



ADHD and College Success

Everything you need to know about ADHD, college, and living your dreams!

Edge Foundation

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Abstract:

College is a critical time for students with ADHD. It's usually the first time students are challenged to do it all on their own. Simply striving to be organized and motivated isn't the solution to college success. Instead finding new strategies that work with ADHD strengths is the key. This paper includes dozens of tips and strategies you can start using today!

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Does this sound like you?

I do my homework but forget to hand it in.

I have trouble staying focused on the things I know I "should" be doing.

Sometimes class is so boring I can hardly stand it.

I keep promising myself I won't procrastinate, but I keep finding myself doing it at the last minute, ***again.***

Sometimes an assignment seems so huge, I just can't figure out how to get started on it. And even when I do get motivated to begin, I feel like I never get anything finished.

I know I'll feel better when I go to bed on time, but I just can't sleep until I'm totally exhausted.

I'm late way more often than I want to be. It's so hard to get out of the door on time.

You can change!

ADHD and college: a challenge you can handle

Do you get an anxious feeling when you think about school? Going to college is an adjustment for *anyone*, but when you have ADHD, the challenges are that much greater. However, college is a challenge you can handle if you go armed with the knowledge of a few extra things you can do to make sure your college experience is everything you hope it will be.

Do you have the 4 student qualities for success?

Successful students usually have four qualities that help them achieve their goals:

1. Sticking with things even when the going gets tough (a.k.a. perseverance),
2. Ability to delay gratification and focus on the big picture,
3. Time management and organizational skills, and
4. Striking the right balance between fun and work.

Are you feeling discouraged already? No surprise. These particular skills don't come easily to students with ADHD. **Organizational problems, impulsivity and time management issues are actually the hallmarks of living with ADHD.** You think, "If I just get this special planner, I'll never forget anything again." Or you promise yourself, "Next time I'm going to start working on my class reading at the beginning of the term instead of cramming right before finals." It's so easy to think, "If I just *make* myself do this... it'll be fine." But what if we told you that *making* yourself do it is the totally *wrong* approach?

What if making yourself be motivated or organized isn't the solution, but figuring out how to master yourself is?

Self Mastery is the key to achieving your dreams

Self mastery: identifying and using the tools and skills that work with your personal strengths to achieve your goals and be successful.

College is often the time where you need a new set of skills – or maybe just a tune up – to cope with ADHD. It's the time of life where you learn to master yourself. Why now? In your life before college, high school and your parents together gave you built-in structure and accountability. But in college you have a lot of unstructured time and you are totally in charge of making all of your own decisions.

"I always thought that I was never going to be able to get organized. My coach showed me I was wrong."

*Are you ready to learn more?
[Click here to sign-up today](#) and take the first step to getting your life under your control, and finding your Edge!*

College gives you new freedoms and new responsibilities

Want to stay up late partying? *No problem*. It's a beautiful day and you want to skip classes to go play. *No problem*. You are head of your sorority's social committee *and* in the marching band *and* have a job so you can keep your financial aid. *No problem*. That is, until you are just too tired or simply run out of time to finish the big paper that's due.

There's no one, except yourself, to tell you what you should do and where your responsibilities lie. Without self-mastery, it's easy to let poor time management and organizational skills drag you down; it's easy to miss that right balance between fun and work; and it's easy to find yourself living out your nightmare of showing up to an important test totally unprepared.

For most college students with ADHD the problem is not so much in knowing *what* to do, but in getting it done. As one student said, "I know *how* to plan. My problem is very simple; I just don't follow my plans. I need help making sure that I do what I say I am going to do instead of getting sidetracked."

An ADHD coach helps you get into *your* groove and keeps you on track

One thing you can always rely on with ADHD is that it is consistently ***inconsistent***. That means there are days when everything goes great, and other days you can't seem to get out of your own way.

Do your friends or family get frustrated and say things like, "If you're so smart, why can't you just handle it?" And when for whatever reason you don't, they say you are lazy, or unmotivated, or not living up to your potential? And maybe you begin to believe them?

But what if it's not because you aren't trying? After all you are probably already trying pretty hard – or at least thought you were.

What if the problem is having a brain that just works differently? What if, instead of just trying harder, you need a different approach, a different groove, to managing these every day responsibilities?

"I know how to plan. My problem is very simple; I just don't follow my plans."

An ADHD coach works with you to find solutions

This is where an **ADHD coach can help**. ADHD coaches know that the same approach doesn't work for everyone. As the old saying goes, if the shoe doesn't fit, don't blame the foot! ADHD coaches work with people just like you, every day, and help them find solutions that work for *them* – not for their parents or friends. An ADHD coach will help you:

- Be accountable
- Study smarter not harder
- Assess your time
- Prioritize
- Stick to your plan!

An ADHD coach really “gets it”

ADHD coaches bring amazing life **experience** to their coaching. They have a **passion** for working with young people who might have ADHD. Many coaches have ADHD themselves, or love someone who does, or both, so **they really get it**. They know what works, and what doesn't. And they won't try to make you fit into an organizational system that isn't right for you!

One of the nice things about an ADHD coach is they all work on the phone. This takes transportation out of the equation. You can start working with your coach *right now*, and because you don't meet in an office, you can **take your coach with you wherever you go**.

- You get to your appointments just by picking up the phone.
- Because there's no commute, you can easily fit your appointments into your schedule.
- And, by virtue of a phone/email relationship, you stay in much closer touch with your coach than you would if you had to go to an office.
- Plus, the burden of staying in touch is shared. It isn't just up to you.

This extra contact can make all the difference in being able to stay on top of things.

The numbers show that in college it's surprisingly easy for students with ADHD to fall behind. If we've convinced you to look into getting an ADHD coach to help you keep it all together, we hope you'll consider one trained by the Edge Foundation. All of our coaches have met the rigorous standards set by the Edge Foundation and completed training for working with students and young adults with ADHD. [Sign up today!](#)

“I love that I can call my coach from wherever works best for me that day. And the email follow-up she sends helps me remember what we covered in our talk.”

*Are you ready to learn more?
[Click here to sign-up today](#) and take the first step to getting your life under **your** control, and finding your Edge!*

ADHD Success Tips and Skills

Wonder what a coach can do for you? Check out these strategies and tips that Edge coaches use with students, like you, everyday to help stay on track.

Get up on time

- Set two alarms and put one across the room so you have to get out of bed to turn it off
- Or put the second alarm where you know it will bother your roommates so you are more motivated to get out of bed and turn it off in time!
- Set your alarm to go off earlier so you can take your time in the morning.

Stay on schedule

- If you know you get distracted by checking email or Facebook, make it a rule that you can't do it until after classes are over.
- Figure out how much time you need to dress, eat and get organized and then use alarms to remind you to stay on schedule.
- Try using a set of music as a timer. If you have 30 minutes to get ready, time yourself using different songs. So when the music moves on at the end of a song, you need to have moved on to the next step.
- Set up alarms on your phone or a programmable reminder watch that gets you moving on time.
- Put big clocks in your rooms to be visibly reminded about time passing.

Keep organized

- Create a "launch pad" by your exit door. Collect all of the things you'll need in the morning the night before (like your backpack, keys, phone, homework, books) and put them on the launch pad.
- Leave yourself a note at the launch pad so in the morning you can remember what's important for that day.

Sure it's a lot of ideas. You can try them out on your own, or you can get the support and assurance of an Edge coach to guide you as you figure out what works best for you.

"I've discovered what works best for me is to get up early and do as much as I can - then after six just have fun and relax."

Work with procrastination, not against it

- Sometimes it's okay to procrastinate so you have the pressure of the deadline to keep you motivated. But...
- Just be sure to give yourself little deadlines throughout a big project to make the final push more doable.
- If you have to write a paper, break it into the important steps: figuring out the concept, finding research sources, reading and note taking, and finally writing.
- When it's nice out, plan to work at night when the call to be outdoors and playing isn't so compelling.
- Do a moderate amount of vigorous outdoor exercise first, then study.
- Plan for spring fever by taking a heavy load in the winter and a lighter load in the spring.

Be accountable

- Get a study buddy and make an agreement that you'll each get so much done during a set period of time. Knowing you've made a commitment to someone else really helps. It's the power of accountability.
- Whatever you do, do not take an incomplete. Do whatever you have to do to finish a course. Or you may never finish it at all.

Study smarter not harder

- To keep boredom at bay, highlight the text you read with different colors or doodle your notes.
- Make audio notes or see if your book has an audio version and listen as you commute to school.
- Use mnemonics to create funny ways to remember stuff.
- Try standing up while you read or read your assignment aloud to yourself using a character voice.
- Get a study buddy.
- Know which classes will cut you slack so you can put energy into the ones that won't.
- Know when you've hit the point of diminishing returns. If you've worked for 5 hours and know that's enough to get an A minus on the paper and it will take 5 more hours to get an A, but there's other work that needs to be done, move on!

An Edge coach helps keep you accountable until you've figured out a system that works for you.

"I know how to plan. My problem is very simple; I just don't follow my plans."

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Schedule your study time

- Study 2 hours per week for each course credit. Spend at least 2 hours a day reading – starting on the *first* day of class!
- Think of college as your job and spend at least 40 hours per week on classes and class work.
- Block out the hours you plan to study in your schedule – and “show up” just like you would for a job.
- Apply the principal of exercise intervals to studying. Instead of alternating sprinting and walking, alternate study and play. Set a timer and work hard for 30 or 60 minutes then play for the next interval of minutes. Then do it again. Just be sure you quit playing as readily as you quit working!

Plan ahead to keep on track

- Plan for your week on Sunday night or Monday morning. And plan for your weekend on Friday.
- Review each morning what you want to accomplish to make sure you keep in mind what you want to accomplish.
- Write your top three priorities on a note card to keep with you. Pull it out at lunch and dinner to make sure you are on track to accomplishing the day’s agenda.

And while you’re busy taking care of your class work, don’t forget to take care of yourself, too!

Keep anxiety under control

Did you know that half of all adults with ADHD will experience anxiety disorders during their lifetimes? Here are some easy, everyday things you can do to help control anxiety, without taking another pill, which you can **start right now!**

- Exercise regularly – it’s been proven to dramatically reduce the symptoms of anxiety.
- Eat right – skipping meals and ingesting too much caffeine or sugar can actually trigger an anxiety attack.
- Get enough sleep.
- Practice relaxation – when you are stressing, do something distracting and fun. Fill your mind with a challenging task and you won’t have room to think about your anxiety.
- Try mindfulness meditation – it’s been proven to reduce symptoms of both anxiety and ADHD. Check the web for instructions.

“With my ADHD coach I learned time management - so I could get all my homework done and have fun with my friends.”

Get a good night's sleep

ADHD students need to take their sleep seriously. **Students with ADHD are often even *more* sleep deprived than their peers.** Sleep deprivation both mimics and makes ADHD symptoms worse. So if you have ADHD taking charge of your sleep habits is even more important.

- Don't nap during the day.
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol before bed.
- Exercise regularly, but earlier in the day.
- Don't eat a lot before bedtime.
- Establish a relaxing bedtime routine. Turn off the DS, TV, Internet or Wii at least an hour before your bedtime.
- Associate your bed with sleep. Don't do other things like read, check email, text or watch TV in bed.
- Make sure that the sleep environment is pleasant and relaxing. The bed should be comfortable, the room should not be too hot or cold, or too bright.
- Don't sleep with your pet. They can wake you up at night making it hard to fall back asleep.

By working with your ADHD instead of against it, you can learn to use your natural strengths to your advantage.

Keep spending under control

- **Make a budget:** Decide how much you have to spend now - **before** you start shopping.
- **Make a list:** Write down what you plan to buy *before* you go shopping.
- **Prioritize:** Add up how much the items on your list cost. If your list costs more than you have, decide what things you can wait to buy so you stay within your budget.
- **Keep it in cash:** Take only the cash you plan to spend when you go shopping. That means leaving your debit and credit cards at home. Put your spending money in separate compartment in your wallet. **When the money is gone, you are done shopping.** Period. Don't be tempted to use layaway plans to buy things you can't afford.
- **Avoid the mall:** If you stay away from where things are being sold, you won't be as tempted to buy them!

“Thank you for offering such a wonderful service! I have a son with ADHD. He had a coach his first semester of college and she helped him develop strategies that he used as a springboard to a successful freshman year.”

Use fidgeting to stay focused

A bored ADHD brain is a sluggish brain. When compared to the general population, it is pretty clear people with ADHD just require a higher base level of stimulation to stay comfortably alert and focused.

- The great thing about **fidgeting is that it's perfectly natural**. Everyone does it. The trick is to do it intentionally. If you do it right, you can manage your ADHD symptoms in a way that's totally unnoticeable to everyone else.
- It's important to **fidget respectfully**: doing it in a way that works for you but that doesn't bother the people around you. For example, clicking your pen repeatedly during a class might not be so cool, but fiddling with a paperclip under the table would be soundless and invisible.
- It's important to realize that **a good fidget shouldn't compete with the primary tasks**. For instance, if you need your eyes for reading, listening to music will be a better fidget than watching the TV. If you need to listen, doodling or pacing will be a better fidget than being plugged into your iPod.

Make hyper-focus work for you

Do you ever get so wrapped up in something that you forget something else you really needed or wanted to do? Arrange your life so that the things you tend to hyper-focus on are things that bring you closer to your goals.

- Identify the types of activities you tend to hyper-focus on.
- Don't start any hyper-focus prone activities close to bedtime, or before doing something you're likely to procrastinate on.
- Make it a point to be aware of your mental state at all times. We often don't even realize it when we're hyper-focused. Being aware of when you're in it is the first step towards getting out of it.
- Practice being fully present. Use mindfulness exercises to stay in the here and now.
- Use timers and alarms to be cognizant of how much time has elapsed since you started the activity.
- Change your physical position to help break a hyper-focus as soon as you recognize it.
- Plan milestones in your projects. Stop every time you reach one.

Medications do not work for everybody. They are not 'the' answer. Pills do not teach skills, but coaches do." Neil Peterson, Edge Foundation founder.

Meet the Edge Foundation

So, are you ready to take the next step? Here's the page to visit to watch a video and sign up to learn more: <http://www.edgefoundation.org/students/>

Our mission

The Foundation's mission is to help every child, adolescent, and young adult with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (also referred to as ADD, ADHD, or AD/HD) to fully realize their own potential, personal vision, and passion.

The Edge Foundation believes that professional coaching, while not a substitute for the traditional multi-modal treatment for ADHD, is a critical and highly effective intervention in the nontraditional learner's ability to realize his or her potential. At Edge we want every student who has ADD, ADHD, or who has similar challenges to have access to a specially trained personal coach. Coaching can give a young person the edge necessary to achieve his or her full potential in academic and other life pursuits.

Headquartered in Seattle, serving students nationwide.

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Still need convincing? Check out this student's story:



"Dad, the best thing you ever did for me was get me my own coach." Daughter of Edge Foundation founder, Neil Peterson

*Get your own coach.
Sign up today!*

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