

# My Whirling Twirling Motor: An Educator's Guide

## About the Guide

Author Merriam Sarcia Saunders, a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and ADHD-CCSP (Certified Clinical Services Provider with intensive and specialized training in AD/HD, Autism and Coaching for AD/HD), walks us through using her picture book **My Whirling Twirling Motor** in a school setting and answers questions like:

- How do we build community-wide empathy for our students with ADHD?
- How, as classroom teachers, do we accommodate and integrate the behavior and experience of these students?
- As school librarians, how do we create an environment that welcomes and engages a student with ADHD?

## About the Book

**My Whirling Twirling Motor**

By Merriam Sarcia Saunders

Illustrated by Tammie Lyon

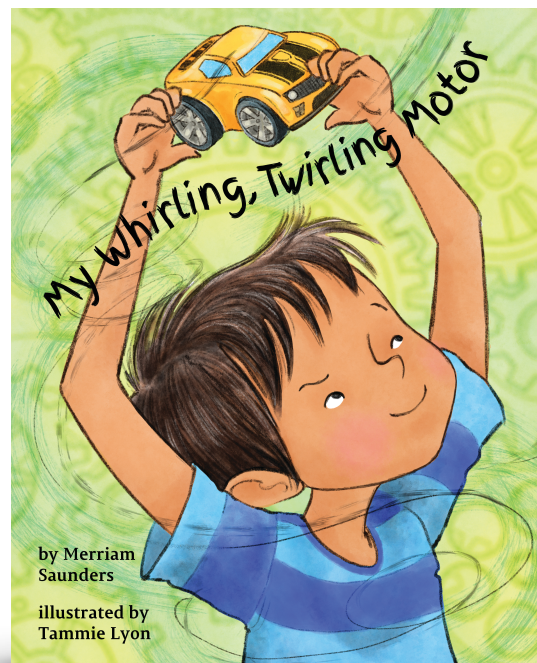
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Psychological Association

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Age Range: 4 - 8 Years

Charlie feels like he has a whirling, twirling motor running inside him all the time and sometimes he just can't settle. When his mom wants to talk to him, he figures he's in trouble...but she has a surprise for him instead! Includes a Note to Parents, Caregivers, and Teachers with more information on ADHD, behavior management, and helping children focus on the positives.



"The story reinforces that his being overactive and impulsive is not intentional and does not make him bad....A must-have for young readers with any type of behavior difficulty and their caregivers."

—*School Library Journal*, **Starred Review**

"A practical, sensitive depiction of a child with ADHD facing challenges and receiving affirmation...Compassionate, helpful, and wise."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"This story can help children with ADHD understand that while they cannot always control their whirling, twirling motors, they can be successful every day. Parents, caregivers and teachers will find the author's notes valuable as they navigate how to reinforce the positive and catch kids doing something good."

—Jodi Sleeper-Triplett, MCC, SCAC, BCC, Founder & CEO, JST Coaching & Training

This guide explores the picture book **My Whirling Twirling Motor** by Merriam Sarcia Saunders and illustrated by Tammie Lyon (Magination Press/APA ). Images © Tammie Lyon. Page 1

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## Engaging the Whole Classroom with the Book

### Pre-Read Discussion

Although **My Whirling Twirling Motor** focuses on a child with behavioral issues frequently seen with ADHD, many of the behaviors are those with which most children can readily identify, or at least, empathize. So, before reading the book, it may be useful to frame a class discussion by asking some of the following questions:

- *Do you sometimes get in trouble for things you wish you hadn't done?*
- *How does it feel when you get in trouble?*
- *How does it feel when other people get in trouble? How does it feel when your teacher, parent or friend tell you that you did something well? Which one feels better?*
- *Which one would make you work harder to do well?*



### Read Aloud Discussion

Stopping to ask these questions during the read aloud, or going back to the points after an initial read, can help create empathy for the experience of another and also help children who struggle with these behaviors to understand they are not alone.

Stop at a point where Charlie has done something “wrong” and ask the students if they have had similar experiences. Some opportunities might be when he:

- Accidentally hurts Nicole (Spread 3) or forgets his lunch or homework (Spread 4).  
*Have these things ever happened to you? How did you feel?*
- Runs around the house (Spread 5).  
*Does anyone else sometimes feels they have to run to get their energy out?*
- Focused on his blocks (Spread 6).  
*Does anyone else sometimes not hear their parents calling them?*

### Discussion Post-Read

Here are some additional questions to explore with students:

- *How do you think Charlie felt about his day, up until the point he went to bed?*
- *How did you feel seeing him do things wrong all day?*
- *Charlie apologized to Nicole for throwing the ball at her. Do you think that was enough?*



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- What did you feel when Charlie's mom told him about everything he did right, instead? Were you surprised? How do you think Charlie felt?
- Why do you think Charlie is happy his parents think he's wonderful, even though he did things wrong all day? Should they think he's wonderful?
- Do you think if we know someone is watching out for the things we do right, that it will make us try harder to do things right?

## Integrated the Book into Ongoing Practices

When Charlie's mother makes a "Wonderful List" for her son, his perception of his day and himself is transformed. Here are some ways you could integrate a Wonderful List into your classroom:

- Students can make their own Wonderful List by folding and stapling paper sideways, and decorating the cover to bring home for parents or leave in class for the teacher.
- Students can make a one-time Wonderful List by writing down the things they have done right that day.
- For pre-writing/reading Students, they can share their Wonderful's aloud.
- Students/teachers can also make Class Wonderful Lists for things the class does well collectively.
- Students can be encouraged to praise each other. Draw names from a hat for each child to write/say something wonderful about their partner.
- Each day, one student can be Wonderful with the class and teacher taking a few minutes at the end of the day to name ways that child inspired others, be it by work, play, good attitude, energy, persistence etc.



## Resources for Educators on ADHD

A student with ADHD will benefit greatly from accommodations in a 504 Plan or a customized Behavior Modification Plan focused on reinforcing wanted behavior. How, though, might an educator best prepare themselves to teach an ADHD student?

- Guide: *There's One in Every Class: Educator Tips for ADHD and Other Behaviors* by LMFT Merriam Sarcia Saunders  
<http://www.curiouscitydpw.com/TBD>

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- Articles: ADDitude Magazine's free resources for educators:  
<https://www.additudemag.com/category/parenting-adhd-kids/school-learning/for-teachers/>
- Video: *How to ADHD* Youtube Chanel:  
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-nPM1\\_kSZf91ZGkcg9\\_95Q](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-nPM1_kSZf91ZGkcg9_95Q)
- Educator Trainings: CHADD (Children and Adults with ADD):  
<https://chadd.org/teacher-to-teacher/>
- Educator Trainings: Author and LMFT Merriam Sarcia Saunders is available to do customized, in-service staff trainings by Skype for a very reasonable fee.  
<https://www.merriamsaunders.com>

## Productive Partnerships with the Parents of an ADHD Student

Here are some best practices for working with families:

- There is frequently a genetic component to ADHD, so be aware that your student's parent may also be struggling with organization, planning and time management.
- Parents of children who struggle with behavioral issues are often embarrassed, feel shame and a sense of failure regarding their parenting abilities. Being mindful of their sensitivities can go a long way toward developing a collaborative relationship.
- Consider frequent emails designed to inform on progress, not to simply communicate the difficulties or setbacks.
- Communicate what you see working; parents generally know all too well what is not working.
- Try not to complain or pull for help from the parent for behaviors you see in the classroom. Since they are likely impulsive, there is nothing the parent can say to the child at home that will thwart the in-class behavior later, and this will just leave the parent feeling helpless.
- Be aware that for most parents of children with ADHD, the only way homework gets done is if they hover and help. Give the parent permission to step back and allow the child to accomplish as much homework as he can on his own, with no consequence for the amount undone. This can give you a better picture of his possible need for shortened assignments and help immensely with the parent/child home dynamic.



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## Librarians Engagement with an ADHD Student

If you are a librarian or other specialty educator who sees a classroom with ADHD students occasionally, how do you balance the classroom engagement so that everyone is seen and heard?



- If you see a class occasionally, there are some benefits and difficulties if a student has ADHD. If the student likes the time with you, then you are a shiny new object that creates dopamine in the brain and helps him to pay attention.  
If he finds you boring (sorry!), you will likely have many behaviors to deal with.
- Students with ADHD benefit greatly from structure, routines and managed expectations. To the best of your ability, structure your time with the students so that they know what to expect each time they see you. Do you greet them the same way? Do they sit in the same spots, do one thing first each time, use the same materials? The more routine, the easier it will be for the ADHD student to organize his behavior around it.
- If one child is misbehaving frequently, try not to call that child out by name. Instead, remind the whole class of expected behavior and alternate choices available.
- Enlist the child with behavior issues as an assistant. Busy hands have less opportunity to falter.
- After class, consider asking the student directly if there is something he needs that will help him to focus/behave, so he sees you are on his side and are a resource.

## A Novel Mind

Interested in other books that help engage students around issues of mental health? Author and LMFT Merriam Sarcia Saunders founded a Novel Mind ([www.anovelmind.com](http://www.anovelmind.com)), a free, extensive database of 500+ children's picture books, middle grade and young adult works of fiction that portray a mental health issue.

That database is searchable by mental health issue, genre, category, age group, publisher, year, and whether the mental health issue is of the main or secondary character. The database can be used to find books for a child struggling with an issue or to create empathy in others regarding that issue.