

EXTRA HELP FOR ADD AND ADHD

It is especially important for people with attention deficits (ADD) and hyperactivity (ADHD) to have help from family and friends. Often, people with these disorders are the last to realize they are “out of sync” with others and need feedback. Until they build internal controls by learning routines and habits, they will need external structure from those who care about them. Mark any strategies below that you would like others to use, or that would help you help your loved one.

- ___ Find sources of support. Having an ADHD person in the family can be exhausting. Join groups that understand this condition and offer useful tips.
- ___ Read everything you can to help you understand ADD. The more you understand, the less responsible you will feel for causing or controlling problems, and the better you will be able to manage them.
- ___ Know your limits. Make a “Do Not Disturb” sign for moments when you must regain your strength. If you catch exhaustion soon enough, you will revive faster.
- ___ Make agreements ahead of time on behaviors that go overboard. Make sure that ADHD people understand their impact on others. Plan brief time-outs when energy gets overcharged. If necessary, put time-out contracts in writing.
- ___ Ask people with ADD what best helps them stay on task or calm down. Personal insight is often overlooked.
- ___ Expect to give reminders about chores and errands. This can be done in a patient and loving way once the problem is understood. Make lists and keep calendars of the family schedule and give advanced warnings about any changes.
- ___ Don’t make excuses or do things for people with ADD because it is easier. With proper incentives, reminders, monitoring, and breakdown of tasks, responsible habits can be learned.
- ___ During conversations or when giving directions, ask for feedback—“Did that make sense? What did I just say?” Use a timer. Do not let one person speak for too long. Let ADD people know when you are losing their point.
- ___ Ask questions that encourage self-awareness—“Do you know what you just did?”
- ___ Encourage understanding of ADD of everyone who has contact with people with the disorder: family, friends, and, most important, the people themselves. Make it clear that some of the greatest geniuses of our time have had ADD. The intelligent part of the mind can be very strong, but the part of the brain that blocks unneeded movement and distractions may be underenergized.

FRIENDLY CAUTIONS

Find people who appreciate and understand you and make an effort to stay in touch with them. Don’t stay too long where you’re not wanted. Avoid people who give advice that makes you feel uncomfortable or who refuse to believe in ADD. Find a coach who will help you get organized, stay on task, offer encouragement, signal you if you’re talking too much, or interrupt if you are in hyperfocus. Choose someone who is objective and positive for home, school, or work.

Keep others informed in subtle ways—“I get distracted easily so let me know if I’m getting off the topic,” “I can move around a lot, so tell me if it bothers you.” Learn to joke about yourself without putting yourself down—“I’m one of those clueless geniuses.” If others demean you, handle it lightly—“They’ll never let you in the ADD support group if you talk like that.” “I’m trying out for the Albert Einstein award this year.”

NATIONAL NETWORKS, SUPPORT GROUPS, AND OTHER RESOURCES

As more is learned about ADD, the number of support groups, newsletters, and books for individuals and families grows. Many organizations and books offer important advice on how to advocate for yourself or your child at school or in the workplace:

- Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder (CHADD): Suite 201, 8181 Professional Place, Landover, MD 20785, 800-233-4050, 301-306-7070, www.chadd.org.
- National Attention Deficit Disorder Association (NADDA): PO Box 1303, Northbrook, IL 60065-1303, www.add.org.
- ADDvance Resource Site for Women & Girls with ADD: www.addvance.com.
- One ADD Place (an excellent internet site): www.oneaddplace.com.
- Books for Adults: *You Mean I'm Not Lazy, Crazy, Stupid or Dumb* by Kelly and Ramundo, 1995; *Driven to Distraction* by Hallowell & Ratey (Simon & Schuster, 1994).
- Books for Parents: *Maybe You Know My Kid* by Fowler, *Beyond Ritalin*, by Garber, Garber, and Spizman (Harper Perennial, 1996); *Attention Deficit Disorder and the Law* by Latham and Latham, 1992; *Taking Charge of ADHD* by Barkley (Guilford Press, 1995.)
- Books for Children: *Shelly the Hyperactive Turtle (Ages 3-7)* by Moss, 1989; *Putting on the Brakes (Ages 8-12)* by Quinn, 1992; *Learning to Slow Down and Pay Attention (Ages 6-12)*; *Help4ADD@Highschool* by Nadeau, 1998.

MEDICATION

Sometimes, an accurate diagnosis of ADD and education is all that is needed to manage problems. When behavior strategies or alternative treatments (herbs, diet, or biofeedback) are not helpful, it may be essential to try medication. Stimulants are the drug of choice, they are not addicting for people with ADD and will not remain in a person's system after being discontinued. Some people can stop using medication as their organizational skills improve; others will continue to need them in adulthood. For the 20% to 25% of people who are not helped by stimulants, certain antidepressants will be effective and are especially important if moodiness is a part of the problem.

PROFESSIONAL HELP

Education and coaching to learn behavior strategies and social skills may be more important than counseling for the actual neurological disorder of ADD. However, until it is diagnosed, there may be much damage caused by family and relationship problems, not to mention academic or other trauma. Often, medication will be needed to provide sufficient focus to work through past difficulties. Counselors may need to be directive, as people with ADD can lose track of their therapeutic agenda.