

Tips for Parents of Children with ADHD

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It is estimated that one in 20 children have Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). ADHD is a brain disorder that shows its effects on individuals through short attention spans, hyperactivity and impulsive behavior. Though ADHD has been studied for more than 60 years, it has gained acceptance as a diagnosis in only the last 20 years.

In addition to the challenges ADHD puts upon the young people who have the condition, researchers have found that the disorder has a profound affect on families. Life with a child who has ADHD can put incredible pressure on parents and siblings. This pressure can start early in the child's life; many infants with ADHD are fussy, demanding and difficult to comfort. These early and nearly constant difficulties can cause even experienced parents to question their parenting abilities. And as the child gets older, even greater challenges arise.

Parents of children with ADHD often experience feelings of shame, anxiety and even fear that the child's behavior will result in harm to them or others. These feelings can tear families apart. Many parents of children with ADHD find themselves angry with the child, their partner and school or medical personnel. In struggling to help their child cope with the condition and succeed in school and social interactions, these parents often strain the relationships that mean the most to them.

The Symptoms -

ADHD is occasionally difficult to recognize because it shares symptoms with other disorders such as chronic depression. There are three main symptoms that generally affect children (and adults) with ADHD. Those with ADHD may exhibit one or all of these symptoms at any given time.

1. **Hyperactivity**—Near constant motion is a telltale sign of ADHD in children. Tendencies to regularly fidget, tap a foot, bounce in a chair, or twirl a pencil are common. Inability to refrain from talking, especially in settings like school or church, can be another sign of ADHD.
2. **Inattentiveness**—Paying attention for prolonged periods of time is a challenge for children with ADHD. Those who are easily distracted or bored, daydream frequently or have trouble following directions may do so because of ADHD.

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3. **Impulsivity**—Children who are impulsive tend to act before they think. They may put off homework or break rules without thinking about the consequences. Children with ADHD tend to blurt out words and interrupt the conversations of others.

The Blame Game -

Being a parent of a child with ADHD is an incredible challenge, but it is one that thousands of parents have faced. The first step to effectively parenting a child with ADHD is in understanding that parenting practices do not result in ADHD behavior. All too often, parents blame themselves or their partners for their child's behavior. This can damage the very relationship that must be strong to best help their child and themselves cope with the ADHD condition.

The frustration felt by parents of children with ADHD can cause one partner to turn on the other. This is an unfortunate mistake, because facing the challenges brought on by ADHD as a team is much easier than trying to do so individually. Do not play the blame game. A common scenario is one parent blaming the other for being too lenient with the child. The nature of the disorder results in behavior problems. These are not a result of parenting techniques. Instead of criticizing one another, parenting partners are wiser to focus on supporting one another in their parenting duties—nurturing, disciplining, teaching and playing.

Children with ADHD can strain relationships both because of the energy their care requires and the difficulty of getting capable and willing babysitters. Finding the energy to go out and spend time together for parents of children with this condition can be difficult after a week of dealing with the special parenting challenges that come with the child. Speak with school officials, your child's physician or support groups to learn of individuals or organizations in your area that specialize in caring for special needs children. Make time for yourselves; an investment of time and energy into your relationship can pay dividends by strengthening your commitment to one another and renewing your energy level.

Sibling Rivalry -

Special needs children can also put strains on sibling relationships. Other children in the family may feel their brother or sister is receiving special treatment at their expense. This can cause arguments and conflicts. Parents of a child with ADHD should help their other children understand why one child needs special support or doesn't get disciplined similarly. While it can be easy for these parents to focus primarily on their child who has ADHD, they ought to set aside time especially for their other children and ensure that each child in the family knows they are unique and much loved.

As well, the child with ADHD can become jealous of siblings who they perceive to be labeled as the "good" kids. Their siblings may earn better grades and accolades from teachers, parents or friends. This can cause friction between the child with ADHD and the other children. While most parents know about the dangers of comparing siblings to one another, parents of children who have ADHD need to be particularly wary of doing so even indirectly. They may need to go a step further and actively discourage competition between their children.

Children with ADHD have a low tolerance for frustration and usually are poor losers. They get easily frustrated at their inability to concentrate on the task at hand. Cooperative games and lessons on doing things solely for enjoyment are important useful approaches for parents raising a child with ADHD.

Conclusion -

Raising children is a full time job. When one of those children is a child with ADHD, that job becomes more challenging, but it can also be more rewarding. Helping children learn to cope with a disorder such as ADHD and excel in life is a wonderful accomplishment. Your child, and the other members of your family, face unique challenges but hold the key to truly special family accomplishments.