for the already busy brain!

TIP 3: Don't not say anything

My final tip would be more about what NOT to do.....please do NOT say nothing and hope for a "fresh start" in high school. Your child has additional needs and by hoping they will somehow resolve when they are entering a time of immense change is not a recipe for success!

Leanne Watson, Psychologist, Leanne Watston
lwpsychologist.com

Tap into what worked well with your last teacher

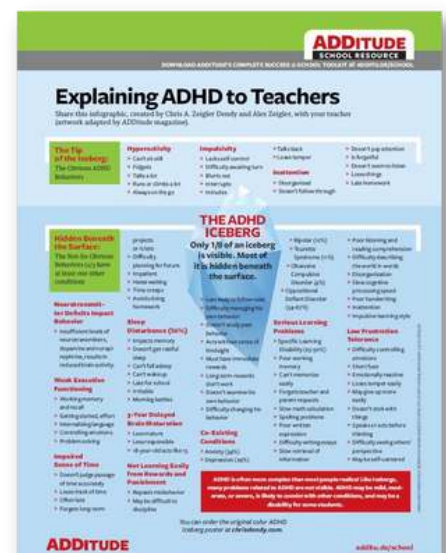
If you had a successful year last year with a teacher, tap into what worked well in the classroom for you child. Ask your child what they liked about the teacher and the classroom and if you get a chance, have a chat with last year's teacher. Handover is often not able to be done at a detailed level as teacher have limited time to prepare for the new year before students are back.

Susan Hughes, ADHD Parent Coach
susanhughes.com.au

Explain the ADHD Iceberg

A wonderful and free resource that explains what's going on underneath the more visible behaviours that can be seen with ADHD.

Available as a free download from the additudemag.com website along with lots of other great resources to support learning.



Share what helps

Does your child need extra support at drop off from the teacher? Do they need regular sensory or rest breaks during class? To wear noise-cancelling headphones? Do they need a transition plan to build up to full days?

If you can, communicate what supports or accommodations your child needs BEFORE the first day.

Trying to have that discussion with the teacher on the first morning will be almost impossible as they try to welcome all the new children and their families.

Let them know of successful strategies

A brief introductory email or letter to your teacher in the first week can be useful in opening communication. Keep it brief.

Try and include one or two previously successful strategies which support your child if you know of a certain emotional trigger. Involve your child by talking to them in advance so they know what you are sharing with his teacher. The focus of this communication should be an offering by you to partner with the teacher in supporting your child.

If it's high school, be selective in which teacher you engage with as engaging with all teachers can be overwhelming.

Choose the subject teacher/s that your child has indicated will be challenging based on the first few days.

Emotions and behaviour

If your child has difficulty managing emotions when triggered, a proactive approach is the best way forward with the new school.

An agreed "safe place" or plan to regulate needs to be pre agreed with the school and your child. All teachers who teach your child need to be aware of this.

A card is often a good way to signal to a teacher that your child needs a break. He/she does not need to speak to the teacher but just show the card to the teacher and leave (check out more on the next page at "Try a break card").

Susan Hughes, ADHD Parent Coach
susanhughes.com.au

87% of teachers do not feel they were adequately taught at university to recognise and support students with ADHD.

Source: ADHD Australia Building Brighter Pathways, ADHD Australia Education Survey Report, 2021

Share resources that support understanding

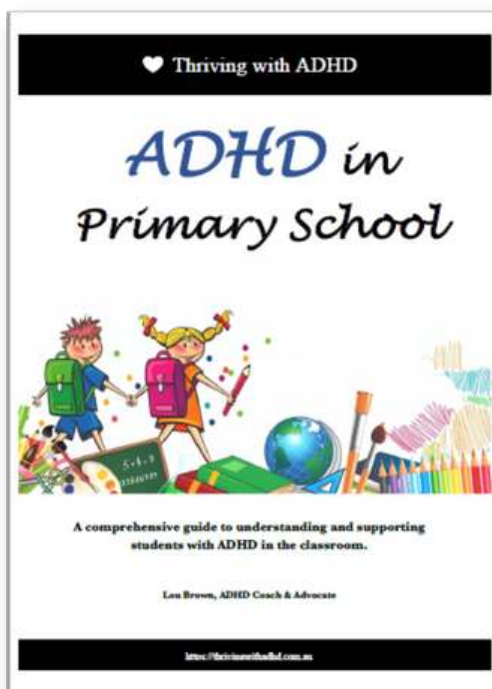
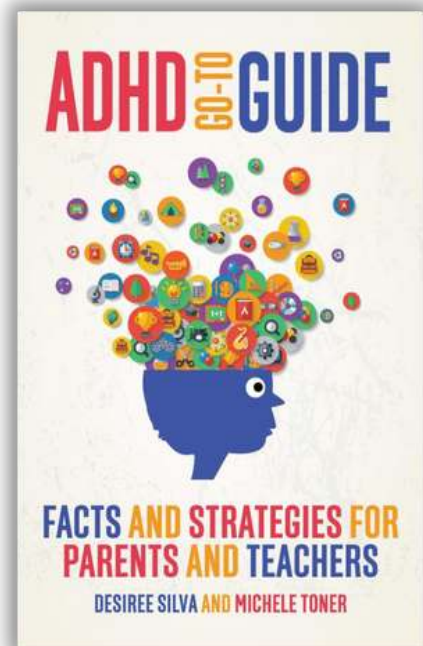
ADHD Go-To for Parents & Teachers

Dr Desiree Silva and Michele Toner are from Perth and have developed the ADHD Go-To Guide for parents and teachers. I have found it an incredibly helpful resource as a parent and therapist.

It has some very useful information and practical ideas for teachers to implement within the school setting.

A great resource to get started with while you wait for upcoming appointments with health professionals.

Kristy Casella, Occupational Therapist, The Swiss Family Clinic
swissfamilyclinic.com.au



ADHD in Primary School

ADHD Advocate and ADHD Australia Board Member Lou Brown says:

"Consider giving your child's teacher a copy of the guide ADHD in Primary School.

The guide has been written to assist teachers really understand ADHD and how to best support students with the disorder. Before you give the guide to your child's teacher, however, make sure you read it yourself.

By doing so you will also gain a better understanding around your child's ADHD and the type of classroom support they require."

You can purchase a copy of guide as an instant download from \$15 at thrivingwithadhd.com.au

The first weeks

Keep a diary.

Keep a diary for the first week or two of incidents your child talks about.

Even if you feel your child has been badly treated, remember there are two sides to every story. Your child may not be able to see the full picture which may become clearer over time.

Ask your child for potential solutions.

Ask your child if they can think of any solutions to a problem. Your child is in the classroom and may be able to see solutions.

For example, if your child keeps forgetting to bring home their diary, ask them if they can think of some reminder to put near their bag for home time.

If they are finding a subject difficult to follow, ask them if they can think of a way of making it more interesting.

Work with your child's teacher

Plan to set up a meeting with your classroom teacher or subject teachers after about two weeks. This will give the teachers time to get to know your child.

A solution-focused positive meeting working together with your child's teacher will set you and your child up for a successful year.

Susan Hughes, ADHD Parent Coach
susanhughes.com.au

Contenance

On the first day of school during the morning drop off, identify with your child where the toilets are that they will use during their school day, encourage your child to go into the toilets to have a look so they are familiar for later when they need the toilet. This will support them to know where to go and feel confident in there. This only takes five minutes to do but reduces the risk of toileting accidents while kids transition back to school.

Narelle Rodgers, Occupational Therapist, Narelle Rodgers OT
narellerodgersot.com

CALM TIP



The Lip Tap is useful for calming down before leaving home or entering school.

Using two fingers on our dominant hand, gently tap your upper lip.

Tapping on your lip causes salivation (making spit). By making spit we are giving signals to our brain and body that we are safe - you can't make spit when you are in danger).

This calms the entire nervous system.



Adapted from "Mindfulness Moments for Building Resilience and Well-Being" by Heidi Beaubriand.

Sally Jones,
Social Worker and Yoga Teacher,
Calm Kids, Calm Families
calmkidscalmfamilies.com.au

Donate sensory tools

We have donated resources to our kid's classes from time to time such as earmuffs, desk-top privacy screens, wobble cushions and heavy balls. We have found that by doing this, our child isn't spotlighted as the only one using something - it's available, and encouraged for everyone to use. Feedback from the teachers has been that the kids really love using them.

Pia Hazelwood, Perth Kids Hub
perthkidshub.com.au



Rainbow Dinosaur Pop-It
clawlicious.com



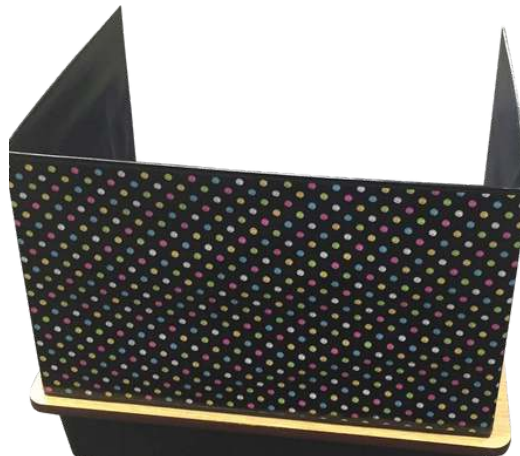
Hi Fidelity Ear Plugs,
skillbuilders.com.au



Tangle



Yellow crew member and key ring, \$10 each,
[facebook.com/Perth-Pop-Its-Sensory-and-More](https://www.facebook.com/Perth-Pop-Its-Sensory-and-More)



Classroom privacy screens, from \$25
amazon.com.au



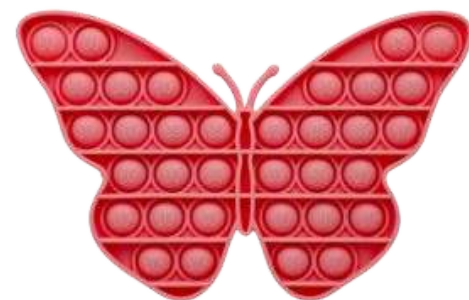
Ear muffs,
skillbuilders.com.au



Slope / angle writing board, from \$75,
skillbuilders.com.au



Rainbow Cloud Pop-It, \$10
clawlicious.com



Butterfly Pop-It, \$10
clawlicious.com

Helping new classmates understand "differences"

Kids are inquisitive and don't have filters. When they notice "differences," they ask the questions that adults are often too polite to ask.

Why is she always getting out of his seat? Why does he have a fidget toy? Why does she get to use a laptop in class and I don't? Why doesn't she speak? Your child may need some help answering these questions. Here are a few ideas.

Storybooks

Our son had open-heart surgery when he was three months old with a "zipper" scar left as a mark of his bravery.

Not long after the surgery, we were at the pool when a young child swam up, pointed at his scar and asked, "what's that?". I stammered something out.

We have shared a colourful picture book about congenital heart defects and heart surgery with our son's new teacher each year.

They have embraced this and read the book to the class, usually within the first week or two of school. Parents have told us their kids came home saying they wish they had a scar too because it was so cool!

Initially, we used an off-the-shelf book, but our favourite was about a young girl and by year 1 our son wanted the story to be about a boy like him.

I wanted to create his own story, but I found revisiting the story quite painful when I tried.

So I emailed the author and asked if we could use his words to create our own picture book. Luckily, the very generous author said yes!

Special Days & Months

Use advocacy and awareness days and months to celebrate your child's neurodiversity. It may be an activity just for your child's class. It could involve fundraising by asking students to all donate a gold coin to a charity.



Difference, not disability: How a WA principal with ADHD celebrates student 'superpowers'

By Lauren Pilat, WA Today, 13 July 2021

Bunbury Baptist College primary principal Tiffany Staples and deputy principal Andrew Horn came up with the idea of Learning Difference Day to help get rid of the stigma around conditions like ADHD.

Learning disabilities" became "learning differences" to get rid of negative connotations that came with a diagnosis, and Mrs Staples with deputy principal Andrew Horn created Learning Difference Day to ensure all students had their learning needs met to reach their individual potential.

Primary students went to school for the inaugural Learning Difference Day on June 25 in bright clothes to symbolise people's differences, while in classrooms students shared their "learning superpower".

"It was here that we saw hearts soften and change," Mrs Staples said. "Students that would normally sit back and try to go unnoticed, stood up proudly and confidently to share their experiences.

"Many said they had been bullied in other schools for their differences but now feel heard, loved and as though they belong."

Teachers and students also designed a jigsaw piece that came together to form a big puzzle to represent how every individual made up a part of the school community.

To read the full article:

<https://www.watoday.com.au/national/western-australia/difference-not-disability-how-a-wa-principal-with-adhd-celebrates-student-superpowers-20210706-p587d8.html>

A guide to your child

Communication Passport

Having a document like a communication passport can help parents feel at ease when their child transitions to a new school/ or starts a new school year.

Communication passports are a person-centred approach to share information about a child in a strengths-based way.

This document can share information such as the way they communicate, their likes/dislikes, medical needs, sensory preferences or mealtime information.

Brittany Maiolo, Speech Pathologist, A Play C Therapy Services
aplayc.com.au



The Incredible 5 Point Scale

I used to be given a considerable amount of paperwork for every child I taught. It was a lot for me to remember in those first weeks.

Then later in the year If I had a day where I was sick, it was so hard to ensure all my students would be understood by the person covering me.

How on earth could a replacement teacher get through all the notes on each student in time to understand and support them? They simply can't!

I would therefore try to ensure important information about a student fitted to one page was clear and colour-coded. I would put it into a table if I could. That way, it only takes a glance to support a child you are less familiar with.

The five-point scale is often used for autistic individuals, but it also works well for ADHD, ODD, anxiety, etc.

I feel that the 5 point scale is perfect for this. It is great for creating a quick guide to help teach a new teacher how to support your child to regulate. It would be great to create your own 5 point scale and give a print-out to your child's teacher.



Lynsey Baughen, Art Therapist, Noa Therapeutic
<https://www.instagram.com/noa.therapeutic/>

One page handover

Sometimes it really helps to see an example - especially when we might be starting from a blank sheet!

ADHD Advocate Lou Brown shares a really helpful example one-page handover for a student with ADHD on her website at thrivingwithadhd.com.au

You can use the templates provided on the next few pages to come up with something that works for you.

A summary to transfer all your years of knowledge about what works for your child and their strengths to your new teacher. Help them shortcut the learnings you've had and start off from day one with what works for them.

Students Name		
Strengths Kind & caring Polite & honest Respectful Curious & inquisitive Creative & artistic (he loves to draw) Quick thinking & spontaneous Able to think outside the box Funny, sees the humour in things Enthusiastic Energetic Lots of fun	Challenges Maintaining focus when interest is low Easily distracted Boredom intolerance Poor working memory Struggles to plan & problem solve Can be rigid in his thinking Poor perception of time Impulsivity & inhibition Hyperactivity (mentally & physically) Excitability & impatience Highly sensitive and emotional	Photo
		Interests: Drawing Minecraft Parkour Photography Animation
As a result, xxx struggles to always: Stay on task when work is tedious or uninteresting Pick up and process every piece of information he is given Remember more than 2 instructions at a time Recall information he has previously learned See the big picture Plan, prioritise and organise his work Pay close attention to detail Slow down and take his time Show his full potential Transition away from activities he finds acutely interesting Inhibit his words and actions Pause before reacting to situations or wait when excited Delay gratification Control the energy in his body without movement Self-motivate	Management strategies Gentle redirection I.e. "You are doing a great job. Keep going." Keep lessons engaging I.e. Inject interest, variety & fun Copious praise & positive reinforcement Frequent in the moment rewards Brief instructions Visual prompts and frequent reminders Transition assistance Planning and problem solving assistance Fidgets & frequent movement breaks Use memory retention strategies & repetition Externalise time Calm firm voice when required *** xxx is very well behaved. Should he start to struggle in class please let me know asap	

Stay positive and brief

Design an A4 laminated poster - one-sided, with a photo of your child and explain how they function in first-person language. You can work with them to create this.

Stay positive and brief but deliver top tips. Here's an example of what I mean:

"Hi my name is Sam, my brain is pretty cool, but it works a bit differently.

I really like toy cars, and my brain loves it when I spin their wheels; I can do this for a long time. This makes me very calm.

I am really good at numbers; I love to do dot-to-dots in my free time.

I can get lonely at break time; if you can help me find a friend to play with or let me do an activity on my own, this will make my day much better.

Sometimes I can get anxious, but my anxiety might look like I am angry or really giggly.

I have brought a sensa tent to school. If I seem stressed, please set it up and ask me if I would like to lie down in there with a 10-minute timer."

The first-person message really strikes a chord with adults that are getting to know your child; it's particularly powerful if your child struggles to express themselves or is currently communicating via sounds rather than words. It is also an excellent way to teach your child self-advocacy. If this strategy works, be sure to update the poster throughout the year.

Lynsey Baughen, Art Therapist, Noa Therapeutic
<https://www.instagram.com/noa.therapeutic/>

Try a break card

If your child needs regular breaks to help them pace their day, one option is using a card to communicate discreetly with the teacher. Discussing this with the teacher before school starts or early in the term can help manage the boom-bust pattern that often accompanies conditions such as Joint Hypermobility Syndrome which often co-exists with ADHD.

Here's an example from Occupational Therapist Hannah Fairburn at Western Kids Health on how you could explain this request to your new teacher. The card could feature any animal your child likes - in this case the child loved sloths so it became a "sloth card".



“Sophie’s therapist has recommended that she complete 45 min of classwork and then take a 10-minute rest to help pace herself through the day. If she is doing a class that builds her confidence (e.g. sport) then she can push it to an hour.

The breaks will look like Sophie flashing the attached card (please see below - “Sophie’s Sloth Card”) and move to an agreed break area without the need to explain herself (as we already know, it is due to pain, fatigue and feeling overwhelmed).

She can wear headphones, play music, fidget, rest, or lay down.

If you are busy teaching the class and her timer goes off, she will leave the card red side up to indicate she is taking a break. She will then time herself for 10 mins, come back once the time is up and continue with the classwork.

I please ask that this strategy be continued over to her specialist classes and all teachers be made aware of this plan.

If possible, it would be helpful if Sophie could go outside of the classroom so she can fully relax in a place she feels safe and not judged by peers.

If there is nowhere suitable adjacent to the classroom then please let me know what might be a suitable area for Sophie to take her break.”

Hannah Fairburn, Occupational Therapist, Western Kids Health
westernkidshealth.com.au

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