

# **COPING WITH ADHD**

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# INTRODUCTION

As recently as twenty years ago, the term Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder was virtually unheard of. It's not that the malady wasn't around; it's just that the label hadn't been coined back then.

In the 1980's, ADHD kids were the problem ones in school. They couldn't pay attention in class, they were constantly disorganized, and recess was a time of joy for them. They were always being yelled at and reprimanded and felt frustrated 95 percent of the time they spent at school.

This author was in grade school in the 1970's. Having been diagnosed as a gifted child, school came easy to me. Unfortunately, so did boredom. That lack of activity manifested itself into a type of hyperactivity that these days would probably have been labeled as ADHD.

But in the past decade, the amount of ADHD diagnoses has skyrocketed. It seems like every single classroom has at least one child on medication for ADHD. Adults are even being diagnosed with Adult ADHD.

ADHD has gone from an obscure medical footnote to a household word in record time. Unfortunately, this disorder is largely misunderstood yet it is the most prevalent chronic health condition among school age children.

Many parents who have children diagnosed with ADHD feel like failures as parents. They perceive their children as being less than perfect which can cause amazingly strong feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Misconceptions and preconceptions go along with this misinformation.

Even though the disorder is constantly in the forefront of health and educational issues, a true understanding of what ADHD is and how to treat it fails to sink in with the average person.

The causes of ADHD are not readily known and cannot be pigeonholed into a neat little container just as the behavior of an ADHD child cannot be labeled easily. All children are different – all children with ADHD are different. They react differently to situations, modifications, and medications.

The bottom line is that ADHD does exist and it can wreak havoc on families, parents, educators, and others when it is left untreated. ADHD is frustrating, stressful, and can make even the most stoic person flustered.

What are even scarier are the social implications that accompany a disorder like this. Consider the following:

- 21 percent of teens with ADHD skip school repeatedly.
- 35 percent eventually drop out of school.
- ADD/ADHD children are much more likely to experiment with drugs and alcohol.
- ADD/ADHD children are more likely to get into accidents.
- When ADD/ADHD kids don't do well in school, their self-esteem drops and they are less likely to succeed as adults.

The good news is that there are many coping strategies out there to help you deal with an ADHD child. Medication

helps, but you must modify other things such as environment, schedule, and attitude in order to effectively deal with ADHD.

This book will examine more closely those coping strategies. We'll give you advice on how to maintain peace in your family and suggestions you can make to allow your child to help themselves.

If you are an adult with ADHD, you're in luck as well. We'll examine this part of the disorder. We'll identify certain behaviors that you can change and help you figure out ways to minimize this disorder in your life so you can live more normally than ever before!

ADHD is here and it's here to stay. The diagnosis isn't a horrifying nightmare. It's a step towards a better life for you, your child, and everyone around you!

## **WHAT EXACTLY IS ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER?**

ADHD, or ADD as it is often referred, is thought to be a neurological disorder that has been present from childhood and manifests itself through a variety of behaviors. These include hyperactivity, forgetfulness, poor impulse control, and distractibility.

ADHD is thought to be a chronic syndrome – that is, one that cannot be cured, although it can be minimized and controlled. It is thought that this disorder affects between 3 and 5 percent of the United States population in children and adults.

Much controversy surrounds the diagnosis of ADHD. This includes the thought of whether a diagnosis of ADHD denotes a disability in the traditional sense or just describes the neurological property of the brain.

There are some medical personnel who believe that the condition isn't biological but psychological in origin. The debate over how to treat ADHD is a constant source of discussion and debate in medical circles. Some advocate medication while others support behavior modification in order to minimize the symptoms.

No clear-cut solution has presented itself, however, and the generally preferred mode of treatment is medication. This can be disturbing for many people – especially when speaking of medicating small children. In fact, ADHD is often being diagnosed in children as young as 3 or 4. This causes opponents of the medication to become especially vocal.

But we'll address that controversy a little later on in the book.

What we want to address most in this section is how to recognize the symptoms of ADHD and how to tell whether or not you or your child is just high-strung or if they truly suffer from this disorder.

One mother says the following about her child:

"I could wallpaper my bathroom with all the accident reports I received from Johnny's preschool. From the time Johnny was very little, he always had a creative mind, was very energetic, very on-the-go and accident-prone. With him being my first, I just thought this was normal.

We met with the principal of Johnny's school four times within his first month of attendance. I began to suspect that

something might actually be wrong with my son. Then his teacher suggested that he be tested for ADHD.

At first, I thought 'Oh my, there's something wrong with my baby. Why us? Why him?'"

This is a common reaction for most parents. No one wants to have their child be stricken with some type of disorder. What these parents need to realize is that the suggestion and then possible diagnosis isn't a death sentence in any way. It's a step toward taking responsibility for your child's health or your health if you are an adult facing this.

While diagnosis of the disorder is complicated by the fact that there is no precise test to identify it, ADHD is defined by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) as a brain condition that makes it difficult for children to control their behavior.

Though the disorder can manifest itself in different ways, we've told you that children with ADHD tend to be inattentive, hyperactive and impulsive. Many children also experience trouble in school, difficulty in relationships with family members and their peers, academic underachievement and low self-esteem.

So, how do you recognize ADHD? The symptoms fall into two quite broad categories.

The first category is inattention. Symptoms include:

1. Failing to pay close attention to details or making careless mistakes when doing schoolwork or other activities
2. Trouble keeping attention focused during play or tasks
3. Appearing not to listen when spoken to

4. Failing to follow instructions or finish tasks
5. Avoiding tasks that require a high amount of mental effort and organization such as school projects
6. Frequently losing items required to facilitate tasks or activities such as school supplies
7. Excessive distractibility
8. Forgetfulness
9. Procrastination or inability to begin an activity

The second is Hyperactivity-Impulsive Behavior. Symptoms include:

1. Fidgeting with hands or feet
2. Squirming in a seat
3. Leaving a seat often even at inappropriate times
4. Running or climbing at inappropriate times
5. Difficulty during quiet play
6. Frequently feeling restless
7. Excessive talking
8. Answering a question before the speaker has finished or interrupting the activities of others at inappropriate times.
9. Failing to wait for one's turn

A positive diagnosis is usually made if the person exhibits six or more of the above-named symptoms for at least three months. Symptoms must appear consistently in varied environments (home, school, etc.) and interfere with normal functioning.

People who are inattentive find it difficult to focus on a particular task and get bored quickly. While they may display effortless concentration doing things they enjoy, making a deliberate and conscious effort to organize and complete a task or to learn something new is difficult.

Hyperactive people seem to bounce off the walls with energy and just cannot sit still. Impulsive people don't think before they act or speak. They have difficulty waiting for things to take their natural course. Everything must happen right away.

There have been times in all our lives when we have been overly impulsive, inattentive or hyperactive. But that does not mean that we are afflicted with ADHD. These behaviors are symptomatic of ADHD if they appear early in life, before the age of 7. However, the age of onset can vary and symptoms may even appear in early adolescence.

They must be excessive, long-term and pervasive. They must occur more often than in other people of the same age group. The behaviors must cause a real handicap in at least two areas of the person's life such as school, home, work, or social interactions.

Boys are at least three times as likely as girls to develop the disorder. Some doctors feel that testing needs to be gender specific because the symptoms present themselves differently in boys versus girls which would account for the vast difference in numbers.

As a result of the disorder, children with ADHD often engage in disruptive activities and antisocial behavior that

alienates their peers and other people around them. In addition, their academic performance tends to suffer because of their inattention and easy distractibility.

Parents of children with ADHD experience high stress levels that are linked to their extreme frustration in attempting to discipline their children. This can lead to problems in the marriage and in the worst case, even divorce.

Unfortunately, ADHD is not a disorder that disappears with time. ADHD persists into adulthood. However, the good news is that there are ways in which one can alleviate the symptoms.

We will cover coping strategies later on in this book, but it must be noted that ADHD won't just go away.

The good news about ADHD is that recent years have seen an increase in the overall understanding of what the disorder looks like. We know that not every child with ADHD is hyperactive, and not every child who is inattentive has ADHD. This is great news and the good news just keeps on coming.

When you have a child who is diagnosed with ADHD or you, as an adult have been told that you have Adult ADHD, keep in mind that you are in the company of some pretty famous people who have, or still do, struggle with this disorder.

Consider the following list:

- Alexander Graham Bell – Inventor of the telephone
- Hans Christian Andersen – Author
- Beethoven – Composer
- Harry Belafonte – Actor, Composer
- Terry Bradshaw – Retired NFL Quarterback and Sports Commentator

- George Burns – Actor
- Admiral Richard Byrd – Navy Aviator
- Andrew Carnegie – Industrialist and Philanthropist
- Lewis Carroll – Author Alice in Wonderland
- Prince Charles – Future King of England
- Cher – Actress/Singer
- Winston Churchill – Statesman
- Bill Cosby – Actor
- Leonardo Da Vinci – Sculptor and Artist
- Thomas Edison – Inventor
- Albert Einstein – Inventor
- Dwight D. Eisenhower – Former President of the United States
- Benjamin Franklin – Politician, Inventor
- Michael Jordan – Basketball Player
- Abraham Lincoln – Former President of the United States
- Stephen Spielberg – Director, Film Maker

The list literally goes on and on and on. These people achieved notoriety for their achievements despite their shortcomings. They suffered from ADHD and overcame the diagnosis to become not only rich and famous, but remembered and revered for their creativity and leadership.

This could be you or your child. Don't give up. Don't blame yourself. Take control and take charge. ADHD can be controlled and sufferers can live normal, productive lives.

Some of you might be wondering what exactly the cause of ADHD is. The answer, unfortunately, isn't as cut and dried as you might want it to be.

## **WHAT CAUSES THIS DISORDER?**

It is only natural that parents who are told that their child has been diagnosed as having Attention Deficit

Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) will want to know exactly what went wrong. Unfortunately, this is something to which they are not going to get a simple answer. Researchers are still uncertain about the underlying factors that cause ADHD.

Recent research indicates that ADHD is not a disorder of attention per se as researchers had assumed. It is linked to a developmental failure in the brain circuitry that underlies inhibition and self-control. This loss of self-control in turn impairs other important brain functions crucial for maintaining attention, including the ability to defer immediate rewards for later, greater gain.

Studies conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health in U.S.A. found that the right prefrontal cortex, two basal ganglia and the vermis region of the cerebellum are significantly smaller than normal in children with ADHD. These findings make sense because the brain areas that are reduced in size in children with ADHD are the very ones that regulate attention.

Genetics can also play a role in ADHD. According to research findings, ADHD has a heritability approaching 80 percent. In other words, this means that up to 80 percent of the differences in attention, hyperactivity and impulsivity between people with ADHD and those without the disorder can be explained by genetic factors.

Non-genetic factors that have been associated with ADHD include premature birth, maternal alcohol and tobacco use, exposure to high levels of lead in early childhood and brain injuries, especially those that involve the prefrontal cortex. But even together, these factors can account for only between 20 and 30 percent of ADHD cases among boys; among girls, they account for an even smaller percentage.

At one point, people believed that a poor home environment might be the cause of ADHD. However, the latest research findings increasingly point to biological causes for the disorder. Not all children from unstable or dysfunctional homes have ADHD. And not all children with ADHD come from dysfunctional families. Parents can heave a sigh of relief that this is something that is not their fault.

Another pet theory was that refined sugar and food additives make children hyperactive and inattentive. As a result, parents were encouraged to stop serving children foods containing artificial flavorings, preservatives, and sugars.

However, data from a later study lead scientists to conclude that the restricted diet only seemed to help about 5 percent of children with ADHD, mostly either young children or children with food allergies.

In addition, ADHD cannot be linked to too much TV or food allergies or poor schools.

Now we realize that some of this might sound like a lot of technical mumbo jumbo, but the bottom line is that there is no definitive cause that can be found. It could be a misfiring in the brain, it could be cause by genetics, it could be caused by situational factors – the truth is that ADHD is here, but we're not really sure why.

There are many emotions that can come about when you have a child who has been diagnosed with ADHD. How do you deal with these?

## **NOT MY CHILD**

In all actuality, the most prevalent feelings parents had upon learning an ADHD diagnosis for their child was –

RELIEF! Do you find that hard to believe? That's understandable, but it's true. Most people expressed relief. Why?

They felt relief in knowing that there was a reason for their child's behavior and relief in knowing that the reason was a medical one, and not a result of something the parents had control over or were responsible for.

It wasn't their parenting skills, they were not bad parents, nor was it the fault of a mother who felt that they were somehow responsible or had done something during pregnancy that caused their child to be this way.

It also gave many parents relief by knowing that they were not alone. For some, it even gave them insight as to how they behaved when they were a child.

Some of that relief stems from the possible thought that their child was acting unruly by choice. Before the diagnosis, they felt out of control as if it were their fault their child was out of control. Once the diagnosis was made, their feelings of guilt disappeared.

Of course, along with that relief came another feeling – helplessness. Many parents report that they felt completely alone and deprived of information or support for this new part of their lives. Most parents when told their child was suffering with ADD/ADHD are sent home with a prescription without any clues as to what their rights were, where to find help and support and what to expect.

Many parents have questions and they want answers. Questions such as, Will he grow out of it? Is this forever? What have we done wrong? How do we separate the truths from the fictions when it comes to information? How will this affect him in his life long learning process? Where to we go for support?

Often, the beginning of the diagnosis process begins at school. The teacher notices the behaviors and recommends the child be tested for ADHD. After that, things seem to be dropped on that end. The teacher assumes the parent will take care of the problem, the parent hopes the teacher will participate, and everyone thinks the doctor will present a cure-all.

Many parents report that when they are presented with the possibility their child has ADHD by an educator; they are given nothing else other than the verbal suggestion. They would like to have information more than anything else.

One parent says:

"It would have been helpful if the teachers and evaluation team had some information on hand for me to read. They told me my son has ADHD and an impulse problem, that he should be on medication, but never gave me anything to read to names of books, doctors or anywhere to turn."

They also wanted to have some type of "road map" that will help them guide their child toward success in school. They wanted reassurance that the child's teacher would be working WITH them to insure their child's academic advancement.

Some of that has changed with recent legislation regarding students with disabilities - and ADHD is a disability. But the reactions of parents are still the same: they want information, they want support, and they want help.

The reality is that you or your child has an illness – now definitely not a life-threatening illness, but an illness nonetheless. Illnesses need treatment.

The most common form of treatment used today is

medication. While there is much controversy surrounding the drugging of our children, studies show that this is actually an effective way to manage the disorder.

## **TO MEDICATE OR NOT TO MEDICATE**

For the past decade or so, there has been much controversy surrounding the use of medication to treat children with ADHD. For those who are properly diagnosed with ADHD, though, the appropriate medication can provide a tremendous benefit.

This position is supported by the findings of a 14-month nationwide cooperative study called the “Multimodal Treatment Study of Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.” Known as the MTA, the study involved nearly 600 children, ages 7 to 9, and was the first study to look at long-term treatment of ADHD children.

Essentially, the MTA’s findings – the first of which were released in December 1999 – show that ADHD children do best with treatment plans that include both medication and intensive counseling. It also showed that medication alone is the best treatment if behavioral therapy is unavailable.

The medication most closely associated with the treatment of ADHD is Ritalin. And though Ritalin used to be virtually the sole option for treating the disorder, the list of medications commonly used to treat ADHD has grown in recent years to include about a dozen different options.

The increased number of pharmacological options means that those with ADHD have more opportunity to find a medication that works well for them.

People are becoming more aware of the fact that stimulant medications can be so effective that it's important to try different classes of them to find the right match for a child. Just because one doesn't work, that doesn't mean another won't.

In recent years, new long-acting medications have grown in popularity. Where standard medications might be effective for three or four hours, the new long-acting ones typically remain effective long enough so that a child does not have to be dosed during school hours. The medication might also be effective long enough to carry a child through an after-school activity and even homework time. And there are other benefits as well.

Often children don't like to be different. Going to the school nurse to get their medication makes them different. Also, for some children, the highs and lows of short-acting medications are harder to tolerate. When a medication is wearing off, not only do many children have a harder time paying attention, but they can also get tearful.

Another study, just released in the January 2003 issue of the AAP journal, *Pediatrics*, may help allay some parents' fears about the use of stimulants to treat ADHD. This study, undertaken by Dr. Timothy Wilens, a child psychiatrist at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School, found that children who take Ritalin or other stimulants to control the symptoms of ADHD actually cut their risk of future substance abuse by 50 percent compared to ADHD children who go untreated.

Patients with untreated ADHD are at increased risk for developing substance abuse, likely due to self-medicating. By treating ADHD with stimulants, the risk of abuse actually diminishes substantially.

What kinds of medicines are likely to be prescribed to

treat ADHD? The list is extensive.

## **SPECIFIC MEDICATIONS**

Some medicines used to treat attention-deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are called psychostimulants. Some of these drugs are methylphenidate (brand names: Concerta, Ritalin), dextroamphetamine (brand names: Dexedrine, Dextrostat), d- and l-amphetamin racemic mixture (brand name: Adderall), and pemoline (brand name: Cylert). Although these medicines have a stimulating effect in most people, they have a calming effect in children and adults with ADHD.

Other types of medicine sometimes used to treat ADHD include atomoxetine (brand name: Stratera), clonidine (brand name: Catapres), desipramine (brand name: Norpramin), imipramine (brand name: Tofranil) and bupropion (brand name: Wellbutrin).

Of course, all medications have side effects. Psychostimulants may cause a decreased appetite, a stomachache or a headache. The loss of appetite can cause weight loss in some people.

This side effect seems to be more common in children. Some people have insomnia (trouble sleeping). Here are some ways to avoid side effects (like a fast heart beat, chest pain or vomiting) when taking psychostimulants:

- Use the lowest possible dose that still controls the hyperactivity. Your doctor will tell you the right dose.
- Take the medicine with food to avoid stomach problems.

- Plan to use the weekends as drug-free days. This means, don't take any ADHD medicines on Saturday and Sunday. However, ask your doctor before you try this.
- Children who lose weight while taking medicine for ADHD can have extra healthy snacks during the day.

It's important to take the medicine just the way your doctor says--not more often and not less often. Follow your doctor's advice even if you think the medicine isn't working. Be sure to talk with your doctor if you think the medicine isn't working.

It's best to take the medicine 30 to 45 minutes before a meal. Good times to take this medicine are before breakfast and before lunch. Lunch-time doses can be given at school for some children.

If your child can't take this medicine at school, tell your doctor. Your doctor might suggest a long-acting form of the medicine instead. The long-acting form of this medicine should not be crushed, broken or chewed before swallowing. The long-acting forms are taken only once a day, right before breakfast.

It's also important to know that some of the medicines used to treat ADHD are called "controlled" drugs. There are special rules about the way controlled drugs can be prescribed, because these drugs could be used the wrong way.

The prescriptions for controlled drugs, like methylphenidate and dextroamphetamine, must be refilled at the drug store every month. At some doctors' offices, these prescriptions are only written on 1 day of the month.

The medicines used to treat ADHD have been shown to improve a person's ability to do a specific task, such as pay

attention or have more self-control in certain situations. It is not known whether these medicines can improve broader aspects of life, such as relationships or learning and reading skills.

People with ADHD should be checked regularly by their doctors. During these check ups, the doctor will want to hear what the parents have to say about a child with ADHD. Your doctor may suggest that your child take a break from his or her medicines once in a while to see if the medicine is still necessary.

Talk with your doctor about the best time to do this-- school breaks or summer vacation might be best. The teacher's comments about the child are also important. The doctor will want to check a person with ADHD after the medicine dose has been changed.

The length of time a person takes the medicine depends on each person. Everyone is different. Some people only need a short treatment, for 1 to 2 years. Some people need treatment for years. In some people, ADHD may continue into adolescence and adulthood.

There is a school of thought among parents that they do not want their young child to be medicated to treat ADHD. They feel like they will be "doping up" their child and not doing them any good. That's a personal decision, but some type of treatment MUST be given for these kids.

Many medical professionals feel that a combination of medication and behavioral modifications provide the most effective treatment of ADHD. Behavior changes can also help the parent who doesn't want to medicate. What types of behavior modifications should be implemented? Many!

## **BEHAVIOR CHANGES**

Many physicians hope that behavioral therapy in the treatment of ADHD will begin to take flight and be the emphasis in effective treatment of the disorder. What steps can you take in behavior modification to minimize the symptoms of ADHD? The answer is – SO MUCH!

The basic principles of treatment – for adults and children both – are structure, lifestyle changes and finding and developing talent. There is a lot of focus on the medication, but you build a life on identifying your talent and pursuing it.

Start by helping children find and develop their talents. That is very important and is often overlooked. What happens is people look for what's wrong and how to remediate the problems. And so, the child is given the message that he's a walking defect. What builds a sense of confidence and joy in life is helping a child find something that he or she is good at.

What many people who suffer from ADHD lack is structure. Planning out the steps it takes to accomplish daily tasks – for instance, getting ready for school or completing homework – lets everyone know what expectations are.

With many kids, you can take each day as it comes and there may not be a huge amount of structure. But that's really hard for these kids. You can get in a tug-of-war over that and have a lot of frustration.

When it comes to instruction, keep it brief and to the point. An ADHD child's attention will drift if instructions for anything are too long and rambling. For both parents and teachers, this means it's best to break down tasks into little pieces.

A hugely effective tool is to emphasize the positive and

downplay the negative whenever you possibly can. These kids hear 'no' 50 times a day. Perhaps the biggest challenge is pulling out what the child is doing right and focusing on those things.

Try using "labeled praise". Labeled praise clearly defines what is positive about a child's actions. For instance, "You did a great job of cleaning up" would be more effective than simply saying "Thank you for helping me."

Work as a team with everyone involved. This means home, school, doctor, etc. Collaboration between home and school is essential. It's important to have everybody on the same page. This could be accomplished in various ways.

One especially effective one is to keep a daily diary that the child carries back and forth between home and school. The parent writes in the diary the child's behavior at home. Conversely, the teacher writes in the diary the child's behavior at school.

Not only does this concept provide a written record of behavior, but it can also give a tremendous amount of insight into what is happening with the child in different situations.

You can also try using token economics. This is a tool that is often used in schools to promote good behavior. Some people feel that this is ridiculous. Rewarding a child for behavior they should be exhibiting anyway seems like a condescending way to approach behavior management.

But the truth is that ADHD kids must have reinforcement such as rewards. It gives them something tangible to hold onto and something to look forward to.

Keep in mind that ADHD children have a serious problem controlling their own behavior. Their head might be telling them to "behave", but their disorder prevents them

from doing so.

Setting up a system to use in the classroom and at home for children to earn points they can exchange for other rewards or privileges – such as computer time or an activity – can provide kids with great incentive to adjust behavior. You should also involve the child by allowing him or her to develop a menu of rewards.

Children have a naturally short attention span. It is for this very reason that you should give immediate feedback along with consequences for behavior and activities. Feedback must be clear, specific, and occur as close to the time after the behavior that it refers to.

This feedback should be given often. Parents need to tell ADHD children how they are faring in whatever activity they are involved in or how well they are conducting themselves at very short intervals.

Feedback can be in the form of praise or compliments but should specify exactly what the child has done to earn it. It can also be in the form of physical affection like a hug, extra privileges or occasionally a food treat.

ADHD children have reduced sensitivity to rewards and other consequences. Hence, larger and more important rewards are needed to motivate them to perform, follow rules or behave well. Make the consequences powerful and worth avoiding or earning.

Dole out the positive comments before the negative ones. Try not to make punishment the first step in suppressing undesirable behavior. They should attempt to glean some positive aspect from the child's behavior and reward that aspect. Punishment when given should be mild and specific to a particular behavior.

Above all, be consistent. As parents of a troubled child,

it's easy to give in more often than we should, but this is the exact time when we can't do so. Parents should strive to react in the same manner over a period of time to the child's behavior whenever it occurs.

In addition, they will need to be persistent when dealing with a ADHD child, as they are not exactly the most obedient kind. Even if parents feel that their efforts are going to waste, they need to stick to the disciplinary program or they will not see the fruits of their hard work.

Respond in the same way whether it be at home, at school, or anywhere else. Parents of ADHD children often tend to respond to the same behavior differently at home and in public. They must avoid this as it puts a spoke in all the wheel of all their disciplinary efforts. The ADHD child needs to know that the rules and consequences expected to occur at home will also apply away from home.

Do not in any way contradict another parent or authority figure when the child can observe this behavior. Cohesiveness is important. If the child knows that they have one person who they can go to who will let the rules slide, they win. ADHD kids need consistency. If you undermine each other's behavior, you are taking steps back and not helping your child at all.

You must be equipped to handle problem situations. ADHD children can be difficult and disruptive in the most public of places and parents tend to get caught on the wrong foot every time. Most parents can anticipate a problem situation. What they have to do is devise a strategy to deal with it in advance so that they are prepared when it happens. They will need to make all the rules clear to their children in advance too. Thus, when the problem occurs, both parent and child know the routine.

Make sure you have everything in perspective. Well,

maybe not everything. That might be impossible, but you at least have to have perspective when it comes to your child and his or her illness.

Dealing with an ADHD child is no joke. Parents of such children often find that they are frustrated, enraged, and embarrassed. However, they must remember at all times that they are the adults and cannot afford to lose control. If both parent and child were to lose their cool, the situation would deteriorate rapidly. In any case, ADHD children are victims of a disorder and often cannot help the way they behave.

Make lists. Seriously – as many lists as you can. And teach your child to do the same. These lists should include tasks that need completed, dates to be remembered, and activities that need to be attended.

Provide them with a reward for completing their tasks, checking things off their lists, and remembering important dates. Keep in mind that these kids tend to brush off anything and everything in favor of whatever is in front of them at the time. When they are able to complete tasks and remember important dates, they will eventually modify their behavior to make it commonplace.

These kids have excess energy. It's a fact. It is for that very reason that you need to provide some type of outlet for this energy. Encourage your child to participate in a hobby or activity that allows them to blow off the steam that naturally occurs in their body.

Accept their limitations. This could be one of the most important coping strategies we can mention. Whether you like it or not, your child has limitations. An ADHD child is never going to be a model child. So don't hit your head against a brick wall trying to make him one. Try to see the virtues in your child and help him make the most of them.

Remember that you are the expert on your child. ADHD is just one of those controversial subjects that everybody and his brother has an opinion on. Tune out what's uninformed. Trusting your instincts and keeping open communication with your child about how he's doing and really being observant is invaluable because you're really a case manager.

Stay away from labeling. Remember that you have to look at the whole child – he's got his own temperament, his own talents and interests. It's easy to let the label overshadow everything.

And beware, too, of lumping in other problems that often occur in children with ADHD – including depression, anxiety and learning difficulties – under the single diagnosis of ADHD.

Experts are getting better at understanding the differences between learning disabilities and ADHD. Sometimes they can overlap and that can be tricky and complicated to dissect.

ADHD is different for every child. It's important to understand which problems are truly part of ADHD and which are not, so that each problem can be dealt with appropriately.

Above all, try your very best to stay calm when dealing with an ADHD child. It's easy to lose your cool when the child is out of control. Speak slowly and precisely. Show them that even though you are frustrated, you are still able to stay in control. Try to talk to them about your feelings and how you are trying to cope with your own frustration.

Often, children learn by watching. When you talk to them and bring them into your mindset, you could very well be teaching them the tools they need to control their own frustration.

And by all means, give yourself a break when you need one. It takes a lot of energy to live and work with kids who have ADHD, so try to give yourself some space occasionally – either by using a sitter or by relaxing your demands for a particular time period – so that you can have some time off.

Unfortunately, there are more parties involved in raising an ADHD child than just the child and the parent. Families have to become active in the treatment of a child with this disorder.

## **FAMILIES AND ADHD**

The impulsivity of children with ADHD makes them act before they think and their behavior can escalate quickly. They don't mean to do damage and are upset when they hurt people or break things, but they'll still do exactly the same thing next time round!

ADHD children are untidy and disorganized, which will irritate people who like tidy houses and regimented behavior.

They can be unpopular with other children, teachers, friends and even family members. This can cause problems with both family and friends.

Parents can feel overwhelmed and unable to cope with their child's behavior. They may avoid social situations in the hope of avoiding problem behavior and then start to feel isolated.

Friends, relatives and neighbors may feel entitled to comment and give negative judgments, which can strain relationships.

Your child may hurt other family members or damage their belongings, to the point where relationships are very strained. Your child can feel like a scapegoat and may start ignoring what he feels is constant nagging from you.

When dealing with siblings, the issue becomes even more sensitive. Children with ADHD need a lot of attention and may need different treatment from other children in the family. This can cause resentment and jealousy on the part of your other children who don't have ADHD.

Older children may resent the lack of attention or feel forced to look after their sibling because of their special needs. Younger children may copy the bad behavior of the ADHD child.

Siblings may feel their home life is disorganized and tiring, with lots of conflict. They may resent the fact their brother or sister breaks their possessions and interferes all the time.

They may feel their sibling is favored because you're using different methods of discipline to manage ADHD. 'I'd never get away with that' is a common complaint.

And what happens to your partnership – be it marriage or otherwise? ADHD can put a strain on your partnership, particularly if you have different views on discipline or different parenting styles.

One of you may feel you have to take the brunt of dealing with ADHD and taking time off work, for example to deal with problem behavior, attend school and medical consultations, or have meetings as part of the statementing process.

You may also have to pay private specialists to deal with medication, counseling and evaluations, which will put a

strain on the family budget.

If one parent leaves the relationship, it puts even more of a burden on the parent left to deal with ADHD, and the subsequent resentment may sour the relationship further.

There's also a danger of spending so much time on your child that you don't spend any time on your relationship as a couple. If you find yourself unable to cope, talk to someone before the strain gets too much.

It's best to get advice on how to deal with problems while they're still small and easier to manage. Talk to your doctor, find a support group, and get counseling or family mediation. It's better to face the problem head on than to avoid it entirely.

What you need to do is fully integrate the child into the family and make them feel a part of the larger unit. Use routines and give clear rules: explain how you expect your child to behave in situations and teach him what to do when he feels he's heading for trouble.

1. Watch for trigger behaviors and step in to avert the problem before it starts.
2. Negotiate rules with older children.
3. Criticize the behavior, not the child. Instead of: 'You're so spaced-out, it drives me crazy,' say 'It makes me unhappy when you forget things.'
4. Get everyone to cool off. Don't escalate arguments or inflame them.
5. When boundaries are broken, make other family members realize it isn't personal.

6. Try to stay positive. Avoid sounding disappointed in your child, which will lead to low self-esteem, and praise, praise, praise good behavior - for siblings, too.
7. Make sure relatives and friends understand it's important for your child to feel accepted by them. Older relatives may have less patience with a busy child, in which case it can help to make visits short and sweet.

Some family members may be less than enthusiastic about the whole process. Some friends and relatives don't believe ADHD exists. They think your child is deliberately naughty and you are a bad parent - they will often say your child just needs a good smack.

Friends and relatives may feel they know everything about ADHD because they've read it in the paper or seen it on TV. So they'll berate you for not trying an exclusion diet, not giving your child dietary supplements or not trying complementary treatments for ADHD.

They can blame you for putting your child on medication - or not putting your child on medication, depending on their views.

Educate them, if they're open-minded enough to listen. Some people can see comprehensive reports by an expert, but will still claim the expert doesn't know what she is talking about.

If this is the case, you can simply smile politely, thank them for their advice and explain that you're following your doctor's advice. A second option is to just ignore them - and punch a cushion when you get home.

You may find that some friends decide to drop you because they can't deal with your child's behavior. This is hurtful but remember: it's their problem, not yours or your

child's. True friends will try to understand and help. A friend who drops you isn't worth worrying about.

When you are parenting a child with ADHD, there are special considerations that need to be addressed – whether you want them to be or not.

## **PARENTING AN ADHD CHILD**

Parenting a child with ADHD has more pitfalls than parenting the average child.

You'll need to experiment to find out what works best for your child. Also, because a child with ADHD is unpredictable, what works one day might need a different approach the next.

Your style of parenting affects your child's behavior. Just as good habits can be learnt, there are things that can increase the likelihood of misbehavior. They include:

1. Your experience as a child. If you were told off all the time as a child, you might do the same with your own children - or go the opposite way and never tell them off.
2. Parents disagreeing on rules. This confuses your child, who won't know what he's supposed to be doing so his behavior will deteriorate. You're also setting yourself up for 'divide and rule', where if one parent says no, he'll ask the other and act on a 'yes'.
3. Lack of energy. If you've had a hard day at work, you're feeling low, you're not getting enough help or you're coming down with a bug, it's easy to let discipline slip. One-off occasions won't hurt, but if it

continues for a long time, your child may start behaving badly to get some attention from you.

With behavioral problems, there's also a lot of potential for fighting. You can feel that you spend all your time nagging your child, so you need to make sure you have good times together.

Set up special times to spend with your child doing things you enjoy together and just playing.

Rules and boundaries are important because they help us get on with other people. If everyone knows what's acceptable, what's not and the consequences of doing something that's unacceptable, everyone will get on.

For example, if a child knows he has to keep his hands to himself, he won't punch or hit other children in the playground. If he doesn't know the rule or ignores it, other children will get hurt and they'll avoid him. He might also end up getting hurt.

It used to be thought children shouldn't speak up, and it was OK to hit them when they'd broken a rule. Today, people realize that children respond better if you make them feel loved, secure and important, and you give them attention when behaving well. If children only get attention when they behave badly, they'll behave even worse to get more attention.

For children with ADHD, it's better to praise the good behavior (ie. the one you want to see more of) and ignore the bad behavior as much as you can. Negotiate rules with older children so they'll have a say in what happens.

When it comes to rules, you need to be consistent in your approach.

- State the rule: homework before TV.

- Remind your child of the rule when he challenges it, and what the consequences will be: homework first or no TV for the rest of the evening.
- Enforce it: take the fuse out of the plug, if you have to!

Remember to pick your battles. We can't stress this part seriously enough. Look at what's really important – what will matter five years down the road – and choose to address those issues.

Let your child make choices for themselves. Instead of giving them a myriad of options, set out two and let them choose between one and the other. ADHD children can't concentrate on many things all at the same time. When you taper down choices, you are giving them the ability to make decisions but you are not overwhelming them either.

Always keep in mind that you are not a bad parent in any way shape or form just because your child has ADHD. As we've said before, some people feel that ADHD is just a myth that doesn't truly exist. This simply isn't true.

ADHD is a medical condition with no one to blame. These children are demanding and always on the go. That's just the way they are. It's not your fault; it's just the way they are built.

This can make you feel extremely overwhelmed and a failure as a parent. Get those thoughts out of your head. Some parents may wonder why they couldn't have a nice, quiet child instead of the livewire who never listens. But there are a number of reasons why children could develop ADHD.

As we said in the beginning of this chapter, your parenting style can influence how you and your child deal with ADHD. There is no one right way or one wrong way.

Dealing with a child who acts before she thinks things through, loses and breaks things and forgets what you've said 30 seconds later can be frustrating and stressful. It can drive you to the point where you give up on discipline, and find yourself being snappy, critical or even hating your child.

You need help to deal with the difficult behaviors and accept that you're not perfect - and that what works for one child might not work for yours.

Just as you might be dealing with some self-esteem issues when it comes to your ADHD child, your kid is dealing with the same issues in their own way.

## **YOUR ADHD CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM**

Self-esteem is about self-value. It's not about being bigheaded or bragging. It is about how we see ourselves, our personal achievements and our sense of worth.

Self-esteem is important because it helps children feel proud of who they are and what they do. It gives them the power to believe in their abilities and the courage to try new things. It helps them develop respect for themselves, which in turn leads to being respected by other people.

Your child's self-esteem is shaped by:

- how he/she thinks
- what he/she expects of herself
- how other people (family, friends, teachers) think and feel about him/her

Many children with ADHD have problems in school and with teachers and sometimes have difficulties at home. They find it difficult to make and keep friends.

People often don't understand their behavior and judge them because of it. They disrupt situations, often gaining punishments, so they may find it easier not to bother trying to fit in or do work at school.

All this means children with ADHD often feel badly about themselves. They might think they're stupid, naughty, bad or a failure. Not surprisingly, their self-esteem takes a battering and they find it hard to think anything positive or good about themselves.

Hyperactive, disruptive behavior is a key factor of ADHD. Children with ADHD can't help behaving this way, but teachers trying to cope with a disruptive child may deal with it by excluding her from the classroom.

Birthday parties and social events are a natural part of growing up, but other parents may not want to invite a child who is known to have bad behavior. Again, this can lead to a child with ADHD being excluded. Exclusion only adds to your child's negative feelings and reinforces the idea that she's naughty.

So how can you help your child with his or her self-esteem?

- Praise and reward: you need to make your child feel positive about himself or herself, so try and give praise wherever possible. This can be for large or small actions - for example if she's tried hard at school or has helped clear up after a meal. As well as verbal praise, giving small rewards can highlight accomplishments.

- Love and trust: don't attach conditions to your love. Your child needs to know you love her no matter how she behaves. Tell your child she's special and let her know you trust and respect her.
- Goals: set goals that are easily achieved and watch your child's confidence grow.
- Sports and hobbies: joining a club or having a hobby can build self-esteem. Depending on your child's interests, the activity could be swimming, dancing, martial arts, crafts or cooking. No matter what the hobby, your child will gain new skills to be proud of - and for you to praise. Sometimes children with ADHD will go off their activity, so be prepared to come up with new ideas.
- **Focus on the positive:** get your child to write a list of everything she likes about herself, such as her good characteristics and things she can do. Stick it on her bedroom wall or in the kitchen, so she sees it every day. Encourage your child to add to it regularly.

Part of self-esteem has to do with criticism. You have to teach your child the best way to deal with that criticism.

Tell them the following and then reinforce it:

1. Listen to what's being said. Don't interrupt to contradict or make excuses.
2. Agree with it, where possible.
3. Ask questions if they are unsure about anything.
4. Admit mistakes and apologize.
5. Calmly disagree if it's unfair. For example, they can politely say, 'I don't agree with you'.

There are times when criticism is necessary, but children with low self-esteem aren't good at accepting criticism - or giving it nicely.

How you give criticism is important. Criticism is another part of making your child feel loved: sarcastic, negative comments can undo all your hard work to be encouraging. So is there such a thing as good criticism? If you want to teach your child how to accept criticism, you need to give it in a constructive way.

This means being calm, not angry, and focusing on the behavior you want to change instead of criticizing the person. It also helps if you can find positive things to say to balance the criticism. Using 'I' tends to be less aggressive than 'you'.

So if your child is struggling with a piece of school work, don't say 'you're stupid', but 'I loved the way you read the first page. It's only a couple of words you're stumbling on. Focus on the positives instead of the negatives. Your child will be better for it.

All these things apply when your child gives criticism as well. For example, 'I like playing with you, but it's too cold to play outside today.'

The idea is to learn techniques to cope with criticism, give confidence and generally make your child feel better about himself/herself.

Anger is a natural part of childhood. Heck, it's a natural part of adulthood. But, an ADHD child has an especially difficult time dealing with and controlling anger.

## **ANGER AND ADHD**

All children behave badly from time to time, and sometimes get aggressive, but it's more common for children with ADHD to have problems with their behavior. This is because the core symptoms of hyperactivity, impulsivity and inattention all affect the way your child interacts.

If you look at how these symptoms can affect a child's behavior, it's easy to see how they are linked to bad or aggressive behavior.

- Hyperactivity causes a child to fidget, run about excessively, talk excessively and have difficulty in playing quietly. It can cause your child to accidentally damage others' belongings, play too roughly and hurt other children.
- Impulsivity causes a child to blurt out answers, speak before thinking, interrupt, barge into games and have volatile moods. It can result in your child having a short fuse and to lash out when frustrated.
- Inattention causes poor attention to detail and problems with following instructions. A child with inattention problems may not appear to listen to requests.

Dealing with these behaviors can push parenting and teaching skills to the limit. This means children with ADHD often receive a lot of negative feedback and critical comments.

It's thought that these negative parenting and relating styles increase the likelihood of aggressive behavior that, if unchecked, can lead to oppositional disorder or the more severe conduct disorder. Children with ADHD are more likely to have oppositional or conduct disorder than other children.

Put simply, there are two parts to tackling any behavioral problem:

1. Encouraging the behavior you want through rewards, praise, or attention and
2. Reducing the behavior you don't with clear, consistent rules and quick punishments.

Children with ADHD thrive on consistency and routines, so to improve the chances of good behavior, let them keep to their routine, such as getting up, eating or leaving for school at the same time each day.

The most effective way of enforcing rules is to decide on them together with your child - so agree in advance things such as bedtimes, how long friends can come over and play for, etc.

Where possible, make sure you give your child a good reason for the behavior you want. For example, tidying up your room will mean you'll find things more easily.

There are actually some very effective ways to reduce bad behavior.

- Get your child's attention. Address him/her by name and speak clearly.
- Keep commands short and simple.
- Give quick punishments that can be enforced now.

It's not always possible to ignore bad behavior and focus on the good. Instant, mild punishments - sometimes called 'negative consequences' - can reduce aggressive and angry behavior.

Bad behavior often decreases when it costs your child

something. The three main costs are time, money and undesirable consequences such as briefly removing your child from an activity he/she enjoys.

The main reasons a punishment fails are because it's too severe, it's given too late, or it's inconsistent.

Punishments can take various forms.

1. Natural consequences may be enough to stop the behavior. For example, if you throw your drink on the floor, you don't get another.
2. Time-out can be helpful in dealing with tantrums. This is when your child has to sit out for a brief amount of time - usually about five minutes. For older children, a good rule of thumb is one minute for every year of age. The idea is to give your child a chance to calm down. An example would be to get your child to sit at the foot of the stairs or in a corner.
3. Losing privileges such as allowance or games console can also discourage bad behavior. It's a good idea to limit these punishments to a set period - for example one day, so your child has a chance to start the next with a clean sheet.

Avoid punishments that have the potential to harm your child either physically or psychologically. For example, keep from insulting your child publicly.

Be careful not to reward bad behavior. For example, items you buy after a tantrum on a shopping trip could be seen as a reward. Keep consequences small and instant. It's consistency that's effective - not severity. Monitor the effect of the punishment. If it isn't changing behavior, it's time to try a different tack.

When your child has calmed down and returned to

his/her normal self, talk to him/her and be clear about what was wrong and what you'd like to see changed. You may be tempted to ask 'why', but with younger children especially, it's best to keep any analysis to a minimum. Often tantrums and anger are your child's way of expressing things she can't put into words.

Over the next few days look out for signs that your child has listened to what you've said. If she has, tell her you're pleased she's listened and taken note.

If the punishments you've come up with don't seem to be working, try others. You will also find that what works one day may not work another.

ADHD isn't just a disorder for children. Many adults are beginning to be diagnosed as well. The truth is that many of these adults have had ADHD for quite some time, but were left undiagnosed due to the misinformation about this problem. But once a diagnosis has been made, there are definitely ways for adults to adjust, adapt, and live full, healthy lives.

## **ADULT ADHD**

Being an adult in today's world can be enough to make any of us feel frazzled and unorganized at times. We have all experienced walking into a room, only to forget what we went there for. Having a busy, distracting life is tough enough, but for an adult with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, some of the daily challenges take on even more significance.

The term ADHD is really a misnomer. It is a disorder more of attention inconsistency rather than a deficit. Individuals with ADHD are capable of sustaining attention for

long periods of time, but usually only to tasks that are of significant interest to them.

This sometimes interferes in daily functioning; as well all have to do things at times that are not of great interest to us. Adults with ADHD often exhibit many of the following behaviors:

- Unfinished tasks
- Broken promises
- Unfulfilled potential
- Temper outbursts (emotional sensitivity)
- Resistance to being touched (physical sensitivity)
- Fidgety
- A tendency toward drug and/or alcohol abuse
- Inability to cope with the stresses of everyday life
- Procrastination due to distractibility
- Seeming not to hear or being inattentive
- Over-focusing on some tasks while ignoring others
- Impulsivity
- Difficulty with organization
- Easily bored
- Can't sit still

- Has learning disabilities

Comments often made about ADHD adults include the following:

"She doesn't finish what she starts"

"He's irresponsible."

"She's smart, but she never settles down."

"He never follows through with anything."

"She won't let me comfort her when she's upset."

"He falls asleep watching TV the minute he comes home."

"He's immature"

The severity of ADHD is on a continuum. Being diagnosed depends on how well one manages the symptoms. It's this continuum that makes it hard to estimate how many people have it.

Current estimates range between 1% and 22% of the general population who suffer from this disorder. Some say more boys than girls have it, but many doctors believe it's the same proportionally. The difference in behavior in girls/women are not as easily observed and may be tagged as an emotional problem rather than an attention problem

As with children, many feel this disorder in adults is genetic and that they have suffered with the problem since childhood with it being undiagnosed or misdiagnosed. Often girls or women have to be more impaired than boys to receive a diagnosis of ADHD.

Some feel that the brain is believed to be less active in the areas controlling attention and concentration thus making it a physical disorder rather than a mental one. ADHD is also believed to be connected to low levels of a brain chemical called dopamine. This is why stimulant medications such as Ritalin are believed to work so well with ADHD because they make that area of the brain more active and result in better focus.

It is a misconception that everyone with ADHD has emotional problems, though assessing for co-existing depression or anxiety disorders is important since this has important implications for treatment planning. Sometimes, the emotional difficulties a person experiences are just offshoots of living in a society that has non-ADHD standards.

It is simply an issue of the ADHD person's brain being wired a little differently from most individuals'.

Contrary to popular myth, ADHD does not result from poor parenting or family dysfunction. The diagnosis requires evaluation of childhood, parental, and sibling history and symptoms; school records/teacher comments; checklists used to assess inattention, impulsivity, hyperactivity, and emotionality.

It is useful to hear several anecdotes to describe these symptoms, both from the patient and from significant others. Often psychological testing is used to look for patterns of consistent difficulties with attention or inhibition of behaviors, co-existing disorders such as learning disabilities, and rule out other disorders. Psychological testing allows for a more objective evaluation in comparison to others of like age and ability.

As we've addressed before, treatment of ADHD often involves a combination of education, medications, and learning skills. Some believe there are specific stages of

treatment that a person with ADHD will need to travel through in order to effectively cope with the problem. These include:

1. Aha, I have it.
2. Grief—there's a reason you could not live up to people's standards!
3. Seek support, understanding, and companionship during grief
4. Seeking, exploration, and experimentation. Everything looks different—try new things.
5. Coming of age— enjoy a new identity, redefine values, honor talents/ gifts

Conversely, there are several common problems that accompany treatment as well. These include:

1. Someone key in the person's life does not accept the diagnosis
2. After an initial burst in improvement, progress slows
3. The newly diagnosed person does not want to try meds (although this does not preclude success)
4. No meds seem to work
5. Stigma about using meds, e.g., from pharmacists, co-workers, family, etc.
6. Lack of people who understand what it's like to have ADHD

7. Trouble deciding who to tell about the problem and how to tell them
8. Hard to find a clinician qualified to diagnose and treat ADHD
9. Attempts at structure keep falling apart
10. Feelings of shame and embarrassment about having ADHD

Despite numerous possible obstacles and failures that have often occurred prior to diagnosis, adults with usually possess a number of wonderful qualities and traits. They are sensitive, creative, and often very intuitive.

Treatment of adults often includes rebuilding one's self-image, and learning to express and deal with pent-up anger and guilt. Individual or family therapy, as well as support groups can be helpful, as can learning to say no,

So here are some useful tips to help an adult suffering from ADHD.

First, restructure your life.

- Encourage loved ones to assist by give you extra reminders, while taking the ultimate responsibility.
- Lists should become your best friend. Make lists for everything – things to do, things to remember, things to forget. You may want to utilize Post-It notes as they can be placed anywhere and can help you remember what it is you need to remember.

We feel we need to include a note here on lists. When making a to-do list, don't include things that you know you won't be able to accomplish in a day. For example,

if you need to paint the shutters, don't put "Paint the shutters" on your to-do list for Monday. Instead write "Start painting the shutters".

People with ADHD tend to get overwhelmed quite easily and having too much on a list can cause you to procrastinate and not do the tasks at all. Take great joy in crossing something off of your daily list!

- Pace yourself
- Your work space should be of sufficient space but free of excess distractions
- Experiment with background sound to cover other distractions
- Always have a specific plan. You should budget in some specific time for distractions. In other words, allow yourself to procrastinate.
- Try to master distractions. If you can't see a reason to do something, don't do it, unless it is a responsibility that cannot be shunned. Pay someone, trade off with a spouse—there has to be an inner willingness or distraction will likely be a problem.

Second, learn to negotiate.

- Get your temper under control. Never try to make a deal or compromise when your temper is active. Don't blame others. Your reactions to what anyone does are still your responsibility. Identify the underlying anger and use words to express it.
- Learn not to blame. Remember that it doesn't matter WHY something happened. But it does matter WHAT happened. Come up with a plan to solve the problem

rather than worrying how the problem got there. Be specific. Set the plan in motion, and stick to it.

Third, don't forget to focus on your relationship with your spouse or significant other.

- Guard against co-dependent behaviors. In codependency, we focus attention on each other rather than taking responsibility for ourselves. A person with ADHD often blames others for problems, and significant others often end up taking responsibility.

- A partner can help break a task down, or facilitate communication with direct questions.

Adults with ADHD are in a much better place than their younger counterparts because adults can better understand what's happening to them and take action to counteract the symptoms.

Perhaps the most difficult place to cope with an ADHD child is at school. The next section can be used by educators or by parents who would like to make suggestions to their child's teacher.

## **TEACHING AN ADHD CHILD**

Speaking from personal experience, this author can tell you that having an ADHD child in the classroom can be one of life's most difficult situations. ADHD children require a lot of attention and constant supervision to be kept on task.

When there are several other children that need your attention as well, it's not always possible to focus enough attention on that one student who is disruptive even when you know you need to do exactly that.

An ADHD student is amazingly disorganized with papers and school supplies bursting out of his or her desk. They can't sit still unless you have them entranced in the lesson, and they are constantly interrupting you while you are teaching.

There are times when it literally takes every ounce of patience you can muster up not to yell at the little angel at the top of your lungs. The upside is that these kids can often be real joys as well. They can be good workers, very funny, and are often extremely personable.

The structured school classroom setting can be a tremendous challenge for individuals who have difficulty sitting still, being quiet, and paying attention to the right thing.

One of the worst parts of trying to educate an ADHD child is keeping him or her on task to make sure he or she doesn't fall behind. Often these kids will "hit a wall" during the school year.

Every week they just get a little farther and farther behind, until they're so far behind that it's impossible to catch up. They lose their homework assignments, even after they have spent hours working on them. And they study hard for tests only to perform poorly the next day. They just slip farther and farther behind with each passing week.

ADHD is most often recognized and referred for treatment in third grade. This is when elementary school kids most often hit the "academic wall."

In third grade they are expected to do more and more work on their own, and they are given more homework to do as well. There are also many referrals in seventh grade, or when the child leaves Elementary School for Junior High School, with several classes and several teachers.

There are times when elementary students find ways to compensate in their younger years. However, once they move to the higher grades – junior high – they find that these same coping strategies just don't work anymore.

So, as an educator, what can you do to help your ADHD child in the classroom? Well, the first step is to recommend an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meeting. This may scare many parents because IEPs are often used for special education students.

Calm the parent's fears by pointing out to them that an IEP is simply a "game plan" to address problematic issues and figure out ways that all teachers and school personnel can help their child succeed academically.

Aside from an IEP, what else can you do in the classroom? These children are very easily distracted, and the classroom is the worst place for them since there can be so much going on all at the same time. Consider your seating plan.

- Move your ADD ADHD student's desk to where there are fewer distractions, close to the teacher to monitor and encourage, or near a well-focused child.
- It is usually better to use rows for seating arrangement and to try to avoid tables with groups of students. Often the groups are too distracting for the ADHD child.
- In the ideal setting, provide tables for specific group projects, and traditional rows for independent work. Of course, we are rarely in an ideal setting.
- Every once in a while, try arranging desks in a horseshoe shape to allow for appropriate discussion while permitting independent work.

- Your ADD ADHD student's desk should be near the teacher (for prompting and redirection), away from other challenging students, and not touching others' desks.

However, if you notice that your attention deficit student looks around a lot to see where noises are coming from, because he is very auditorily distractible, he may benefit from being seated near the rear of the classroom.

- Experiment with seat location in the front of the classroom (near the board) and instructional area if your student is more visually distracted.
- It is important for the teacher to be able to move about the entire room and to have access to all students. Practice "Management by Walking Around" in the classroom. The more personal interaction, the better.
- Have all of the distractible ADD ADHD students seated nearest to place in the class where you will give directions or lectures. At least as close as possible without being punitive.
- To minimize distractions, seat the ADD ADHD student away from both the hallway and windows.
- Keep a portion of the room free of obvious visual and auditory distractions. Have at least a part of the room free from bright, loud, or distracting objects.
- Use desk dividers and/or study carrels carefully. Make sure they are used as a "study area option" rather than as a punishment.

- Seat those really smart and quiet girls next to the ADHD child.
- Stand near the attention deficit student when giving directions or presenting the lesson.

Right from day one, make the classroom rules clear and post them where they are visible every moment of every day. Be sure all students know the consequences for violating the rules and be consistent.

There are certain times of the day when extra concentration will be necessary. It may help to post a daily schedule showing what will be studied and when for the children to refer to. This also reinforces the routine of school and allows the child to know what to expect from one moment to the next.

When you give assignments to the ADHD child, break them up into small, manageable pieces. By doing this, you are acknowledging that their attention span is a hindrance to them and they can complete the smaller parts of an assignment without losing their train of thought.

It might also help to provide these kids with step-by-step instructions on how to complete an assignment. Give them a checklist that allows them to cross off a step once they complete it. This will give them a sense of success also which is good for all students!

When presenting a lesson, there are also some things you can do to minimize distraction and help the ADHD student gain as much as possible from your instruction.

- Provide an outline to ADHD students with key concepts or vocabulary prior to lesson presentation.
- ADHD kids are easily bored, even by you. Try to increase the pace of lesson presentation. Include a

variety of activities during each lesson appropriate to elementary school.

- Use multi-sensory presentations, but be careful with audio-visual aids to be sure that distractions are kept to a minimum. For example, be sure interesting pictures and or sounds relate directly to the material to be learned.
- Make lessons brief or break longer presentations into discrete segments.
- Actively involve the attention deficit student during the lesson presentation. Have the elementary school age ADHD student be the instructional aid who is to write key words or ideas on the board.
- Encourage the ADD ADHD students to develop mental images of the concepts or information being presented. Ask them about their images to be sure they are visualizing the key material to be learned.
- Allow your elementary school students to make frequent responses throughout the lesson by using choral responding, frequently calling on many individuals, having the class respond with hand signals.
- Try role-playing activities to act out key concepts, historical events, etc. I have taught ADD ADHD students the history of the Revolutionary War in the parking lot of the school, using cars, trees, and other objects to represent events and places in history. This can work well.
- Be creative! Yes, it is possible for even you to bore a student. Work at teaching, motivating, and entertaining. The more exciting a subject is to a child, the better he will learn. Be excited about what you are

teaching!

- Your attention deficit student will respond better to situations that he finds stimulating and engaging. Varying the instructional medium and pace will help sustain his interest.
- Your ADD ADHD elementary school aged student would probably find lessons that emphasize "hands-on" activities highly engaging.
- Keeping the time required for sustained attention on task balanced with more active learning will improve his performance.
- Use cooperative learning activities, particularly those that assign each child in a group a specific role or piece of information that must be shared with the group.
- Develop learning stations and clear signals and procedures for how students transition from one center to another.
- Use game-like activities, such as "dictionary scavenger hunts," to teach appropriate use of reference/resource materials.
- Interact frequently (verbally and physically) with your attention deficit student. Use the ADD ADHD student's name in your lesson presentation. Write personal notes to the student about key elements of the lesson.
- Pair students to check work.
- Provide peer tutoring to help ADD ADHD student's review concepts. Let ADHD students share recently learned concepts with struggling peer.

ADHD students have a horrible problem with organization. Even when they are shown how to become more organized, the whole concept still seems quite foreign to them. Try a couple of these ideas:

- Use dividers and folders in his desk so he can easily find things.
- Model an organized classroom and model the strategies you use to cope with disorganization.
- Show that you value organization by following 5 minutes each day for the children to organize their desks, folders, etc.
- Reinforce organization by having a "desk fairy" that gives a daily award for the most organized row of desks.
- Develop a clear system for keeping track of completed and uncompleted work such as having individual hanging files in which each child can place completed work and a special folder for uncompleted work.
- Develop a color coding method for your room in which each subject is associated with a certain color.
- It's not difficult to spot the ADHD child in a classroom. Likewise, the backpack becomes less of a way to transport homework and important papers and more of a place to stash anything and everything.

You must check to make sure that they are actually turning in their work. It is strange but true. They have probably done the homework, but just are not paying attention when you ask them to turn it in.

- You may also want to try getting a large manila envelope – as large as you can find. Try the kind of envelope that businesses use to use to deliver documents from one department to another with a signature section printed right on the front.

Duct-tape the folder to the child's backpack. Tell your child's teacher that you will insert the homework, and then sign the folder. Have the teacher remove the homework and sign the receipt.

Minimize opportunities for your child to lose the homework. You have invested too much time in getting the homework done to let your child lose it now.

- An organizing time at the end of each day can be helpful to gather the necessary materials for the assignments and develop a plan of action for completion. This will greatly aid the development of the "executive processes".

Many times the social aspect of school can be of particularly great concern for the ADHD student. Peers view these kids as weird and have problems coping with their erratic behaviors. The other kids will often exclude the ADHD child which can cause some real problems with self-esteem. What can you do to enhance social skills at school?

- Provide a safe environment for the child with ADD ADHD. Make sure the child knows you are his friend and you are there to help him.
- Treat him with respect. Never belittle him in front of his peers. Both he and the other children know that he stands out, and if the teacher belittles the child, then the rest of the children will see that as permission from the teacher to belittle the child as well. Children can be

cruel.

- Students with attention deficit disorder can experience many difficulties in the social area, especially with peer relationships. They tend to have trouble picking up social cues, they act impulsively, have limited self-awareness of their effect on others, display delayed role-taking ability, and over-personalize other's actions as being criticism, and tend not to recognize positive feedback.
- ADD ADHD students tend to play better with younger or older children when their roles are clearly defined.
- These attention deficit students tend to repeat self-defeating social behavior patterns and not learn from experience.
- Conversationally, they may ramble and say embarrassing things to peers.
- Areas and time-periods with less structure and less supervision, such as the playground and class parties, can be a problem. Students with good social awareness and who like to be helpful can be paired with the ADD ADHD child to help. This pairing can take the form of being a "study buddy", doing activities/projects, or playing on the playground.
- Cross-age tutoring with older or younger students can also have social benefits. Most successful pairing is done with adequate preparation of the paired student, planning meetings with the pair to set expectations, and with parental permission. Pairing expectations and time-commitments should be fairly limited in scope to increase the opportunity for success and lessen the constraints on the paired students.

- Many Attention Deficit students lack friends to be with outside of the school-setting. It can be beneficial to strategize with your ADD ADHD student and his parent on developing a "friendship plan" for the home setting.

Sometimes the goal of establishing one special friendship is ambitious and sufficient. This could include steps of identifying friend possibilities that might be available/accepting, practice in making arrangements using the phone, planning an activity or sleep-over that is structured/predictable, and tips on how to maintain friendships over time.

Whether you're an adult or child sufferer, a parent, or an educator, there is help out there.

## **FINDING SUPPORT**

It's normal and so easy to depend on friends and family to help you deal with your problems, but beware of leaning on them too much. ADHD can be a difficult problem to understand and cope with. When you are faced with this disorder in any way, it can be extremely beneficial to surround yourself with people who know how you feel.

You can pool your resources to find help and get support that will help you cope with the daily frustrations of ADHD. So where do you find that support?

Start by looking around your community. Talk to a doctor, contact the local hospital, or even at the local community center. Scan the newspapers for daily club meetings and support groups.

If you don't have a group already formed locally, consider forming one yourself. All it takes is a few people to make an effective support group. Meetings can be held in

each other's homes or you could even gather at a local restaurant periodically to trade stories and tips.

There doesn't need to be any specific formality to these types of groups. All you really have to have is people who share a common problem and you have a support group.

You can also look on the Internet for a message board that addresses ADHD. We've found some great boards just by doing a Google search. Among other, they include:

[www.adders.org](http://www.adders.org)

[www.adhdnews.com](http://www.adhdnews.com)

[http://messageboards.ivillage.com/iv-psaddchild?ice=ivl\\_searchmb](http://messageboards.ivillage.com/iv-psaddchild?ice=ivl_searchmb) (for parents of ADHD children)

[http://messageboards.ivillage.com/iv-bhgenadd?ice=ivl\\_searchmb](http://messageboards.ivillage.com/iv-bhgenadd?ice=ivl_searchmb) (for adults with ADHD)

Help is out there whether you have to make it yourself or simply join in. Don't discount support groups. They can be a lifesaver for people who are confused and need a little extra help in dealing with ADHD.

## **CONCLUSION**

ADHD is most definitely one of the most pressing problems for children and adults in our world today. What was once a virtually unheard of disorder is now commonplace and well-known. It is also a bone of contention with many.

Some people believe that labeling children with this tag is wrong and unhelpful. Others think that it is a cop-out and a way for parents to have an excuse for their child's behavior or their lack of parenting skills.

The bottom line is there is always a reason why people act the way they do. When certain behaviors are beyond control by the individual, a medical reason should be explored. Many childhood illnesses are ignored or even missed, but kids with ADHD have attention focused on them because of the obvious behaviors they exhibit.

Adults with ADHD face special problems as well. They have most likely been afflicted with this disorder for many, many years. Because the diagnosis has only become known within the last decade, having a reason for their behavior might be a real relief.

Either way, it really doesn't matter in the long run. People act a certain way for a myriad of different reasons. Certain behaviors manifest themselves in many ways. Finding methods to cope with those behaviors can make all the difference.

Myth or fact, ADHD is something that's part of our society today and getting help in dealing with it is just part of the disorder.

Normal lives are possible – even with ADHD. Face it, deal with it, live with it, and conquer it. It IS possible! Get ready for a whole new world – a world that functions smoothly even with ADHD.

The following websites were referenced in researching this article:

[www.ADDinschool.org](http://www.ADDinschool.org)

[www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)

[www.netdoctor.co.uk](http://www.netdoctor.co.uk)

[www.parenthood.com](http://www.parenthood.com)