

Parenting a Child with AD/HD

By CHADD-Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder



Parenting a child with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), or any disability, can be overwhelming at times. However, it is important to remember that children with AD/HD can and do succeed. As a parent, you can help create home and school environments that improve your child's chances for success. Early intervention is the key to preventing school and social failure and their associated ills — conduct disorder, delinquency, mood disorders, drug and alcohol abuse and anxiety disorders.

Being an Effective Parent

The following tips can help you be the most effective parent possible for your child.

Seek up-to-date, scientifically supported information about AD/HD. Be careful about ads claiming to "cure" AD/HD. Currently, there is no cure for this disability. It is up to the parent to learn to distinguish the "accurate" information from the "inaccurate." AD/HD is a hereditary disorder and is not caused by poor parenting or a chaotic environment.

It is important to educate other adults so that relatives, teachers and caretakers understand that AD/HD is neurobiological (your child's brain works a bit differently) and is not the result of too much sugar or too little discipline. They also need to know how they can help your child meet expectations for performance and behavior.

Seek a professional evaluation and treatment. When first seeking a professional, ask questions related to the diagnosis and treatment of AD/HD. Ask how many of their clients have the disorder. What methods will they use to evaluate the child? What types of treatment do they support? Are they able to evaluate for co-existing conditions that are common to AD/HD? Effective treatment involves the use of a multimodal

approach that includes an appropriate educational program; behavior modification; parent, child and teacher education, and sometimes counseling and medication. A thorough evaluation and assessment of your child's strengths and weaknesses will help you and members of your treatment team (your child's pediatrician, a psychologist and/or psychiatrist, and educators) develop an appropriate and effective treatment plan.

Seek to become your child's best advocate. You may have to represent or protect your child's best interest in school situations, both academic and behavioral. You will be part of the team that determines what services and placements your child receives in an Individualized Education Program or IEP (see IEP article on p. 45) or 504 Plan (see 504 Plan article on p. 50). You will need to know your child's rights in the event of suspension or expulsion from school, or contact with the juvenile justice system. The more you know about your child's rights under the two education laws—the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act—the better the chance that you will maximize positive outcomes.

Seek parent training from a qualified mental health professional experienced in AD/HD. Effective parent training will teach you strategies to change behaviors and improve your relationship with you child. Parent training will help you learn to:

- Provide clear, consistent expectations, directions and limits.
- Set up an effective discipline system.
- Learn to use behavior modification principles to reinforce positive behaviors and eliminate or reduce negative behaviors that create problems for your child.

- Help you assist your child in making friends and learning to work cooperatively with others.
- Identify your child's strengths in areas such as art, computers, mechanical ability and build upon these strengths so that your child has a sense of pride and accomplishment.
- Seek support for yourself. Parents can give each other information as well as support by attending local CHADD support group meetings where available.

Parenting a child with a disability is not an easy task. You may want to arrange for respite, where a provider cares for your child or children for a few hours, a day or night, or even longer, while you take time off from your daily responsibilities of parenting. (See the Respite section of General Resources in the back of the handbook.) If you begin to feel too overwhelmed or defeated, you may want to consider counseling or talking to a trained professional about your feelings.

Tell your child that you love and support him or her unconditionally. There will be days when you may not believe this yourself. Those will be the days when it is even more important that you acknowledge the difficulties your child faces on daily basis, and express your love. Let your child know that you will get through the smooth and rough times together. ■

Thanks to Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD) for permission to adapt and reprint their CHADD Fact Sheet #2. For additional information about AD/HD or this national organization, visit their Web site at www.chadd.org or call 800-233-4050.