

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH ADHD

Often the parents of a child with ADHD feel like they are captives of the condition, and unable to get a handle on control. The entire family can become disrupted, and Mom and Dad, demoralized. I have found the following suggestions to help intervene into this process, and turn things around for the better.

1. Children with ADHD have difficulty handling unstructured situations. Keep your home setting as structured as possible. Having a certain routine for mealtime, getting ready for school, bedtime, and special activities can be very helpful. Checklists for each of these time periods can help him complete these tasks independently, plus offer immediate visual reinforcement for his compliance.
2. "Waiting times" can be the most difficult for the ADHD child, unless this time is structured. Know and use games such as "I see something red," or "I'm thinking of an animal," during the waiting time in doctor's offices or restaurants.
3. Prepare the child for any changes of activities during the day. Use concrete materials, such as a calendar or clock, to explain how this will affect your schedule. Let the child know what kinds of behaviors are expected during the new activity. If sudden changes occur in the schedule, place the child with ADHD close to you so that you can monitor his behavior and give him a sense of security.
4. Keep verbal commands short, clear and concise. Be sure you have the child's attention before giving him a directive or making a request of him. It is advisable to give him several single-step commands or directions rather than multi-step ones. Ask the child to repeat what you have asked of him so that you can correct any misperceptions. Offer immediate praise when your child completes an assigned task.
5. Help the child develop problem-solving skills. Task analysis and reasoning abilities, as well as problem-solving skills, may be inadequately developed because the child is unable to focus his or her attention on the important aspects of the problem. His brain, and particularly the frontal lobe, is literally underdeveloped and underperforming. We call this a defect in the *executive functions* of the forebrain. Teaching problem-solving skills in the following ways can aid the child in forcing his brain to perform the steps necessary to execute the tasks of solving problems. This helps his forebrain establish and grow the necessary circuitry to enable him to problem-solve on his own.
  - a. What are the words that tell me what the problem is?
  - b. What are some possible solutions to the problem? (Have the child brainstorm with you.)
  - c. Which solutions will work best and why?
  - d. Try out the chosen solution.
  - e. Evaluate how effective the solution was in solving the problem.
6. Channel the child's excessive energy into acceptable activities whenever possible. Assign him duties to perform such as taking care of plants, taking out the garbage or other household chores. These tasks will allow the child to feel helpful. Again, notice that the child is being structured toward *successful execution* of tasks.
7. Encourage the child to use a computer for learning skills. The immediate reinforcement provided by a computer helps the ADHD child learn better. Success with learning tasks can be used to earn the child play time in the computer.

8. Provide shelf space for your child's games and toys. Each shelf should be clearly labeled. Shelves help the child organize his/her possessions. He can find things on shelves without having to rummage through boxes or drawers. Too, physical and visible order in the immediate environment can be very reassuring to the child. He should also be taught to put things back in their place immediately after playing with them. Too many toys can be distracting to the ADHD child.
9. Give your child a work area that is free of distractions. A desk or table that is uncluttered and away from household noise will help him concentrate. Supplies needed for homework should be kept in a specified place on the desk.
10. Help your child organize his clothing. Shelves for clothes are better than chests of drawers because your child can see where his/her clothes are. Low hooks and hangers make hanging up clothing easier. Label which clothes are for school and which are for play. Show your youngster how to hang up and fold clothing. Give him a laundry bag to put dirty clothes in. It is advisable to have your child lay out the clothing he will wear the next day before bedtime. This routine will save time in the morning and will decrease chances of cluttering the room unnecessarily in the mornings in the youngster's haste to find the clothes needed for school.
11. Use short lists of tasks to help your child remember routines or responsibilities. A checklist is much better than constant verbal "reminders" which your child often perceives as nagging. Checklists reduce the friction that verbal commands often produce, and the child is able to gain a sense of satisfaction from checking them off.
12. Show rather than tell how to do something new. Remember that distractibility is one of your child's main problems. A demonstration of how to do something, using as few words as possible, helps the child to focus his attention on what you are doing and keeps your voice from being a distraction. Learning becomes more concrete and is more likely to be understood and remembered if the emphasis is on the child's doing rather than simply on his listening.
13. Use a calm, quiet voice when disciplining. A raised or loud voice only adds to the anxiety of the child. When you find yourself raising your voice, it usually means you are taking the child's resistance, avoidance or direct verbal defiance too personally. Take a deep breath and reassure yourself that his yelling is a comment about his disorder, not an indication of your failure as a parent.
14. Be firm. Don't bog down in establishing lots of little rules that aren't important and are hard to enforce. However, do establish certain clear, basic rules that you are able to enforce consistently. Don't argue with your child. Simply restate your rule and be sure that it is followed. Your child depends on your consistency, so don't set up rules unless you intend to enforce them fully.

So let's review:

- Keep the rules simple.
- Give short concrete directions and not too many at one time.
- Have your child repeat instructions aloud.
- Break tasks down into smaller steps.
- Maintain daily routines.
- Praise positive behaviors.
- Provide immediate feedback and encouragement.
- Help your child organize their activities and environment.