
THE WELLNESS LETTER

Your Child and AD/HD

Taking Care of Your Child

Children with AD/HD have problems finishing tasks, listening, and following instructions. Boys with AD/HD have trouble focusing, are easily distracted, and are impulsive and hyperactive. Girls with AD/HD show more fear, depression, mood swings, and thought and language problems. All children with AD/HD can become frustrated, angry, and disappointed. They may sometimes feel misunderstood.

Whether or not your child is being treated with medications, you can work with him or her to change behaviors. You can help him or her to become productive and more focused. The best approach is to work as a team, with you taking on a role similar to that of a coach—patient and understanding but also firm. This approach will help your child learn to accept structure. Actively working with your child will help reduce the stress on both you and your child.

Understand your child

Children with AD/HD often do things very differently from other children. Some of the things they do are unproductive and seemingly immature and irresponsible. You may think your child should know better, and it may be tempting to scold him or her. But before getting angry, think about what your child's experience may be.

Focus yourself on your child's experience

A child with AD/HD is more easily distracted, frustrated, and sensitive to failure than are most other children. Many children with AD/HD have the added burden of being hyperactive. Your child is not deliberately causing problems. In fact, children with AD/HD are often curious, crea-

tive, and intelligent. Take time to understand how your child experiences his or her environment and relationships. Be curious with your child about different ways to see things and different ways to do things. Don't question the correctness of your child's reality. Help your child understand that others may view things differently.

Give up caring about what other people think. Helping your child focus and change his or her behaviors will require patience. Your child may seem very different from other children. There may be some embarrassing situations. Be proud of the work you do with your child. Don't focus on the opinions of others. You have your child's best interests at heart.

Get to know your child

Knowing your child will help you decide the best way to work together to solve problems at home and at school. Understanding your child's habits and behaviors, and knowing the things that are particularly difficult for him or her, will help you see areas that need to be changed. Watch how your child interacts with others. Watch how your child reacts to and tries to solve problems. By watching, you will begin to see problem areas. You will see the situations that make your child unable to focus. You will also begin to understand how the problems your child faces lead him or her to become frustrated or angry. Then you can better understand how these problems create low self-esteem.

Don't just focus on the difficulties your child has. If you want to help your child, you must form a close bond with him or her. It is important to be patient. Laugh with your child. If you and your child spend time together and share common in-

terests, you can more easily solve problems together. Having fun with your child will give you strength and patience.

Communicate with your child

Let your child know that you are there to help with problems. Tell your child that you love and appreciate him or her. Children with AD/HD may be sensitive to jokes or comments, which other children are able to brush off easily. Letting your child know that he or she is appreciated and that you like to spend time with him or her will make it easier to solve problems together. Otherwise, it may seem as if you want to change your child because you are dissatisfied with him or her.

Communication is important. You can translate the things your child has a hard time understanding. Rules, instructions, and reasons given by a teacher or other adult may need to be put into your child's own words. You can play an important role in doing this.

Shaping Behavior

One of the biggest difficulties for children with AD/HD is controlling impulses and learning what is appropriate. Children with AD/HD also have trouble getting things done. Once you understand your child, you can help him or her with these problems. Your role will be teacher and disciplinarian. Here are several things that you can do to help shape your child's behavior.

Provide Structure

Structuring activities helps organize your child. Structure can be provided by telling your child what to do and by encouraging your child to think things through. Rewards are helpful in getting your child to accomplish tasks.

Lists And Organization

When you tell your child to do something, only tell him or her one thing at a time. If you want to give your child more to do, write out a short list. Make sure your child understands what is expected. Have your child repeat the task in his or her own words. Be firm and clear about your expectations. Be specific. Set time limits on when a task needs to be finished.

Writing out a list of tasks is helpful in several ways. It focuses the child. It serves as a reminder if he or she forgets. It also gives a sense of accomplishment to your child as he or she checks off finished tasks.

The list may be especially helpful if you write it with your child. Put it in your child's own words. Whenever possible, give your child choices about details, such as when a specific task should be done. This lets the child feel some sense of control and freedom of choice.

Understanding Consequences

You can provide structure by helping your child think things through. Encourage your child to think about the consequences of his or her actions. For example, ask your child to fill in the blanks: "If you do ... then ... will happen." Or you might ask your child "What do you think will happen if you do such-and-such?" You can fill in the consequences your child overlooks. Use the consequences to help your child think of other behaviors. In encouraging your child to think about the consequences of actions, you help your child to take responsibility for his or her own actions.

Reducing Distractions

Reducing distractions in the environment can help your child not to feel overwhelmed. There are several ways this can be done. Create routines.

Break down large projects into manageable small steps. Keep yourself and your household on a predictable schedule that your child can rely on. Whenever possible, prepare for transitions in advance so that your child is not faced with an overstimulating change.

Reducing Impulsive Behavior

To reduce impulsive behavior—and use up the extra energy your child may have—plan activities that keep your child busy and active. Sports and similar activities that involve your child with other children are a good choice. The other children can be examples of positive behavior. These activities can also give your child a sense of accomplishment.

Losing Things

Children with AD/HD often lose things. Losing things can cause frustration. Set aside a special place in your home where your child can put things that are needed every day (such as a backpack, keys, or a wallet). Doing this allows you to watch for these items and prevent a last-minute search for a missing item.

Setting Limits

One of the most important things you can provide is predictable, consistent, and fair reinforcement and discipline of your child's behaviors. Plan ahead for any behavior you want to encourage or discourage.

A child with AD/HD will not be at the same level of maturity as other children his or her age may be. He or she may not understand consequences in the way other children might. To help your child understand, you must be patient and clear. Make sure you have your child's attention.

Make sure that your child understands which behaviors will be rewarded and which will be disci-

plined—and what the consequences will be. Have your child repeat what you have said in his or her own words to check for understanding. Explain again if necessary. You may want to write the rules down and post them in the house.

Remember, it is important to balance the good with the bad. Encourage good behaviors as you discourage inappropriate behaviors.

Reinforcement

Always be genuine in the praise and support you give your child. Children with AD/HD do many things well. Focus on these things, and on the accomplishment of the specific tasks you requested, when giving your child praise.

If your child is showing effort or improvement, let him or her know that you recognize it. Even if your child is unable to complete a task, or does the task poorly, it is important to let your child know that you appreciate the effort. Children with AD/HD can easily become frustrated. You need to help your child understand that while things don't always work out, the effort put into a task is still worthwhile.

Another way of encouraging good behavior is to provide rewards when your child meets your expectations. Make out a chart, with the expectations or tasks on one side, and a space for your child to mark off the tasks as they are completed. The next column should contain the number of points he or she will receive for completing the task. Tell your child what the points may be used for—special privileges, money, or some activity. Explain and write down the possible rewards. You can give extra points if your child remembers to do a task without being reminded or accomplishes a task early. If you want to include large tasks on the chart, be sure to break them down into smaller steps.

Discipline

Children with AD/HD do not always follow the rules. They may not always respond to praise and encouragement. Using discipline to discourage inappropriate behaviors will likely be necessary.

With discipline, you should have a clear plan as to what the action will be. You must be prepared to carry out the action regardless of any inconvenience. Consistency is important for your child to clearly understand which behaviors are not acceptable. Getting angry and disciplining by giving out spontaneous punishments will not help your child. *The purpose of discipline is not to hurt your child, but to guide your child's behavior.*

Taking away privileges and using time-outs are good ways to change your child's behavior. "Time-outs" are specific periods of time that your child must spend alone, for example, in his or her room. The goal of a time-out is to teach your child to watch his or her own behavior. The quiet and isolation of time-outs can help your child calm down if he or she is over-stimulated. Be selective about which behaviors result in time-outs and enforce these consistently. Only the worst behaviors should be selected. Set a time limit for the time-out. Do not respond to any temper tantrums your child may have during the time-out.

Understanding and dealing with a child's anger and rage

Every parent of a child with AD/HD has probably experienced the child's anger and rage—and felt overwhelmed and helpless. It is helpful to understand those things which cause your child's anger. Anger is usually a response to feelings of frustration that come from a sense of failure or of being misunderstood. Anger or rage may also be caused by intense anxiety. Understanding what led up to

the anger can go a long way in helping the child to end the rage or tantrum. You can help your child calm down by reducing stimulation, having him or her take a time-out, or involving the child in exercise or another calming activity.

Talking with your child about his or her day and discussing things can also prevent feelings of frustration or anxiety from becoming angry outbursts.

Keep your child's primary care doctor informed

If your child is getting treatment from more than one health care provider it's important that these providers be able to talk to one another. It's a very good idea to sign a consent to release information. This will allow the psychiatrist or behavioral health therapist to talk with the primary care doctor.

Accessing Your Behavioral Health Benefits

Please call the number on the back of your insurance card for questions about benefits, obtaining referrals to treatment, and other behavioral health issues.