

Effective Parenting for a Child with ADHD



To effectively parent a child with ADHD you must be an **effective manager**. You are managing someone with poor self-regulation. Your interactions with your child must be consistent, and predictable. There is a lot of information about ADHD on the internet, not all of it is good. The following information has been gathered from multiple reputable resources to help you effectively parent your child.

The Situation

Imagine this: A kid is on a bicycle speeding downhill. The world is whizzing by. He needs to avoid holes in the pavement. The road is curving. The wind buzzes in his ear, and makes his eyes tear. Suddenly, there are rocks in the road. He goes to put on the brakes—but they don't work!! As the bike speeds downhill, just staying on it seems overwhelming. Too many obstacles call for the rider's attention. So much seems out of control. Who has time to pay attention to the huge truck coming up?

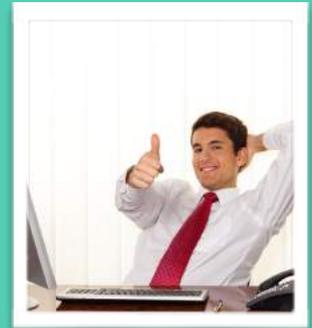
That's the life of someone with ADHD. It all comes from difficulty "Putting on the Brakes".

Executive Function

If we are going to get fancy, ADHD is really a disorder of executive function. Executive function is a relatively new term, often used by researchers, psychologists and other experts to describe the cognitive abilities needed to accomplish daily tasks as well as learning. Executive function is our brain's management system. The brain is a complicated business and it needs an effective manager at the helm if things are going to run smoothly. If your child has ADHD, his/her brain is being run with a manager who takes too many coffee breaks. Parents will often notice this poor management system and step in and assume the role of manager. This works for some time, but for lasting results, parents really should assume the role of coach instead of manager.

Executive function provides the ability to self-regulate and monitor our behaviors through:

- Planning and organization
- Keeping track of time
- Inhibiting impulses and actions at the appropriate time
- Initiating a task without being directed by another person
- Switching between tasks or multi-tasking
- Recalling past knowledge and using it in a current situation
- Evaluating progress and changing course when needed
- Ability to manage current and future- oriented task demands
- Completing tasks or work on schedule
- Ability to monitor one's own performance and to measure it against some standard of what is needed or expected
- Understanding and engaging in group dynamics, including waiting turns during conversations and sharing
- Seeking out additional resources or information or asking for help when needed
- Ability to control emotions



Problems with executive function often become more apparent as children enter elementary school and must learn to complete assignments work in groups with other children and meet demands of schoolwork, homework and additional responsibilities at home. Deficits in executive functioning can cause problems at any age though. Executive function deficits make it difficult for children with ADHD to anticipate difficulties and problems. Lets imagine another scenario: Jack is on a boat, happily fishing. Reeling in the jigging fish while steering the boat captures all his attention.



This is what
Jack sees



This is what you see



So, Kids with ADHD:

- Have trouble stopping long enough to consider what is best for themselves in the future. This often gets misinterpreted as not caring.
- Have trouble stopping long enough to consider what is best for other people. This often gets misinterpreted as being selfish, mean, or manipulative.

Jack is so consumed by the experience of the moment (catching the fish) that he can't look ahead to see the waterfall coming up. It's not that he doesn't care about the cliff. After all, he doesn't want to fall off a cliff any more than anyone else. It's that he never gets the chance to see it. Just like the speeding bicyclist, ADHD kids often are stuck in the present moment. The future comes as a surprise. This is called a lack of "foresight."



General strategies for parents

- **Participate in your child's treatment.** ADHD is not caused by parents, but parents play a big role in helping children manage their symptoms and improve outcomes. Be involved in creating treatment goals and assist in practicing skills that your child is learning in treatment.
- **Incompetence vs. Non-compliance.** Parents must develop an understanding of incompetence (non-purposeful problems that result from the child's inconsistent application of skills leading to performance and behavioral deficits) and non-compliance (purposeful problems which occur when children do not wish to do as they are asked or directed). ADHD is principally a disorder of incompetence. However, since at least 50% of children with ADHD also experience other disruptive, non-compliant problems. Parents must develop a system to differentiate between these two issues and have a set of interventions for both.
- **Positive Directions.** Positive directions include telling children what to do rather than what not to do or giving them a start rather than a stop direction. That provides the most effective type of commands for the ADHD population.
- **Rewards.** Remember that children with ADHD need more frequent, predictable and consistent rewards. Both social rewards (praise) and tangible rewards (toys, treats, privileges) must be provided at a higher rate when the ADHD child is compliant or succeeds. Remember, it is likely that the ADHD child receives less positive reinforcement than other children because they are often disruptive. Make an effort to reward positive behaviour and ignore misbehaviour. Over time, your child will learn to differentiate between them.
- **Use a timer.** Children with ADHD have trouble keeping track of time. This will help them with the beginning and ending of an activity. You can also help your child create a list of things to do.
- **Apply the KISS Principle** - Keep Instructions Short and Simple - Children with ADHD have problems with short-term memory, therefore anything longer than one sentence is likely to be forgotten. Also try to speak clearly and without shouting.
- **Try and catch your child being good.** When they behave appropriately, make sure your praise is very specific for example 'That's great. I love the way you coloured that picture so carefully'. Also try and give praise when your child is within earshot e.g. 'Jack has been so helpful today' - this will also serve to raise his profile with others.
- **Help your child focus.** Reduce distractions in your child's environment when you're talking to them or they are doing tasks. Focus on one thing at a time. For example, having the house be quiet (no TV in the background) when trying to do homework, reading, or listening to direction. This will make it easier for them to pay attention.
- **Take Care of Yourself.** Families with one or more children experiencing ADHD are likely to experience a greater stress, more marital disharmony, potentially more severe emotional problems in parents and often rise and fall based upon this child's behavior. It is important to understand the impact this child may have upon a family and deal with these problems in a positive, preventative way rather than a frustrated, angry and negative way after you have reached your tolerance.
- **Take Care of Your Child.** Remember that your relationship with your child is likely to be strained. It is important to take extra time to balance the scales and maintain a positive relationship. Find an enjoyable activity and engage in this activity with your child as often as possible, at least a number of times per week.

Strategies for improving communication

- Go up to your child and make direct eye contact before giving an instruction.
- Check for understanding: —Tell me what I want you to do.
- Give verbal directions one at a time, not in a long list.
- Use “first - then” commands. “First remove your shoes, then you can have a cookie”
- Physical contact can help the child focus.
- Encourage your child to talk aloud through a situation rather than just plunging in.
- Go over steps in a procedure before and during activities, including those you and your child do together.
- Express expectations in written or visual form as well as verbal, such as a chore chart or a checklist.

Kids with ADHD may display some of the following behaviours:

- Be impatient
- Have trouble with arguing, blaming others, or even lying
- Sometimes have “melt downs” over unimportant things
- Yell at people who are trying to help them
- Have trouble noticing how other people are reacting to them
- Have a sense of always being nervous or worried

Strategies for maintaining structure

- Establish predictable routines for morning and evening. Use a visual schedule to help remind your child of the routine. If you notice your child is off task, instead of reminding them, ask them to go and look at their schedule.
- Make sure your child has a private space of his or her own, even if it’s just a table.
- Make sure other caregivers are familiar with daily routines and behavioral goals and adhere to them.

Using Rewards and Consequences to Promote Good Behavior Rewards

- Make a chart with points or stickers awarded for good behavior, so your child has a visual reminder of his or her successes.
- Make a reward menu with your child of activities, privileges, or items that they are willing to work for. When your child gets enough stickers, let him/her choose an item from the reward menu.
- Make sure most rewards are privileges or activities, rather than food or toys.
- Change rewards frequently. Kids with ADHD get bored if the reward is always the same.
- Immediate rewards work better than the promise of a reward in the future, but a system where small rewards lead to a big one can also be effective.
- Reward your child for small achievements that you might take for granted in another child.
- Remember, hugs, smiles, and praise are rewards, too.

Helping a child with attention deficit disorder improve social skills

- 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.
- Be careful to select playmates for your child with similar language and physical skills.
- Invite only one or two friends at a time at first. Watch them closely while they play.
- Have a zero tolerance policy for hitting, pushing and yelling in your house or yard.
- Make time and space for your child to play, and reward good play behaviors often.