



## Some Tips for High School Students

-- *Leslie E. Packer, PhD*

Feel like everyone's always yelling at you for not doing what you're supposed to be doing? Look, this is your life, and you need to get in charge of it if you don't want everyone making decisions for you. I teach parents how to advocate for their kids, but I also teach kids how to advocate for themselves, and part of advocating for yourself is taking as much responsibility for yourself as you can. That means not making excuses or trying to use something as a cop-out. It means speaking up and telling people when you really do need help or advice. It also means recognizing that even if something is from your "disability," you still have to live in this world and you need to take steps so that your problem doesn't become everyone else's problem.

Here are some things you might want to try if you're having these problems:

★ Do you have tics (movements or sounds) that are really bothering other people? Some kids with tics report that they can learn to substitute or modify tics that are really embarrassing or problematic. The "trick" is to find something that you can use that will 'satisfy' the urge or "itch." One boy I worked with had a biting tic – and yes, he got thrown out of school for it. But he experimented around and found that biting on a piece of cardboard was almost as good as biting another person, and he started carrying a piece of cardboard around in his pocket in case he ever felt the need to bite.

★ Having trouble keeping your concentration on what the teacher is saying? You might try a trick I used to use -- I used to occasionally try to focus on seeing if I could "lip read" what the teacher was saying (no, I don't have any attention problems, but I'd just get bored as heck in school sometimes). By forcing myself to concentrate on the teacher's mouth, I'd be able to keep myself more "on task" during the really boring stuff. Don't ask me what the really boring stuff was, because I'd just hate to hurt any of my old social studies teachers' feelings. 😊

★ Another good "trick" you can use is to try looking at your teacher a lot, and even better, nod your head occasionally as if agreeing with him or her. It will fool them into thinking that you are actually paying attention, they'll smile, and you might even begin to pay attention for real. And always, always, always thank them if they correct you for a mistake or try to suggest that you do something a bit differently. It'll make them think you actually care about doing better work.

★ If you don't understand the task or instructions, ask the teacher politely if s/he can explain the assignment again, but using different words or examples. If you're really confused and the teacher hasn't shown you an example of what the finished product should look like, ask the teacher to show you what the project should look like at the end.

★ OK, your mind drifted and you suddenly noticed that you “lost the plot.” Now what? If you don’t say anything, you’ll fall further behind, right? This is one of those times when you should flash your teacher your most adorable grin and say “I’m sorry, my brain went on vacation without me and I lost the plot. Can you please repeat what you just said?” Of course, if you do that too often, it won’t work, so do try to keep yourself focused as best as you can. One trick I used to use was to try to figure out really good questions to ask the teacher about the subject. To do that, I had to actually listen to the teacher, so that strategy got me through a lot of really boring social... um... lectures. If you can actually come up with a good question or idea, even better!

★ Have trouble memorizing stuff? Try to develop memory tricks called “mnemonics.” A well-known mnemonic is the one used to remember the notes that are on the lines of the treble clef. The notes are E, G, B, D, and F, and the mnemonic is “Every Good Boy Does Fine” or “Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge.” When you create your own mnemonics, try to use humor and weird imagery to increase your chances of remembering it. The more outlandish, the better!

★ Try to use your teacher’s name at least once a day. It will make them think you really know who they are. They like that. If you really want to fool your teacher into thinking you’re a good student, show up on time or even early for class, have your papers and books ready for work, and turn in your assignments on time or when they ask you to. That’s a “biggie” with them.

★ Write things down or record them in some way. It doesn’t really matter whether you record them by hand, tape record them, or keyboard them. The important thing is for you to keep track of your responsibilities. When you’re 35, do you really think someone’s going to run around after you gently telling you that you forgot to meet your work obligations or that you forgot to send in your tax return? Heck, no! Start getting some good habits now.

★ Can’t remember to go the school nurse to take your medication? How about asking your folks to get you a programmable wrist watch that has alarms you can set to remind yourself of important daily times and routines?

★ Having trouble studying? Find a study pal. It will be easier for you to stay “on task” if you are working with someone else. And for heaven’s sake, stop telling yourself that you can get it all done the night before when that strategy hasn’t worked for you since you hit 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Leave yourself more time than you really think you need.

★ You know how your folks always tell you to turn off the music? Well, it turns out that there is research showing that students with ADHD may do better if there IS music on. So if you’re struggling with your math homework, maybe you should put on that CD for background if you want -- as long as you don’t let yourself stop working to start watching the tube or dancing around the room constantly.

★ If your handwriting looks like something that cat dragged in and then back out, can you find a word processor to use? Neatness actually does make a difference in grades, and teachers are only human -- they will look more favorably on neatly typed work than on something that they can’t read. Yes, I know you figured that if you were intentionally messy, they’d never figure out if you spelled that word correctly or not, but you’re better off typing the assignment on a word processor and using the spelling checker.

★ Having trouble sticking with a homework assignment? OK, switch assignments. That’s right -- don’t just stop working to “take a break,” because we BOTH know that you’re not going to find it easy to come back. Just switch to another assignment for a while. Switch as often as you need, but keep yourself working on something. You’ll be amazed at how much quicker your work will get done.