



How do I tell my child about ADD (ADHD)?

Many parents are concerned about "labelling" their child with ADHD. Other parents feel it's important to discuss ADD (ADHD) with their child, but don't know where to start or exactly what to say.

Parents face a difficult dilemma due to the negative image that many people hold about ADD (ADHD). But not telling your child has negative consequences too. Just talk to an adult who has gone a lifetime without understanding the cause of his or her struggles and you'll quickly understand the importance of knowing about ADD (ADHD) as early in life as possible.

Why is important for your child to know about ADD (ADHD)?

- Avoiding the ADD (ADHD) "label" doesn't mean your child won't be labelled! He or she will be labelled things like "lazy," "space cadet," or "stupid." Think about it - are these really better?
- Knowing that you have ADD (ADHD) is a critical first step toward meeting the challenges that ADD (ADHD) presents.
- By sharing what you know with your child, the hard work required to meet ADD (ADHD) challenges can become a family project. It's unlikely that your child is the only family member with ADD (ADHD). Every child with ADD (ADHD) has a 40% chance that at least one parent has ADD (ADHD). And siblings are likely to have ADD (ADHD) as well. By tackling ADD (ADHD) together, your child can feel accepted and won't feel alone.
- Having ADD (ADHD) isn't all bad. ADD (ADHD) has a "bad" reputation in the classroom because classrooms today are not very ADD-friendly. There are many positive traits associated with ADD (ADHD) - such as creativity, energy, enthusiasm, and ability to hyper-focus. Often, the very same traits that make the classroom difficult may be advantages for your child later in life.
- Knowing about ADD (ADHD) throughout childhood means that you and your child can problem-solve together and make more ADD-friendly choices - enhancing his or her opportunity for success.



Tailor what you say about ADD (ADHD) according to the age of your child. Like any complicated subject, a younger child needs to have ADD (ADHD) explained on a level that he or she can understand. It's important not to flood your child with information or with terminology that can't be understood.

Keep in mind that how to talk to your child about ADD (ADHD) is as important as what you tell your child.

ADD (ADHD) should be introduced in a realistic but constructive way. Tell your child that everyone is good at some things and not so good at other things. It's often

helpful to talk about your own strengths and weaknesses and the difficulties you may have had as a child. Let your child know that you'll help him or her meet the challenges of ADD (ADHD). Help your child discover and develop his or her gifts. The more comfortable you are in discussing ADD (ADHD), the more comfortable your child will be in learning to live with the condition rather than against it.



Let your child know he or she is not alone. If you are a parent with ADD (ADHD), it can be helpful to talk to your child about your own ADD (ADHD). "Oops, I burned the toast again. That's because my ADD (ADHD) brain was thinking about something else when I should have been thinking about toast." Or, "I've lost my car keys again - maybe you can help me figure out how not to lose my keys so often."

Give your child positive examples of successful people with ADD (ADHD). There are now stories about famous athletes, Hollywood celebrities, politicians, comedians and business entrepreneurs with ADD (ADHD) including President JFK and actor / comedian Jim Carrey. Talking about ADD (ADHD) in a balanced context can give your child a more constructive attitude about ADD (ADHD) - that it creates challenges, but that you can have a very successful life with ADD (ADHD) if you put yourself in the right context.



Talk about ADD (ADHD) as a way of life, not an excuse. But be sure to make it a way that the whole family will take on rather than a mountain that your child must climb alone.



Emphasize your child's strengths - don't over focus on ADD (ADHD) foibles. One of the greatest risks in growing up with untreated ADD (ADHD) is low self-esteem - the result of a lifetime of criticism, of embarrassment, of not being able to keep up with others who may not be as bright, but not understanding why.



For a younger child - ages 6-10 - parents should refer to [Learning to Slow Down and Pay Attention](#) by Kathleen Nadeau, Ph.D. and Ellen Dixon, Ph.D. This book is cartoon illustrated and written on a level that a child in the early elementary school years can easily understand. It not only explains ADD (ADHD), but also focuses in a positive way about problem-solving and getting help.

For a child that is somewhat older - ages 9-13 - parents should refer to [Putting on the Brakes](#) by Patricia Quinn, M.D. and Judith Stern, as well as the [Brakes Activity Book](#) and [Best of Brakes](#). These books have lots of kid appeal, and provide more sophisticated, in-depth information for an older child.

*Adapted from <http://www.addvance.com/help/parents/child.html>
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