



Knowing What to Expect: Tips for Parents on ADHD

Introduction

The purpose of this informational sheet is to provide you with practical solutions for common problems faced by families managing Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). ADHD does not just involve the child who is diagnosed, but the whole family!

Parenting children with ADHD is challenging. Being clear and consistent in your expectations and having clearly defined consequences for breaking rules is one of the most important steps you can take in making your and your child's life more manageable.

Parenting any child can be frustrating. Parents are often stressed by trying to balance their own needs with the needs of their children. It is even harder to parent a child with ADHD because they need require a higher level of consistency, more help than the average children and frequently have more difficult behaviors to manage. Try your best to be consistent. When you are not—forgive yourself as you are only human!



Communication Tips

Here are some general tips for communicating and working with kids with ADHD:

- 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.

Practical Tips for Managing ADHD Behaviors

Difficulty Starting an Activity:

- Give your child a cue that it is time to begin working.
- Break down tasks into smaller pieces.
- Explain the purpose of the assignment.
- Give your child immediate feedback.
- Praise them for good effort.
- Set a reasonable time limit for completing the task.

Talking Too Much:

- Be direct about when it is ok to interrupt and when it is not.
- Do not accidentally reinforce interrupting by stopping your conversation to attend to your child's interruption.
- Develop a signal to indicate that you are going to continue talking and use it.
- Create opportunities to practice turn taking by playing games.
- Praise successful waiting.

Remembering :

- Have your child repeat directions/or information out loud.
- Write important information down.
- Break multi-step tasks into smaller steps.
- Make up songs for improving recall (think of Schoolhouse Rock).

Staying on Task:

- Clear work area of distractions.
- Make sure that your child understands the task.
- Break the task into smaller pieces.
- Be available to help when needed.

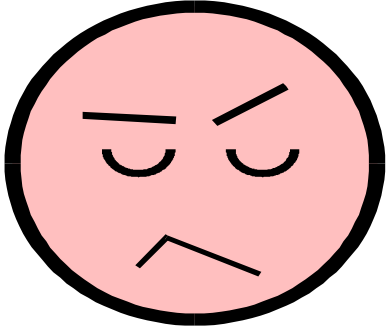
Working Independently:

- Identify activities that your child is likely to be able to complete.
- Give brief, concise directions.
- Have your child tell you what the beginning, middle and end of the task will include.
- Praise your child for his/her efforts.
- Work together on more difficult tasks, slowly decreasing the amount of time you are involved.



Source: Communication Skill Builders, Inc. (1991). (Catalog No. 7696)

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When Kids Are Crabby:

The time between school and early evening can be particularly difficult for children with ADHD. Many are irritable and stressed out. It is not surprising. They have had a whole day of trying to hold it together. They are making a transition from school to home or to after school care. For many children, their medication may be wearing off.

Here are some tips for making this time less stressful:

- Offer “downtime” after school where your child has a break from trying to attend (starting off with a snack can be helpful).
- Provide a consistently structured time for meals, homework and bedtime.
- Talk to your physician about your child’s behavior. He/she may choose to change the timing of medications to cover this time.
- Exercise—Go to the park, go for a walk and burn off energy.

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Initiative for Children’s Healthcare Quality. (2002). ADHD Toolkit, Form 17. Available: <http://www.nichq.org/initiatives/>.

Medications for ADHD

For most children with ADHD, medication is an integral part of treatment. Medication is used to improve the symptoms of ADHD so the child can function more effectively. For many people, medications dramatically reduce hyperactivity and improve their ability to focus, work and learn.

Stimulants are the most studied and most widely used medications for ADHD and experts agree they should be the first line of treatment. 90% of children with ADHD will improve on one of the three most commonly used stimulants.

As with any medication, ask your child’s physician for information you need to use the medication safely and effectively. Be sure you:

- Tell your physician if your child has medication allergies, other illness, or takes other medication.
- Ask your physician to select a medication covered under your pharmacy benefits if possible to reduce your out of pocket cost.
- Understand when and how your child should take the medication.
- Know when you can expect to see benefit from the medication and what changes you should expect to see.
- Get information on the most common side-effects of the medication and how you can deal with them.
- Ask your physician what to do if your child misses a dose of medication.
- Store all medications in the home in a safe location where children do not have access.

Use the Weekly Medication Record to track your child’s medication usage. Take the complete record to your visits with healthcare practitioners so they can evaluate the response to medication and help address any side-effects.

Sources: AHRQ Publication No. 03-0019. February, 2003. Your Medication: Play It Safe. <http://www.ahcpr.gov/consumer/safemed/safemed.htm>

Medical Management of Children and Adults with AD/HD. CHADD Fact Sheet #3. 1996-2003. <http://www.chadd.org>.

NIH Publication No. 96-3572. Reprinted 1996. <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/index.cfm>.