

Parent Guide To Help Children With ADD-ADHD

Tuesday, 13 July 2010

Last Updated Wednesday, 14 July 2010

ADD/ADHD Parenting Tips Helping Children with Attention Deficit Disorder

Life with a child with ADD/ADHD can be frustrating and overwhelming, but as a parent there is actually a lot you can do. The symptoms of ADD/ADHD can be controlled and reduced. You have the power to help your child meet his or her daily challenges and channel his or her energy into positive arenas—and at the same time bring greater calm and order to your family home.

Â

Children with ADD/ADHD can and do succeed. The earlier and more consistently you address your child's problems, the more likely their success.

{mospagebreak title=Helping your child with ADD/ADHD}What you need to know

Â

Children with ADD/ADHD generally have deficits in executive function: the ability to think and plan ahead, organize, control impulses, and complete tasks. That means you need to take over as the executive, providing extra guidance while your child gradually acquires executive skills of his or her own.

Although the symptoms of ADD/ADHD can be nothing short of exasperating, it's important to remember that the child with ADD/ADHD who is ignoring, annoying, or embarrassing you is not acting willfully. Kids with attention deficit disorder want to sit quietly; they want to make their rooms tidy and organized; they want to do everything their parent says to do—but they don't know how to make these things happen. Having ADD/ADHD can be just as frustrating as dealing with someone who has it. If you keep this in mind, it will be a lot easier to respond to your child in positive, supportive ways. With patience, compassion, and plenty of support, you can manage childhood attention deficit disorder while enjoying a stable, happy home.

Â

{mospagebreak title=Stay positive and healthy yourself}

Â

As a parent, you set the stage for your child's emotional and physical health. You have control over many of the factors that can positively influence the symptoms of your child's disorder.

The power of a positive attitude

Â

Your best assets for helping your child meet the challenges of ADD/ADHD are your positive attitude and common sense. When you are calm and focused, you are more likely to be able to connect with your child, helping him or her to be calm and focused as well.

-

Keep things in perspective.

Remember that your child's behavior is related to a disorder. Most of the time it is not intentional. Hold on to your sense of humor. What's embarrassing today may be a funny family story ten years from now.

-

Don't sweat the small stuff and be willing to make some compromises.

One chore left undone isn't a big deal when your child has completed two others plus the day's homework. If you are a

perfectionist, you will not only be constantly dissatisfied but also create impossible expectations for your ADD/ADHD child.

-

Believe in your child.

Think about or make a written list of everything that is positive, valuable, and unique about your child. Trust that your child can learn, change, mature, and succeed. Make thinking about this trust a daily task as you brush your teeth or make your coffee.

When you take care of yourself, you're better able to take care of your child

Â

As your child's role model and most important source of strength, it is vital that you live healthfully. If you are overtired or have simply run out of patience, you risk losing sight of the structure and support you have so carefully set up for your child with attention deficit disorder.

-

Take care of yourself.

Eat right, exercise, and find ways to reduce stress, whether it means taking a nightly bath or practicing morning meditation. If you do get sick, acknowledge it and get help.

-

Seek support.

One of the most important things to remember in rearing a child with ADD/ADHD is that you don't have to do it alone. Talk to your child's doctors, therapists, and teachers. Join an organized support group for parents of children with ADHD. These groups offer a forum for giving and receiving advice, and provide a safe place to vent feelings and share experiences.

-

Take breaks.

Friends and family can be wonderful about offering to babysit, but you may feel guilty about leaving your child, or leaving the volunteer with a child with ADD/ADHD. Next time, accept their offer and discuss honestly how best to handle your child.

Â

{mospagebreak title=Establish structure and stick to it}

Â

Children with ADHD are more likely to succeed in completing tasks when the tasks occur in predictable patterns and in predictable places. Your job is to create and sustain structure in your home, so that your child knows what to expect and what they are expected to do.

Tip for helping your child with ADD/ADHD stay focused and organized

-

Follow a routine.

It is important to set a time and a place for everything to help the child with ADD/ADHD understand and meet expectations. Establish simple and predictable rituals for meals, homework, play, and bed. Have your child lay out clothes for the next morning before going to bed, and make sure whatever he or she needs to take to school is in a special place, ready to grab.

-

Use clocks and timers.

Consider placing clocks throughout the house, with a big one in your child's bedroom. Allow enough time for what your child needs to do, such as homework or getting ready in the morning. Use a timer for homework or transitional times, such as between finishing up play and getting ready for bed.

Simplify your child's schedule.

It is good to avoid idle time, but a child with ADHD may become more distracted and "wound up" if there are many after-school activities. You may need to make adjustments to the child's after-school commitments based on the individual child's abilities and the demands of particular activities.

Create a quiet place.

Make sure your child has a quiet, private space of his or her own. A porch or bedroom can work well too, as long as it's not the same place as the child goes for a time-out.

Do your best to be neat and organized.

Set up your home in an organized way. Make sure your child knows that everything has its place. Role model neatness and organization as much as possible.

Avoid problems by keeping kids with attention deficit disorder busy!

Â

For kids with ADD/ADHD, idle time may exacerbate their symptoms and create chaos in your home. It is important to keep a child with ADD/ADHD busy without piling on so many that the child becomes overwhelmed. Sign your child up for a sport, art class, or music. At home, organize simple activities that fill up your child's time. These can be tasks like helping you cook, playing a board game with a sibling, or drawing a picture. Try not to use the television or computer/video games as time-fillers. Unfortunately, TV and video games are increasingly violent in nature and may only increase your child's symptoms of ADD/ADHD.

Â

{mospagebreak title=Set clear expectations and rules}

Â

Children with ADHD need consistent rules that they can understand and follow. Make the rules of behavior for the family simple and clear. Write down the rules and hang them up in a place where your child can easily read them.

Children with ADD/ADHD respond particularly well to organized systems of rewards and consequences. It's important to explain what will happen when the rules are obeyed and when they are broken. Finally, stick to your system: follow through each and every time with a reward or a consequence.

Don't forget praise and positive reinforcement

As you establish these consistent structures, keep in mind that children with ADHD often receive criticism. Be on the lookout for good behavior and praise it. Praise is especially important for children who have ADD/ADHD because they typically get so little of it. These children receive correction, remediation, and complaints about their behavior but little positive reinforcement.

A smile, positive comment, or other reward from you can improve the attention, concentration and impulse control of your child with ADD/ADHD. Do your best to focus on giving positive praise for appropriate behavior and task completion, while giving as few negative responses as possible to inappropriate behavior or poor task performance. Reward your child for small achievements that you might take for granted in another child.

Â Â Kids with ADD/ADHD: Using Rewards and Consequences

Â RewardsÂ Â Â

Â Consequences

- Reward your child with privileges, praise, or activities, rather than with food or toys
- Change rewards frequently. Kids with ADD/ADHD get bored if the reward is always the same.

- Make a chart with points or stars awarded for good behavior, so your child has a visual reminder of his or her successes.
 - Immediate rewards work better than the promise of a future reward, but small rewards leading to a big one can also work.
 - Always follow through with a reward.
-
- Consequences should be spelled out in advance and occur immediately after your child has misbehaved.
 - Try time-outs and the removal of privileges as consequences for misbehavior.
 - Remove your child from situations and environments that trigger inappropriate behavior.
 - When your child misbehaves, ask what he or she could have done instead. Then have your child demonstrate it.
 - Always follow through with a consequence.

^

{mospagebreak title=Encourage movement and sleep}

^

Physical activity can help your child with ADD/ADHD

^

Children with ADD/ADHD often have energy to burn. Organized sports and other physical activities can help them get their energy out in healthy ways and focus their attention on specific movements and skills. The benefits of physical activity are endless: it improves concentration, decreases depression and anxiety, and promotes brain growth. Most importantly for children with attention deficits, however, is the fact that exercise leads to better sleep, which in turn can also reduce the symptoms of ADD/ADHD.

^

Find a sport that your child will enjoy and that suits his or her strengths. For example, sports such as softball that involve a lot of "down time" are not the best fit for children with attention problems. Individual or team sports like basketball and hockey that require constant motion are better options. Children with ADD/ADHD may also benefit from martial arts training, taekwondo, or yoga, which enhance mental control as they work out the body.

Better sleep can help your child with ADD/ADHD

^

Insufficient sleep can make anyone less attentive, but it can be highly detrimental for children with attention deficit disorder. Kids with ADD/ADHD need at least as much sleep as their unaffected peers, but tend not to get what they need. Their attention problems can lead to overstimulation and trouble falling asleep. A consistent, early bedtime is the most helpful strategy to combat this problem, but it may not completely solve it.

^

Help your child get better rest by trying out one or more of the following strategies:

-

Decrease television time and increase your child's activities and exercise levels during the day.

-

Eliminate caffeine from your child's diet. Cola drinks and chocolate have significant caffeine.

-

Create a buffer time to lower down the activity level for an hour or so before bedtime. Find quieter activities such as coloring, reading or playing quietly.

-

Spend ten minutes cuddling with your child. This will build a sense of love and security as well as provide a time to calm down.

-

Use lavender or other aromas in your child's room. The scent may help to calm your child.

-

Use relaxation tapes as background noise for your child when falling asleep. There are many varieties available including nature sounds and calming music. Children with ADHD often find "white noise" to be calming. You can create white noise by putting a radio on static or running an electric fan.

^

The benefits of "green time" in kids with attention deficit disorder

Research shows that children with ADD/ADHD benefit from spending time in nature. Kids experience a greater reduction of symptoms of ADD/ADHD when they play in a park full of grass and trees than on a concrete playground. Take note of this promising and simple approach to managing ADD/ADHD. Even in cities, most families have access to parks and other natural settings. Join your children in this "green time" - you'll also get a much-deserved breath of fresh air for ^

{mospagebreak title=Help your child eat right}

^

Diet is not a direct cause of ADHD, but food can and does affect your child's mental state, which in turn seems to affect behavior. Monitoring and modifying what, when, and how much your child eats can help decrease the symptoms of ADD/ADHD.

All children benefit from fresh foods, regular meal times, and staying away from junk food. These tenets are especially true for children with ADD/ADHD, whose impulsiveness and distractedness can lead to missed meals, disordered eating, and overeating.

^

Eating small meals more often may help your child's ADD/ADHD

^

Children with ADD/ADHD are notorious for not eating regularly. Without parental guidance, these children might not eat for hours and then binge on whatever is around. The result of this pattern can be devastating to the child's physical and emotional health. Prevent this pattern by scheduling regular healthy meals or snacks for your child no more than three hours apart. Physically, the child with ADD/ADHD needs a regular intake of healthy food; mentally, meal times are a necessary break and a scheduled rhythm to the day.

-

Get rid of the junk foods in your home.

-

Put fatty and sugary foods off-limits when eating out.Â

-

Turn off television shows riddled with junk-food ads.

-

Give your child a daily vitamin-and-mineral supplement.

Â

Nutrition Basics for Kids

Â

Whether or not your child has ADD/ADHD, he or she will benefit from eating a nutritious diet. Most children eat far too many unhealthy foodsâ€”from burgers and fries to ice cream and soft drinks. Few get the vitamins, minerals, and fiber, they need. It is important to your childâ€™s current and future health to eat a healthful diet, and that may mean that you need to improve your own diet to set a good example.

Read: Nutrition for Children and Teens: Helping Your Kids Develop Healthy Eating Habits

Â

{mospagebreak title=Teach your child how to make friends}

Â

Children with attention deficit disorder often have difficulty with simple social interactions. They may struggle with reading social cues, talk too much, interrupt frequently, or come off as aggressive or â€œtoo intense.â€• Their relative emotional immaturity can make them stand out among children their own age, and make them targets for unfriendly teasing.

Keep in mind that many kids with ADHD are exceptionally intelligent and creative and will eventually figure out for themselves how to get along with others and spot people who arenâ€™t appropriate as friends. Moreover, personality traits that might exasperate parents and teachers may come across to some people as quirky and charming.

Helping a child with attention deficit disorder improve social skills

Â

It's hard for children with ADHD to learn social skills and social rules. You can help your child with ADD/ADHD become a better listener, learn to read peopleâ€™s faces and body language, and interact more smoothly in groups.

-

Speak gently but honestly with your child about his or her challenges and how to make changes.

-

Role-play various social scenarios with your child. Trade roles often and try to make it fun.Â

-

Be careful to select playmates for your child with similar language and physical skills.Â

-

Invite only one or two friends at a time at first. Watch them closely while they play.Â

-

Have a zero tolerance policy for hitting, pushing and yelling in your house or yard.Â

-

Make time and space for your child to play, and reward good play behaviors often.

Â

{mospagebreak title=Related links}

Â

-

ADD / ADHD Treatment - Finding Treatments That Work for Children and Adult

-

ADD / ADHD in School - Helping Children with ADHD Succeed at School

-

ADD / ADHD Medications: Are ADHD Drugs Right for You or Your Child?Â

-

ADD / ADHD Tests and Diagnosis: Diagnosing ADHD in Children and AdultsÂ

-

ADD / ADHD in Children: Recognizing the Signs and Symptoms

Â

Related links for parenting a child with ADD/ADHD

Â

ADD/ADHD parenting advice

-

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (PDF) â€“ Covers most aspects of ADD/ADHD. See pages 10-14 for behavioral modification strategies that involve parents. (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities)

-

Parenting a Child with AD/HD â€“ Succinct but comprehensive article followed by a long reading list. (National Resource Center on AD/HD)

Â

Behavioral strategies for dealing with ADD/ADHD in children

Â

-

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder : Behavioral Management â€“ Excellent article that discusses not only establishing rules and rewards and improving concentration but also strategies for dealing with aggression and where to set priorities. (University of Maryland Medical Center)

-

Non-Medical Interventions for ADHD â€“ Written by a physician, this down-to-earth article provides a lot of practical advice for parents, with a refreshing recognition that yes, doing everything you need to do to help a child with ADD/ADHD is tough. (Attention Deficit Disorder Resources)

-

How to Parent Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Parenting 101 â€“ Although this commercial site is selling its own program and books, it offers an enormous amount of clear, well-described guidelines and strategies for parents of children with ADD/ADHD. Pull down the Parenting menu for advice on everything from sibling rivalry to

choosing a babysitter. (Child Development Institute)

Â

More strategies for dealing with childhood ADD/ADHD

Â

-

Helping Your Teen with ADD (ADHD) Prepare for Independence “Excellent, age-specific tips for helping your teenager handle money, chores, driving, and schoolwork; manage their time; and take responsibility for their health. (ADDvance.com)

-

ADHD and Social Interactions “Describes how parents can help their children with ADD/ADHD recognize emotional facial expressions and social cues more easily. (4ADHD)

Â