



WHAT WE KNOW

## Parenting a Child with ADHD

Often, when a child is diagnosed with ADHD, 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 ADHD 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.** ADHD 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 ADHD worse.
- **Learn all you can about ADHD.** There is a great deal of information available on the diagnosis and treatment of ADHD. 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 ADHD. Currently, there is no cure for ADHD, 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 ADHD have been considered and ruled out.

Multimodal treatment for children and adolescents with ADHD consists of:

- Parent and child education about diagnosis and treatment;
- Behavior management techniques;
- Medication; and
- School programming and supports.

Treatment should be tailored to the unique needs of each child and family.

## 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 ADHD, a record of your child's prior treatments and placements, and contact information for the professionals who have worked with your child.
- **Take an active role in forming a team that understands ADHD 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 ADHD 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 ADHD 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 ADHD.

- **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 CHADD's Parent to Parent Family Training on ADHD (<http://www.chadd.org/parent2parent>) or the Parent Technical Assistance Center Network (<http://www.parentcenternetwork.org/>).
- **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 CHADD fact sheet #4, "Educational Rights for Children with ADHD," for more information.

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**"The more knowledge you have about your child's rights under two education laws—IDEA and Section 504—the better the chance that you will maximize his or her success."**

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## 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 <http://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 (<http://www.federalresourcecenter.org/frc/TAGuide/welcome.htm>) or parent training and information center (<http://www.taalliance.org/centers>).
- **Find out if you have ADHD.** Since ADHD is generally inherited, many parents of children with ADHD often discover that they have ADHD when their child is diagnosed. Parents with ADHD may need the same types of evaluation and treatment that they seek for their children in order to function at their best. ADHD 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 ADHD 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.

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**“Many children with ADHD have strengths in certain areas such as art, athletics, computers or mechanical ability. Build upon these strengths.”**

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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 ADHD have difficulty making the connection between their behaviors and these consequences. Parents can help their child with ADHD 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 ADHD 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 ADHD 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 ADHD. 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 ADHD 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.

Forgatch, Gerald R. and Forgatch, Marion S. (2005). *Parents and Adolescents Living Together: Part 2: Family Problem Solving*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

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, Illinois: ParentMagic Inc.

Parker, Harvey (1999). *The ADD Hyperactivity Workbook for Parents, Teachers, and Kids* (Third Edition) Plantation, FL: Specialty Press.

Silver, Larry (1999). *Dr. Larry Silver's Advice to Parents on ADHD* (Second Edition). New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.

### **For Help With Your Child's Social Skills**

Cohen, Cathi (2000). *How to Raise Your Child's Social IQ: Stepping Stones to People Skills for Kids*. Washington, DC: Advantage Books.

Frankel, Fred (1996). *Good Friends Are Hard to Find: Helping Your Child Find, Make and Keep Friends*. Glendale, CA: Perspective Publishing.

Sheridan, Susan (1998). *Why Don't They Like Me? Helping Your Child Make and Keep Friends*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

### **For Help Navigating the Educational Maze**

Anderson, Winifred; Chitwood, Stephen; and Hayden, Deidre (1997). *Negotiating the Special Education Maze: A Guide for Parents and Teachers* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House.

Jensen, Peter S. (2004). *Making the System Work for Your Child with ADHD*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Latham, Peter; and Latham, Patricia (1997). *Attention Deficit Disorder and the Law* (Second Edition). Washington, D.C.: JKL Publications.

Weingartner, Paul L (1999). *ADHD Handbook for Families—A Guide to Communicating with Professionals*. Washington, DC: Child and Family Press.

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For further information about ADHD or CHADD, please contact:

**National Resource Center on ADHD  
Children and Adults with  
Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder**  
4601 Presidents Drive, Suite 300  
Lanham, MD 20706  
800-233-4050  
[www.help4adhd.org](http://www.help4adhd.org)

Please also visit the CHADD Web site at  
[www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org).