

Tips for Parents with Attention Deficit Disorders.

BE FIRM, CONSISTENT, AND KIND -- Remember the power of praise and reward. Use a positive attitude and not a punitive one in dealing with your child. Establish clear ground rules when the child is young and keep those rules with appropriate amendments. As the child matures and improves in judgment, give him more leeway. There is no "Operating Manual" for rearing your child, but one rule to heed--NEVER, NEVER put the child down. Do not degrade the child--MAINTAIN self-esteem at all cost.

LISTEN -- Listen actively to your child. This sets a good example and helps the child feel important and valued. Remember, if you do not want your child to tune you out, do not tune the child out.

DO NOT HAGGLE OR NEGOTIATE OVER SMALL THINGS -- Make a clear decision. Right or wrong, it is better than haggling. Decision making is a chore for youngsters with ADD. Encourage him to make a decision, but be patient with him as he tries to think it through. If he makes a decision accept it. If he hesitates and shows indecision, only then make the decision for him. Build mutual respect as each learns to make choices and understand the consequences.

GIVE CHILD CHORES -- Keep the chore appropriate and keep clear guidelines as to who will do what and when. Select one or two chores and be prepared that it will also take your time. Goodwill and many calm reminders may be necessary to get those chores done. Parents who share duties and chores with their child help to build self-discipline and a sense of responsibility.

HELP THE CHILD REMEMBER -- Many children with ADD are distractible and forgetful. Keep a short list of tasks. A list is impersonal, and the child will gain satisfaction as he checks off those tasks that he completes. Use picture cues, a prominently placed calendar, or environmental reminders (i.e. after supper feed the dog; when sister brings the dishes-you load the dishwasher). These techniques are memory boosters.

BE PREPARED TO ACCEPT THE ABSENT MINDEDNESS OF MOST CHILDREN WITH ADD -- Often children do not process multiple requests quickly or accurately. Before making a request, it helps if parents first make sure they have their child's attention. Watch to see where the child lays the kitchen shears, the saw, the hammer, etc. Check later to see if the item has been put away, if not, give a calm reminder to put it in its proper place. Most importantly, allow the child only that which he can manage. Too many toys, tools, clothes, shoes, etc. are distracting and cannot be managed comfortably. Provide things only as they are needed, and teach that everything has a time and place for its return.

STRETCH THE ATTENTION SPAN -- Rewarding non-hyperactive behavior is the key to preparing these children with ADD for school. The child can be shown pictures in a book and be rewarded. Games of increasing difficulty can be taught. As an example, start with building blocks and progressing eventually to dominoes, card games and dice games etc. Matching pictures is an excellent way to build a child's memory and concentration skills.

AVOID A POWER STRUGGLE OVER REPEATED DIRECTIONS-- Give a command one to three times as needed but say it each time as though it was the first. Speak clearly and slowly, use a gentle touch, make good eye contact, and keep an encouraging expression. After the parent has stated his wish in a simple, clear command, the child can be asked to repeat what was said. As soon as the child does what was asked, the parent should simply say, "Thank you, I appreciate your doing what I asked." One of the most potent motivations is a verbal response indicating your pride and acceptance of the child's efforts.

HELP YOUR CHILD ORGANIZE -- Many youngsters with ADD are erratic in their approach to problem solving and present themselves as being very disorganized. They may have great difficulty relating an event in its proper sequence. Keep a calm, structured, and predictable home existence. Be firm and consistent about routine chores and schedules for meals, homework, bedtime, etc. Routines and schedules help your child accept order and become more predictable. Minimize distractions and provide a place, a time and the tools for a task's completion. Help him know where to begin, when to end and how to express who, what, when, and where. Again, a calm, uncritical manner should be the rule.

DIFFICULTY WAITING -- Because of the child's impulsivity, fear of forgetting, and/or being forgotten, he will speak and act out of turn. Give him a turn!! Some interruptions may be allowed. If you have permitted some lack of good manners, and provided warnings and cues to help him realize he did interrupt, he may be disciplined by excluding him from the activity.

PREVENT PROBLEMS WHENEVER POSSIBLE -- Keep in mind that even children with ADD do not intend to be defiant. They probably mean to do the right thing. It is best to try to prevent problems rather than dealing with them after they occur. Recognize that it may be more beneficial for your child to stay home with a baby-sitter, than to stay in a crowded daycare facility or attend an exciting wedding reception. The idea is to avoid situations that could be embarrassing until he learns a measure of self-control. These stimulating situations may be gradually introduced.

AVOID FATIGUE -- When children with ADD are tired, their self-control breaks down. Rest, relaxation and regular routine are particularly needed for this group of children.

PROVIDE OUTLETS FOR THE RELEASE OF EXCESS ENERGY -- Because their energy should not be bottled up, these children need daily constructive and creative activities that may include running, biking, swimming, sports, etc.; a fenced yard helps. In bad weather, provide a recreation room where they can do as they please without criticism for their noise or activity level. Children with ADD are often creative. You may want to provide them with things like craft supplies.

ACCEPT YOUR CHILD'S LIMITATIONS, RECOGNIZE STRENGTHS, AND HELP OTHERS DO THE SAME -- Undue criticism or attempts to change the energetic youngster into a "model" child, may cause more harm than good. Since many ADD behaviors are not intentional, do not expect to completely eliminate them--just try to teach reasonable control. Nothing is more helpful for the child with ADD than having a tolerant low-key family who respects the child and allows the child to respect himself.

IN MANY CASES, PARENTS SHOULD NOT TUTOR THEIR OWN CHILD -- It is helpful for a youngster to have a family member read to him or discuss some ideas. An attempt to teach phonics or math is usually unsuccessful. The child profits more from showing what he has already mastered, than from the strained relationship that may result from parental tutoring. Provide a study area and a study person whenever possible.

PRAISE OR PUNISHMENT MUST BE IMMEDIATE -- The longer the interval between the child's behavior and the time he gets feedback, the more opportunity there is for him to skip to another event and fail to make the feedback relevant. The cardinal rule is to focus on the behavior and not the child or the child's self-esteem. Since these children cannot handle many rules, the family needs a few clear consistent ones. Punishment should be short in duration. An occasional slap on the behind may be part of normal child rearing, but beyond that it becomes ineffective and often creates more problems especially for the child with ADD. These children need adult models exhibiting control and calmness in order to decrease their own aggressive behavior. Avoid situations that may encourage inappropriate behaviors.

APPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS SHOULD BE REWARDED BUT NOT BOUGHT -- Reward appropriate behavior with such things as special time or privileges with parents or another favorite person. If he gets up 15 minutes late, then he should be required to go to bed 15 minutes early that night. The more tangible rewards such as money, toys, and candy can be used as a starting place to get the child's attention; they should soon be replaced by social and personal rewards.

BE OBSERVANT - KEEP IN MIND WHAT WORKS - USE IT OVER AND OVER -- Avoid negative comments. Do not assume that the child understands what you want. Make an effort to explain clearly what is expected so the child can comply. "Put the clothes in the dryer and then you can watch TV, or the TV will be turned off ." Define what a "clean room" is or what "Be good in the store" means. The child with ADD can direct himself toward appropriate behavior if someone helps him understand what is expected.

PERIODICALLY GET AWAY FROM IT ALL -- Parents must take time away from their child often enough to recharge. Coping with some of these children for 24 hours a day can be very stressful. Families must get through the difficult times without being torn apart. It is important to protect the basic relationships in your family. Learn to maintain a balanced point of view. Separate the essential issues from the non-essential ones. Be as calm as possible, do not over-react, keep your eye on the future and most importantly, get every ounce of energy from your sense of humor.