

13 Parenting Strategies for ADHD Kids



From **ADDitude's** Experts

ADDITUDE
LIVING WELL WITH **ATTENTION DEFICIT**

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CONTACT INFORMATION

New Hope Media
1-646-366-0830
39 West 37th Street, 15th Floor
New York, NY 10018

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by Deborah Carpenter

Most parents are good parents. But if your son or daughter has ADHD, “good” may not be enough. To ensure that your child is happy and well adjusted now and in the future—and to create a tranquil home environment—you’ve got to be a great parent.

Fortunately, it’s easier than you’d imagine to go from good to great. All it takes is a few adjustments in your parenting skills and the way you interact with your child. Here’s what works, and why.

Believe in Your Child’s Future

It’s not easy to accept that there’s something not quite “normal” about your child. But a child who senses his parents’ resentment—and their pessimism about his prospects—is unlikely to develop the self-esteem and can-do spirit he’ll need in order to become a well-adjusted adult.

Treat your kid as if he were already the person you would like him to be. That will help him become that person.

Be a Good Role Model

Parents are a child’s most influential role model, so think carefully about your own behavior. If you’re unable to control yourself, how can you expect your child to exercise self-control?

It’s perfectly normal to feel angry at your child from time to time. It’s not OK to continually shout at her. You wouldn’t dream of screaming and swearing at friends or coworkers, so you know you can control your anger if you must.

Don’t Be Too Quick to Say No

All children need to be told “no” at certain times—to keep them from doing something dangerous. But many parents say “no” reflexively. And a kid who hears “no” a lot is apt to rebel—especially if she’s impulsive to begin with.

Smart parents know when to say “no,” and when it makes more sense to take a deep breath and answer in the affirmative—and avoid a nasty confrontation.

Pay Attention to Positive Behavior

Many parents overlook all the positive ways in which their child behaves. The resulting negativity can cast a pall over the household that affects every aspect of life.

“Catch your child being good or doing something well, and praise her,” says Sal Severe, Ph.D, the author of *How to Behave So Your Preschooler Will Too*. “By praising desirable behaviors, you teach her what you want—not what you don’t want.”

Anticipate Potentially Explosive Situations

“Parents spend a lot of time in reactive mode instead of thinking and planning ahead,” explains George DuPaul, Ph.D., professor of school psychology at Lehigh University at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. A simple plan, he says, is all it takes to keep a positive experience from turning negative for all concerned.

Whatever you do, be consistent. All kids benefit from consistency,” says Dr. DuPaul, “but ADD kids, in particular, need consistency. It’s not a luxury for them. A last-minute change in schedule or an interruption of a familiar routine can wreak havoc with a child who already feels like he spends most of his time off-balance.”

Avoid Buying into Negative Remarks

It’s no fun to hear others describe your child as “slow” or unmotivated. But don’t let negative remarks deter you from advocating for his educational needs. After all, kids with ADD can succeed if they get the help they need.

“While it’s true that your child’s mind works differently, he certainly has the ability to learn and succeed just like any other kid,” says Dr. DuPaul.

Discipline, Not Punishment

How often have you complained to friends, “I’ve yelled, lectured, threatened, given time-outs, and even spanked—and nothing works!” Do you see the problem with this approach? Any child exposed to such a variety of “sticks” would be confused.

Instead of punishing every infraction, stick to a consistent behavior modification program: Define attainable goals and reward each achievement until the behavior becomes routine.

Distinguish Between Defiance and Distraction

Imagine telling your child to make his bed. Now imagine finding him, minutes later, lying on his unmade bed playing cards. What should you do?

The best approach might be to remind your child what you want him to do. Punishment makes sense if it’s clear that your child is being defiant—if he refuses to make the bed. But, in many cases, an ADHDer fails to comply because he becomes distracted. When you repeatedly punish a child for behavior he can’t control, you set him up to fail.

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Skip Labels

Kids who hear bad things about themselves all the time come to believe these things. No matter how frustrating your child's behavior, never call him "lazy," or anything else that might be hurtful.

Bear in mind that some of the problem behaviors you ascribe to ADHD may be common to all children of that age. Read up on the stages of childhood development—especially if your child happens to be your first-born.

Make Your Child—Not Meds—Responsible

There's no doubt that, for many children with ADD, the right medication makes a huge difference in behavior. But by no means are meds the only thing that makes a difference. Talking about it as if they were will leave the child feeling that good behavior has little to do with her own efforts. When you catch your child doing something you've repeatedly asked her not to do, don't ask, "Did you forget to take your medication this morning?" And don't threaten to increase her dosage because she did something inappropriate.

"Statements like these give your child the impression that her behavior is controlled solely by external factors," says Dr. Kenneth Brown-Gratchev, Psy.D. "It's a parent's responsibility to send the clear message that, while medication will improve the skills she possesses, it won't fix all of her troubles."

Enlist Your Child in Problem-Solving

"When you team up with your child to address negative behaviors, you create a supportive, loving climate at home," says Carol Brady, Ph.D., a psychiatrist based in Houston.

Next time your kid's room is a mess, tell her, "We have a problem, and I need your help to solve it." Say that it's hard for you to tuck her in at night because you might trip over her toys, and ask for her input. The more involved your child is in the solution, the better the outcome.

Stop Blaming Others

Are you the kind of parent who finds fault with everyone except your child? Do you say things like, "If only the teacher were better, my son wouldn't have so much trouble in school"?

Other people can contribute to your child's problems. But trying to pin the blame exclusively on others encourages your child to take the easy way out. Why should she take personal responsibility for her actions if she can blame someone else?

Get Support

Some things in life cannot be done well alone, and raising an ADHD child is one of them. "If you take the Clint Eastwood approach, you'll wind up exhausted emotionally and physically," says Brown-Gratchev. "Build a support system. That way, when your own 'system' overloads or fails, as it will from time to time, there's someone to put you back together again."

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