

How Can I Help My Child with ADHD?

From Reading & Other Learning Disabilities

A Blog by Dr. Gary G. Brannigan and Dr. Howard Margolis

Parents of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) want to know how to help their children, how to make home life calmer, and if possible, more satisfying and happier. Although no one solution will prevent or solve all problems and what works for one family will not work for all, parents of children with ADHD can usually help their children, and by extension, improve home life. To help parents help their children with ADHD, the National Institute of Mental Health offers these suggestions:

Children with ADHD need guidance and understanding from their parents and teachers to reach their full potential and to succeed in school. Before a child is diagnosed, frustration, blame, and anger may have built up within a family. Parents and children may need special help to overcome bad feelings. Mental health professionals can educate parents about ADHD and how it impacts a family. They also will help the child and his or her parents develop new skills, attitudes, and ways of relating to each other.

Parenting skills training helps parents learn how to use a system of rewards and consequences to change a child's behavior. Parents are taught to give immediate and positive feedback for behaviors they want to encourage, and ignore or redirect behaviors they want to discourage. In some cases, the use of "time-outs" may be used when the child's behavior gets out of control. In a time-out, the child is removed from the upsetting situation and sits alone for a short time to calm down.

Parents are also encouraged to share a pleasant or relaxing activity with the child, to notice and point out what the child does well, and to praise the child's strengths and abilities. They may also learn to structure situations in more positive ways. For example, they may restrict the number of playmates to one or two, so that their child does not become overstimulated. Or, if the child has trouble completing tasks, parents can help their child divide large tasks into smaller, more manageable steps. Also, parents may benefit from learning stress-management techniques to increase their own ability to deal with frustration, so that they can respond calmly to their child's behavior.

Sometimes, the whole family may need therapy. Therapists can help family members find better ways to handle disruptive behaviors and to encourage behavior changes. Finally, support groups help parents and families connect with others who have similar problems and concerns. Groups often meet regularly to share frustrations and successes, to exchange information about recommended specialists and strategies, and to talk with experts.

Tips to Help Kids Stay Organized and Follow Directions

Schedule. Keep the same routine every day, from wake-up time to bedtime. Include time for homework, outdoor play, and indoor activities. Keep the schedule on the refrigerator or on a bulletin board in the kitchen. Write changes on the schedule as far in advance as possible.

Organize everyday items. Have a place for everything, and keep everything in its place. This includes clothing, backpacks, and toys. Use homework and notebook organizers. Use organizers for school material and supplies. Stress to your child the importance of writing down assignments and bringing home the necessary books.

Be clear and consistent. Children with ADHD need consistent rules they can understand and follow.

Give praise or rewards when rules are followed. Children with ADHD often receive and expect criticism. Look for good behavior, and praise it.

Reference

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Note. For similar columns on learning and behavioral problems, visit www.reading2008.com/blog.