

# Teens with ADHD may need help making transition to college

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(HealthDay) -- For students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD, making the transition to college can be especially difficult. But by adopting certain strategies, such as sticking to a structured daily schedule and tapping into the university's disability support services, freshman with ADHD can do well, according to experts and teens with the condition.

"The ones who are going to do best are those who come to [college](#) prepared, who are aware of their weaknesses and have some strategies for compensating," said Kristy Morgan, a recent Kansas State University doctoral graduate in student affairs and higher education who conducted in-depth interviews with eight college freshman with [ADHD](#) about what they learned from the experience.

Certain themes emerged.

While most students said they got through high school without having to study much, they found college classes much tougher -- and most felt they didn't have the study skills to handle it.

"They were able to get through junior high and high school pretty well, and get good enough grades to get into college," Morgan said. "Then they got to college. They were finding they had to study very independently, and there were less in-class opportunities for test prep, and it was more difficult."

Students with ADHD also said they looked forward to the "freedom" of a less regimented college schedule, yet they found it more difficult to manage their time without the structure that high school provides.

"In many households, teenagers with ADHD rely to varying degrees on their parents to help in terms of time management and organization, helping to prioritize, keeping their things organized, staying focused on deadlines and making sure they strike an appropriate balance between leisure and studies," said Dr. Andrew Adesman, chief of developmental and [behavioral pediatrics](#) at Steven and Alexandra Cohen Children's Medical Center of New York. "When they go to college, pretty much most of that is out the window."

Particularly for kids who are prone to immediate gratification or have difficulties with impulsivity, college offers endless distraction, Adesman said. "They may be prone to indulge in one form of distraction or another. It could be relaxing and not studying, or drinking and partying," Adesman said.

And even though many universities have disability support services that students with ADHD can turn to for extra help, only two of the eight students had done so. The other six said they either weren't aware such a service was available, or they hadn't gotten around to asking for assistance, which can include tutoring or test-taking accommodations, such as taking exams in quiet, distraction-free rooms.

Some students may have also shied away from seeking the extra support because of "embarrassment or shame, not wanting to be different from others in the class, or they had misperceptions about what those services involved," Morgan said.

Despite the challenges, five of the eight students were having a successful freshman year, Morgan said.

To help students with ADHD make the transition to college, the experts offered teens and parents these tips:

- **Get educated about ADHD:** While some children outgrow ADHD, symptoms -- which include inattention, [hyperactivity](#) and impulsivity beyond what's normally seen given a child's age and development -- often persist into adulthood. Yet most of the students interviewed had significant misperceptions about ADHD. Most said they thought they would have outgrown it, even though about 80 percent of people with ADHD don't, Morgan said. Before teens leave for college, parents -- perhaps with a pediatrician or psychologist -- should make sure their teens understand what ADHD is and the ongoing challenges they should expect, Morgan said.
- **Develop study strategies:** Pretty much everyone procrastinates sometimes, but for students with ADHD, this trait can be extreme. In college, where an entire grade may depend on one paper or on one or two exams, staying on top of the work is especially important. One strategy to deal with this is developing a plan, for example, read one chapter each night, or arrange to study at the same time every day, and stick to it.
- **Set a schedule:** Inconsistent daily schedules themselves also pose challenges for teens with ADHD. College students may have a class at 8 a.m., then another at 3 p.m., then a totally different schedule on another day. How to make use of all that free time, and not while away the hours playing ultimate frisbee on the quad? Again, students should develop a schedule and abide by it.
- **Contact disability support services:** Many colleges have resources for students with disabilities ranging from physical impairments to dyslexia, and, ADHD. These services are provided discreetly, Morgan said. However, students will have to fill out certain forms or paperwork in order to access the

services, and following through with that can be challenging for kids with ADHD. She urges college students with ADHD to make it a priority.

- **Continue taking medications:** Take ADHD medications as prescribed, Adesman said. He also advises students not to tell their roommates or friends that they take stimulants for ADHD. Stimulants are sometimes abused by students without ADHD who believe the drugs will help them focus. Kids with ADHD may be pressured to share their pills, which is against the law, Adesman said.

**More information:** The [U.S. National Institute of Mental Health](#) has more on ADHD.

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