



Helping Your Child with ADHD

Having a family member with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can be a very frustrating challenge. It can leave family members feeling exhausted, helpless, and confused.

ADHD is not caused by bad parenting or bad children. Some scientists believe that it is caused by an area of the brain that is not active enough in regulating the child's planning and focusing. As a result, it is difficult for a child with ADHD to manage his or her behavior.

Unfortunately there is no simple test for determining if a child has ADHD. A child gets bored easily, quickly loses interest in work, and seems drawn to fun, might have ADHD. If your child has had the following symptoms for at least six months, consider getting a professional evaluation by a doctor or psychologist who has experience dealing with ADHD.

- Impulsiveness, inattentiveness and activity far greater than children the same age.
- Other adults who have contact with your child report that the child has poor self-control or is more active than normal.
- Adults who work with your child report behavior problems.
- More of your time and energy is required to manage the child than other parents invest in children the same age.
- Other children avoid your child because of excessive activity, emotion, or aggression.
- You are worn out from caring for this child.

Of course all people have some of these characteristics but when a child consistently shows more of this behavior than classmates and shows the behavior over a period of time, there is reason to wonder if the child may have ADHD.

The most effective treatment for ADHD has been medication. Stimulants have been effective in helping 50% to 95% of children with ADHD. Any use of medication should be carefully considered with a physician. Of course, in addition to medication, there are important things that parents and teachers can do to help a child with ADHD.

It is easy for people dealing with an child who has ADHD to become frustrated and demand better behavior from the child. But because of the way the brain of the child with ADHD operates, some tasks are unusually difficult for that child. He or she does not anticipate the future very well. However, rather than withdraw expectations from the child, parents and teachers can make consequences for behavior more immediate, more frequent, and more noticeable.

There are many things you can do to help a child with ADHD function better. Provide positive attention for their efforts and accomplishments. Since they thrive on variety, you can provide new tasks and surroundings. It may also be helpful to have bright, cheerful, stimulating educational materials. Since children with ADHD find it difficult to wait for future rewards, offering prompt rewards at the completion of a task may be helpful. They also work best with close supervision and personal attention. Working side by side with your child can not only provide that extra supervision, but can also provide time to be together in positive ways. Instructions may need to be broken into small parts and repeated many times as they accomplish each part. Tasks that require the most attention should generally be done when the child is not tired.

Because of the demands of caring for a child with ADHD, other parts of your life can suffer. Be sure to get emotional support from someone who is understanding. Also make arrangements for vacations. Perhaps your child has grandparents who can watch the child while you take time to recover your energy.

With the extra stresses of ADHD, it is possible for families to become negative and reactive. Yet, with the use of sensible principles, family life can be maintained and you can raise a happy, healthy child.

Applications

Russell Barkley has recommended 14 guides for raising children with ADHD. Review the list below (adapted from his book) and see where you can make improvements in the way your family deals with the child who has ADHD. (More information about his book is listed at the end of this unit.)

1. Give your child more immediate feedback and consequences
2. Give your child more frequent feedback.
3. Use larger and more powerful consequences.
4. Use incentives before punishment.
5. Break assignments into small steps.
6. Provide reminders.
7. Provide a reward closely connected with the task.
8. Make thinking and problem solving more physical - use pictures or symbols.
9. Strive for consistency.
10. Act, don't yak!
11. Plan ahead for problem situations.
12. Remember that your child has a disability. Keep your head.
13. Don't take your child's problems personally.
14. Practice forgiveness.

Dr. Barkley also provides eight steps for better managing the behavior of a child with ADHD. If you have a child with ADHD, you may benefit from studying his suggestions. You may want to buy the book or have your local library purchase it.

Recommended reading

Dr. Barkley's book, *Taking Charge of ADHD*, is the book most highly recommended for parents of ADHD children in *The Authoritative Guide to Self-Help Resources in Mental Health* (2000). It provides information for understanding ADHD and for disputing the myths around ADHD. It also provides many practical helps for helping a child who suffers from ADHD.

Russell A. Barkley, (2000). *Taking charge of ADHD: The complete, authoritative guide for parents*. New York: Guilford Press.

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