



Parenting a Child with ADHD

Often, when a child is diagnosed with AD/HD, the first response from his or her concerned parent is, "What can I do about it?" Although life with your child may at times seem challenging, it is important to remember that children with AD/HD can and do succeed. As a parent, you can help create home and school environments that improve your child's chances for success. The earlier you address your child's problems, the more likely you will be able to prevent school and social failure and associated problems such as underachievement and poor self-esteem that may lead to delinquency or drug and alcohol abuse.

Early intervention holds the key to positive outcomes for your child. Here are some ways to get started:

- **Don't waste limited emotional energy on self-blame.** AD/HD is the result of dysfunction in certain areas of the brain and in the majority of cases is inherited. It is *not* caused by poor parenting or a chaotic home environment, although the home environment can make the symptoms of AD/HD worse.
- **Learn** all you can about AD/HD. There is a great deal of information available on the diagnosis and treatment of AD/HD. It is up to you to act as a good consumer and learn to distinguish the "accurate" information from the "inaccurate." But how can you sort out what will be useful and what will not? In general, it is good to be wary about ads claiming to cure AD/HD. Currently, there is no cure for AD/HD, but you can take positive steps to decrease its impact.
- **Make sure your child has a comprehensive assessment.** To complete the diagnostic process, make sure your child has a comprehensive assessment that includes medical, educational, and psychological evaluations and that other disorders that either mimic or commonly occur with AD/HD have been considered and ruled out.

How to Ensure Your Child's Success at School

- **Become an effective case manager.** Keep a record of all information about your child. This includes copies of all evaluations and documents from any meetings concerning your child. You might also include information about AD/HD, a record of your child's prior treatments and placements, and information for the professionals who have worked with your child.
- **Take an active role in forming a team that understands AD/HD and wants to help your child.** Meetings at your child's school should be attended by the principal's designee, as well as a special educator and a classroom teacher that knows your child. You, however, have the right to request input at these meetings from others that understand AD/HD or your child's special needs. These include your child's physician, the school psychologist, and the nurse or guidance counselor from your child's school. If you have consulted other professionals, such as a psychiatrist, educational advocate or behavior management specialist, the useful information they have provided should also be made available at these meetings. A thorough understanding of your child's strengths and weaknesses and how AD/HD affects him will help you and members of this team go on to develop an appropriate and effective program that takes into account his or her AD/HD.
- **Learn all you can about AD/HD and your child's educational rights.** The more knowledge you have about your child's rights under the two education laws -- the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act -- the better the chance that you will maximize his or her success. Each state has a parent training and information center that can help you learn more about your child's rights (visit www.taalliance.org/centers to find the center in your state).
- **Become your child's best advocate.** You may have to represent or protect your child's best interest in school situations, both academic and behavioral. Become an active part of the team that determines what services and placements your child receives in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504 plan. See *What We Know # 4, "Educational Rights for Children with AD/HD"*, for more information.

How to Make Life at Home Easier

- **Join a support group.** Parents will find additional information, as well as support, by attending local CHADD meetings where available. You can find the nearest chapter to your home on www.chadd.org chapter locator.
- **Seek professional help.** Ask for help from professionals, particularly if you are feeling depressed, frustrated and exhausted. Helping yourself feel less stressed will benefit your child as well.
- **Work together to support your child.** It is important that all of the adults that care for your child (parents, grandparents, relatives, and babysitters) agree on how to approach or handle your child's problem behaviors. Working with a professional, if needed, can help you better understand how to work together to support your child.

- **Learn the tools of successful behavior management.** Parent training will teach you strategies to change behaviors and improve your relationship with your child. Identify parent training classes in your community through your local [parent information and resource center](#) or parent training and information center (www.taalliance.org/centers).
- **Find out if you have AD/HD.** Since AD/HD is generally inherited, many parents of children with AD/HD often discover that they have AD/HD when their child is diagnosed. Parents with AD/HD may need the same types of evaluation and treatment that they seek for their children in order to function at their best. AD/HD in the parent may make the home more chaotic and affect parenting skills.

Parent training will help you learn to:

- **Focus on certain behaviors and provide clear, consistent expectations, directions and limits.** Children with AD/HD need to know exactly what others expect from them. They do not perform well in ambiguous situations that don't specify exactly what is expected and that require they read between the lines. Working with a professional can help you narrow the focus to a few specific behaviors and help you set limits, and consistently follow through.
- **Set up an effective discipline system.** Parents should learn proactive -- not reactive -- discipline methods that teach and reward appropriate behavior and respond to misbehavior with alternatives such as "time out" or loss of privileges.
- **Help your child learn from his or her mistakes.** At times, negative consequences will arise naturally out of a child's behavior. However, children with AD/HD have difficulty making the connection between their behaviors and these consequences. Parents can help their child with AD/HD make these connections and learn from his or her mistakes.

How to Boost Your Child's Confidence

- **Tell your child that you love and support him or her unconditionally.** There will be days when you may not believe this yourself. Those will be the days when it is even more important that you acknowledge the difficulties your child faces on a daily basis, and express your love. Let your child know that you will get through the smooth and rough times together.
- **Assist your child with social skills.** Children with AD/HD may be rejected by peers because of hyperactive, impulsive or aggressive behaviors. Parent training can help you learn how to assist your child in making friends and learning to work cooperatively with others.
- **Identify your child's strengths.** Many children with AD/HD have strengths in certain areas such as art, athletics, computers or mechanical ability. Build upon these strengths, so that your child will have a sense of pride and accomplishment. Make sure that your child has the opportunity to be successful while pursuing these activities and that his strengths are not undermined by untreated AD/HD. Also, avoid, as much as possible, targeting these activities as contingencies for good behavior or withholding them, as a form of punishment, when your child with AD/HD misbehaves.
- **Set aside a daily "special time" for your child.** Constant negative feedback can erode a child's self-esteem. A "special time," whether it's an outing, playing games, or just time spent in positive interaction, can help fortify your child against assaults to self-worth.

Suggested Reading

For Help Parenting Your Children and Teens

- Barkley, Russell (2000). *Taking Charge of ADHD: The Complete Authoritative Guide for Parents* (Revised Edition). New York: Guilford Press.
- Brooks, Robert and Goldstein, Sam (2001). *Raising Resilient Children: Fostering Strength, Hope, and Optimism in Your Child*. Lincolnwood, IL: Contemporary Books.
- Copeland, Edna and Love, Valerie (1995). *Attention, Please! A Comprehensive Guide for Successfully Parenting Children with Attention Deficit Disorders and Hyperactivity*. Plantation, FL: Specialty Press.
- Dishion, Thomas J. and Patterson, Scot G. (1996). *Preventive Parenting with Love, Encouragement, and Limits: The Preschool Years*. Eugene, OR: Castalia Publishing Co.
- Edwards, C. Drew (1999). *How to Handle a Hard-To-Handle Kid: A Parents' Guide to Understanding and Changing Problem Behaviors*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.
- Flick, Grad (1996). *Power Parenting for Children with ADD/ADHD: A Practical Parent's Guide for Managing Difficult Behaviors*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Forgatch, Gerald R. and Forgatch, Marion S. (2005). *Parents and Adolescents Living Together, Part 1: The Basics*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.
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- Heininger, Janet E. and Weiss, Sharon (2001). *From Chaos to Calm: Effective Parenting of Challenging Children with ADHD and Other Behavioral Problems*. New York, NY: Perigee Books.
- Monastra, Vincent (2004). *Parenting Children with ADHD: 10 Lessons That Medicine Cannot Teach*. Washington, DC: Magination Press.
- Phelan, Thomas (2003). *1-2-3 Magic: Training your child to do what you want!* (Third Edition) Glen Ellyn, IL: ParentMagic Inc.
- Parker, Harvey (1999). *The ADD Hyperactivity Workbook for Parents, Teachers, and Kids* (Third Edition) Plantation, FL: Silver,