

When you take care of yourself, you're better able to take care of your child

As your child's role model and most important source of strength, it is vital that you live healthfully. If you are overtired or have simply run out of patience, you risk losing sight of the structure and support you have so carefully set up for your child with ADHD.

- **Take care of yourself.** Eat right, exercise, and find ways to reduce stress, whether it means taking a nightly bath or practicing morning meditation. If you do get sick, acknowledge it and get help.
- **Seek support.** One of the most important things to remember in rearing a child with ADHD is that you don't have to do it alone. Talk to your child's doctors, therapists, and teachers. Join an organized support group for parents of children with ADHD. These groups offer a forum for giving and receiving advice, and provide a safe place to vent feelings and share experiences.
- **Take breaks.** Friends and family can be wonderful about offering to babysit, but you may feel guilty about leaving your child, or leaving the volunteer with a child with ADHD. Next time, accept their offer and discuss honestly how best to handle your child.

Establish structure and stick to it

Children with ADHD are more likely to succeed in completing tasks when the tasks occur in predictable patterns and in predictable places. Your job is to create and sustain structure in your home, so that your child knows what to expect and what they are expected to do.

Tips for helping your child with ADHD stay focused and organized

- **Follow a routine.** It is important to set a time and a place for everything to help the child with ADHD understand and meet expectations. Establish simple and predictable rituals for meals, homework, play, and bed. Have your child lay out clothes for the next morning before going to bed, and make sure whatever he or she needs to take to school is in a special place, ready to grab.
- **Use clocks and timers.** Consider placing clocks throughout the house, with a big one in your child's bedroom. Allow enough time for what your child needs to do, such as homework or getting ready in the morning. Use a timer for homework or transitional times, such between finishing up play and getting ready for bed.
- **Simplify your child's schedule.** It is good to avoid idle time, but a child with ADHD may become more distracted and "wound up" if there are many after-school activities. You may need to make adjustments to the child's after-school commitments based on the individual child's abilities and the demands of particular activities.
- **Create a quiet place.** Make sure your child has a quiet, private space of his or her own. A porch or a bedroom work well too, as long as it's not the same place as the child goes for a time-out.
- **Do your best to be neat and organized.** Set up your home in an organized way. Make sure your child knows that everything has its place. Model organization as much as possible.

- For kids with ADHD, idle time may exacerbate their symptoms and create chaos in your home. It is important to keep a child with ADHD busy without piling on so many things that the child becomes overwhelmed.

Sign your child up for a sport, art class, or music. At home, organize simple activities that fill up your child's time. These can be tasks like helping you cook, playing a board game with a sibling, or drawing a picture. Try not to over-rely on the television or computer/video games as time-fillers.

Set clear expectations and rules

Children with ADHD need consistent rules that they can understand and follow. Make the rules of behavior for the family simple and clear. Write down the rules and hang them up in a place where your child can easily read them.

Children with ADHD respond particularly well to organized systems of rewards and consequences. It's important to explain what will happen when the rules are obeyed and when they are broken. Finally, stick to your system: follow through each and every time with a reward or a consequence. Don't forget praise and positive reinforcement.

As you establish these consistent structures, keep in mind that children with ADHD often receive criticism. Be on the lookout for good behavior—and praise it. Praise is especially important for children who have ADHD because they typically get so little of it. These children receive correction, remediation, and complaints about their behavior—but little positive reinforcement.

A smile, positive comment, or other reward from you can improve the attention, concentration and impulse control of your child with ADHD. Do your best to focus on giving positive praise for appropriate behavior and task completion, while giving as few negative responses as possible to inappropriate behavior or poor task performance. Reward your child for small achievements that you might take for granted in another child.

Encourage movement and sleep

Physical activity can help your child with ADHD

Children with ADHD often have energy to burn. Organized sports and other physical activities can help them get their energy out in healthy ways and focus their attention on specific movements and skills.

The benefits of physical activity are endless: it improves concentration, decreases depression and anxiety, and promotes brain growth. Most importantly for children with attention deficits, however, is the fact that exercise leads to better sleep, which in turn can also reduce the symptoms of ADHD.

Find a sport that your child will enjoy and that suits his or her strengths. For example, sports such as softball that involve a lot of “down time” are not the best fit for children with attention

problems. Individual or team sports like basketball and hockey that require constant motion are better options.

Children with ADHD may also benefit from martial arts training, tae kwon do, or yoga, which enhance mental control as they work out the body.

Better sleep can help your child with ADHD

Insufficient sleep can make anyone less attentive, but it can be highly detrimental for children with ADHD. Kids with ADHD need at least as much sleep as their unaffected peers, but tend not to get what they need. Their attention problems can lead to overstimulation and trouble falling asleep. A consistent, early bedtime is the most helpful strategy to combat this problem, but it may not completely solve it.

Help your child get better rest by trying out one or more of the following strategies:

- **Decrease television time** and increase your child's activities and exercise levels during the day.
- **Create a buffer time to lower down the activity level for 30-60 minutes before bedtime.** Find quieter activities such as coloring, reading or playing quietly.
- **Use lavender or other aromas in your child's room.** The scent may help to calm your child.
- **Use relaxation tapes as background noise** for your child when falling asleep. There are many varieties available including nature sounds and calming music. Children with ADHD often find "white noise" to be calming. You can create white noise by putting a radio on static or running an electric fan.

Help your child eat right

Diet is not a cause of attention deficit disorder, but food can and does affect your child's mental state, which in turn seems to affect behavior. Monitoring and modifying what, when, and how much your child eats can help decrease the symptoms of ADHD.

All children benefit from fresh foods, regular meal times, and staying away from junk food. These tenets are especially true for children with ADHD, whose impulsiveness and distractedness can lead to missed meals, disordered eating, and overeating.

Eating small meals more often may help your child's ADHD

Children with ADHD are notorious for not eating regularly. Without parental guidance, these children might not eat for hours and then binge on whatever is around. The result of this pattern can be devastating to the child's physical and emotional health.

Prevent unhealthy eating habits by scheduling regular nutritious meals or snacks for your child no more than three hours apart. Physically, a child with ADHD needs a regular intake of healthy food; mentally, meal times are a necessary break and a scheduled rhythm to the day.

Teach your child how to make friends

Children with ADHD often have difficulty with simple social interactions. They may struggle with reading social cues, talk too much, interrupt frequently, or come off as aggressive or “too intense.” Their relative emotional immaturity can make them stand out among children their own age, and make them targets for unfriendly teasing.

Don’t forget, though, that many kids with ADHD will eventually figure out for themselves how to get along with others and spot people who aren’t appropriate as friends. Moreover, personality traits that might exasperate parents and teachers may come across to peers as funny and charming.

Helping a child with attention deficit disorder improve social skills

It's hard for children with ADHD to learn social skills and social rules. You can help your child with ADHD become a better listener, learn to read people’s faces and body language, and interact more smoothly in groups.

- Speak gently but honestly with your child about his or her challenges and how to make changes.
- Role-play various social scenarios with your child. Trade roles often and try to make it fun.
- Make time and space for your child to play, and reward good play behaviors often.
- Focus on the positives and use encouraging words to support self-confidence.