CADDAC

CENTRE FOR ADHD AWARENESS, CANADA

Toolkit: Transitioning to Post-Secondary Education for Students with ADHD

Created by the Centre for ADHD Awareness, Canada

Published Spring 2020

CADDAC
CENTRE FOR ADHD AWARENESS, CANADA

Contents

The CADDAC Post-Secondary Transition Toolkit 2
The toolkit contains four parts: 2
Important Things to Know Before Entering the Post-Secondary Environment 2
A Time Line for Preparing to Enter the Post-Secondary Environment (PSE) 3
One to Two Years Prior to Entering the PSE 3
Six months prior to Entering PSE 5
Changes to Anticipate When Moving into the Post-Secondary Environment 6
Less structure 6
Less accountability and oversight… 6
More independence with more responsibility in a new environment 7
Tips and Strategies for Post-Secondary Students with ADHD 8
Academics 8
Organization and Procrastination 8
Medication 8
Online Learning for Students with ADHD in the Post-Secondary Environment 9
Possible benefits of online learning for students living with ADHD 9
Possible difficulties with online learning for students living with ADHD 9
Strategies for Online Learning in the Post-Secondary Environment 10
Tips for reading and note taking 11
Resource List for Transitioning to the Post-Secondary Environment 12

The CADDAC Post-Secondary Transition Toolkit

CADDAC has developed this toolkit to help you and your parents prepare for your transition to college or university and into the post-secondary environment (PSE).

More and more students with ADHD are now going on to a post-secondary education. Unfortunately, being away from their ADHD support system and in a new and demanding environment often leads to unexpected challenges. Being prepared for these challenges is the best strategy for a successful experience.

Many students with ADHD who enter college or university are ill prepared for the increased demands. The additional load on their executive functioning can come as a big shock especially if they had a great deal of scaffolding which allowed them to be successful in high school. Lack of skills in planning, organization, and time management rather than the inability to understand and learn the course content, are most often the reason that difficulties arise. Assignments start to pile up, instructions are misinterpreted, due dates missed or totally forgotten, triggering stress and panic.

The toolkit contains five parts:

1. A Time Line for Preparing to Enter the Post-Secondary Environment (PSE).
2. Changes to Anticipate When Moving to the Post-Secondary Environment (PSE).
3. Tips and Strategies for the Post-Secondary Student with ADHD.
4. Online Learning Strategies for the Post-Secondary Students with ADHD.
5. A List of Resources for the Post-Secondary Student.

Important Things to Know Before Entering the Post-Secondary Environment

1. All past ADHD symptoms and executive functioning impairments will remain while your supports decrease and the load on executive functioning increases.
2. Students with ADHD have the right to accommodations in the PSE. These may even be easier to access in the PSE than they were in high school.
3. It is best to set up all accommodations with the school's disability centre that you might require in advance of needing them, even if you never use them.
4. Once you are 18, you are considered an adult in the medical system. Therefore, your pediatrician or child and adolescent psychiatrist will need you to transition to an adult psychiatrist of family physician for ADHD medical care. There is a lack of physicians who are trained in ADHD or familiar with prescribing medication for ADHD. This is especially true for the adult population, so anticipate that it will take time to find someone to take over your care.
5. There is an increased potential for developing other mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression and substance abuse when you have ADHD, so become aware of the possible red flags so you will be able to recognize them if they occur.

A Time Line for Preparing to Enter the Post-Secondary Environment (PSE)

One to Two Years Prior to Entering the PSE

Discover your learning strengths and needs, how your ADHD symptoms affect your daily functioning, and your executive functioning profile. This will teach you the language needed to advocate for your needs, help you realize the accommodations that you will require in the PSE, and the strategies that you will need to put in place.

Look into Post-secondary (PS) Programs and Schools

- Research schools and programs that might interest you.
- Ask specific questions about potential programs: how are they structured; are they mostly theoretical or hands-on; what is the class size, typical workload and does the program lend itself to a reduced course load?
- Find out if you meet the requirements for the programs that interests you.
- Tour the school – Are you comfortable with the campus size and atmosphere?
- Book an appointment to meet with a representative of the accessibility office. (This may also be called the student wellness, learning support or student support centre, or a variation of the above). about the process of requesting accommodations and the level of support that you can expect to receive.
- Will they expect you to self-advocate with each professor or will the support centre inform the professors of your rights to specific accommodations?

Learn and practice life skills so they become a habit. Once things are a habit the load on executive functioning decreases.

- Initiate and practice good healthy style skills around sleep, exercise and diet.
- Practice life skills, such as food buying and preparation, clothes purchasing and laundry, financial budgeting, credit card use and paying bills.
- Become aware of your time management skills. Develop strategies to help you stay on time and remember due dates and appointments. Develop a strategy to plan schedules for work and play.
- Shadow your parent when they make medical appointments and report on the efficacy and side effects of your ADHD treatment, eventually taking on the task yourself.
- Monitor your medication count routinely and become aware of the lead time required for prescription renewals, how to request a renewal and when doctor appointments are required.
- Be aware that the overuse of medication (using it during the day for classes and at night to cram or catch up on assignments) can cause serious side-effects.
- Anticipate being asked by others to share your medication. This is illegal even if money is not involved. Have refusal statements that you are comfortable using prepared. Learn to store your medications in a safe place.

Six months prior to Entering PSE

1. To understand your rights, access the CADDAC policy paper Understanding ADHD as a Disability in the Post-Secondary Environment Policy Paper.

2. Contact the accessibility office at the post-secondary school to find out the documentation required to request accommodations

    - share CADDAC's school report writing toolkit with your medical professional, and/or
    - provide your doctor with the schools' required medical form.

    If the school requests a psychoeducational assessment for ADHD alone and not a learning disability share CADDAC's Understanding ADHD as a Disability in the Post-Secondary Environment Policy Paper, which states that this is an out dated medically incorrect, discriminatory practice, with the school.

3. Meet with your treating medical practitioner (this generally needs to be an expert in ADHD) to discuss your need for PSE accommodations and review what those accommodations will be. This will assist them in preparing accurate documentation stating your need for accommodations and outlining what those accommodations should be.

    - personally review the CADDAC PSE Impairment/Accommodations Chart with your parents and others who can be helpful in outlining your learning and functional impairments, and
    - discuss which accommodations have been helpful in the past and which accommodations you will be requesting prior to entering the PSE.

4. Book a meeting with the PS school's special needs support centre well before school begins at which time you will share the medical form and/or medical report outlining your impairments and request for specific accommodations. (Access the PS school's web site for instructions on your specific school's process.)

    - Be prepared to advocate for the accommodations you need and supply additional documentation of past individualized educational plans from high school if available.
    - Request that the school allow your parents to communicate with them due to your need for additional support and mentoring. You will probably need to sign a document stating your agreement.

Changes to Anticipate When Moving into the Post-Secondary Environment

The load on executive function skills will increase significantly due to:

Less structure

- Classes times will vary so wake up times and work times may also vary.
- Classes will be larger and lectures longer, but also less consistent with gaps in-between.

This can:

- exacerbate existing sleep problems,
- potentially increase issues with attention regulation and the need for medication,
- increase the need for movement strategies and breaks,
- increase the need for time management and problem-solving skills, and
- require more self-structuring of work versus leisure times.

Less accountability and oversight…

…especially if accommodations are not put in place

- No one will be monitoring you to see it you are attending class or handing in assignments.
- There will be no assistance with chunking large assignments.
- There will be few or no reminders of due dates.
- There will be an increased need for time management of assignments.

This can:

- increase the risk of missed classes,
- increase the potential for procrastination,
- increase the chance of handing in assignments late or forgetting them entirely, and
- make the work load impossible when assignments have been left too late.

More independence with more responsibility in a new environment

- There will be an increased need for the planning and scheduling of self-care, such as: health care, food, exercise, laundry, managing appointments and maintaining a budget on top of school duties.
- You will have the sole responsibility of balancing your personal life and responsibilities.
- There will be a need to learn how to function in a new environment with new rules and housemates,
- There will be less oversight of risky behavior.
- You will be solely responsible for becoming motivated and maintaining motivation.
- The need to balance personal life and school/work requirements.

This can

- greatly increase the load on executive functioning and lead to feeling overwhelmed
- lead to self-care being neglected,
- lead to missed school appointments,
- lead to missed medical appointments, and/or running out of medication.

Tips and Strategies for Post-Secondary Students with ADHD

These tips and strategies will be most effective if they are set up prior to starting or at the start of the school year.

Academics

- Look for, sign-up and attend any learning strategy courses your school provides in August or at the beginning of the year, especially if they are geared toward students with ADHD.
- Set up and keep routine appointments with your (Accessibility) Access Centre counsellor. Ask them to help chunk your assignments, develop a timeline for partial and final completion of assignments and assistance with juggling numerous tasks. Meeting on a routine basis to discuss your progress will also add more accountability.
- Advise your professors about your accommodations.
- You may also wish to hire an ADHD coach who specializes in the PSE.

Organization and Procrastination

- Use both a wall and electronic calendar so you can easily see your schedule. You may need help deciding on the best system to use and the initial set up. Your coach, access centre counsellor, or parent can assist you with this.
- Decide on the best appointment/class/due-date alert system for your needs and initiate immediately.
- Set up a daily structure. Go to bed and wake up at a consistent time.
- Set up an app to automatically shut down the Internet at a specific time. Ex. Cold Turkey.
- Schedule time for aerobic exercise, movement breaks and mindfulness.
- Find storage solutions to help keep your belonging organized. You can even colour code them.
- Assign a specific spot for your phone, keys and other important things. Make it a habit to never place them anywhere else.
- Set up a personal reward system, time doing activities you enjoy, after completing work.

Medication

- Find a safe place to store your medication and do not advertise that you have medication in your room.
- Set up a system to count your medication at specific intervals (once a week). This will allow you to keep track of your medication and know when to contact your physician for a prescription renewal.
- Remember to provide plenty of time for your physician to respond and for you to follow-up (2 weeks). They may be out of the office or the request might be misplaced. Even if the pharmacy won't allow pick-up until closer to the time you run out, at least you will know the medication is there waiting for you. Also, remember that you will require ID to pick up your medication.

Online Learning for Students with ADHD in the Post-Secondary Environment

Possible benefits of online learning for students living with ADHD

- being able to schedule schoolwork during the best time of day for optimal learning – possibly when medication is most effective;
- being able to adapt your pace if more, or less, time is required to absorb a lesson;
- the ability to minimize disruptions and distractions;
- lessons and tasks can be chunked into smaller portions and done over time;
- more opportunity for movement breaks and to move while working (exercise ball, standing desk, fidget toys) if hyperactivity is an issue; and
- the ability to use aerobic exercise to assist with focus before school work.

Possible difficulties with online learning for students living with ADHD

- more independent work and less structure;
- access to inappropriate environments for learning such as the living room couch;
- working on a computer with easy Internet, e-mail, YouTube, Facebook and computer game access can lead to significant online distractions;
- poor executive function can result in challenges including difficulty with understanding instructions, breaking down larger tasks, organization, time management, prioritizing tasks, getting started and completing work, forgetting assignments and the inability to set long term goals;
- less self-regulation means a greater need for outside support and structure which is not easily accessible through online learning; and
- procrastination will be easier with less immediate accountability.

Strategies for Online Learning in the Post-Secondary Environment

Note: Not all strategies are uniformly beneficial for all students living with ADHD. It will take practice to discover what works best for you. However, know that you will need to put at least some strategies in place if you wish to succeed in the online learning environment.

- Research the course format and speak with the professor if possible, prior to signing up, to ensure that the course set-up is suited to your style of learning.
- Put structure in place. Create a weekly schedule with online class, assignment work times, exercise, and break times well defined and stick to it. Ask for help if this sounds like a daunting task.
- Set up a place to learn away from distractions.
- Work when most alert and if taking medication when it is working well.
- Use a timer for periods of work and break time.
- Use the ability to repeat certain parts of the lesson or the entire lesson to pick up any information that you may have missed.
- Use electronic reminders to prompt work times and assignment due dates.
- Print out instructions so they are easily accessible for review. Review and underline important points and refer to them frequently. If instructions have not been written in an easy to print format, request that they be revised.
- Or, cut and paste instructions in bullet point form. If they are too lengthy and wordy rewrite them in bullet form. Writing them down will also help you remember them.
- Review your progress every few days, optimally with a coach, school access centre advisor, or study partner. This will help you assess where you are within the timeline and allow you to increase your efforts if required. A parent can assist if other resources are not accessible.
- Find someone responsible to help keep you accountable, a coach, advisor, study partner or if need be a parent. This will help to prevent procrastination.
- When internal distracting thoughts and worries occur write them down and then let them go while working. This will decrease your urge to dwell on them.
- Allow movement breaks and use things that allow for movement while working such as an exercise ball for a chair, standing desk, seat that allows for movement or fidget toys if hyperactivity is an issue.
- Use aerobic exercise prior to starting work to increase focus.
- Make sure that your sleep schedule is as consistent as possible.
- Put a web site blocker (ex. Cold Turkey) in place so computers automatically shut down at a defined time.
- Reward yourself with a break or activity that you enjoy after you have completed work.

Tips for reading and note taking

- Highlight in different colours as you read to categorize information.
- Doodle notes in the margin when you come to an important point.
- Use your phone or other recorder to make audio notes.
- Try standing while you read.
- Read out loud to yourself with enthusiasm.
- Being able to listen to online content and re-wind and repeat when required will help you take notes.

Sources used in this document:

https://www.verywellmind.com/college-students-with-adhd-20820

Resource List for Transitioning to the Post-Secondary Environment

If you are new to ADHD, or think you may have ADHD but are not sure, start with reading information on our website here under the ADHD and Education tab.

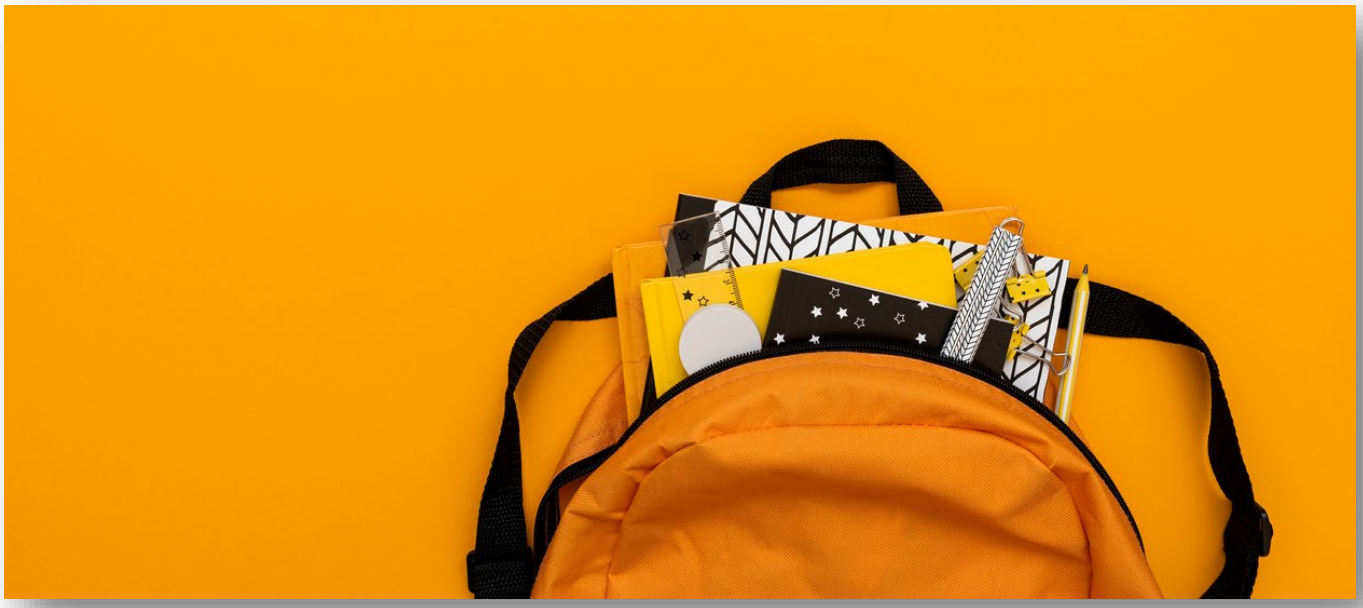
Access CADDAC's Five Part Video Series featuring teens and young adults living with ADHD sharing their insights and strategies.

Access Understanding ADHD as a Disability in the Post-Secondary Environment to understand your rights to post-secondary accommodations.

For a detailed list of appropriate accommodations for the PS student linked to specific impairments please access Post-secondary Accommodations.

Share these instructions on how to use the above chart when writing a report for a post-secondary institution requesting accommodations with your medical professional Chart Instructions

For a list of documentation requirements for a selection of university and colleges (50) across Canada please access Post-Secondary Requirements Chart



CADDAC

CENTRE FOR ADHD AWARENESS, CANADA

STAY IN TOUCH

Phone: (416) 637-8584
E-mail: info@CADDAC.ca
Website: www.caddac.ca

@centreforadhd **@adhdvid**

MAKE A DONATION

www.caddac.ca/ways-to-give
Charitable Number: 828460329RR0001

CC BY NC ND