ADHD and You

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Practical tips for families with children with ADHD at home

ADHD can have a huge impact on family and home life, particularly when regular routines are disrupted, as we know that children with ADHD benefit from structure. Every child is different, and every situation is different, so there is no 'one size fits all' solution or advice, but here are a few tips that may help you adjust to a new family dynamic and bring some calm and harmony back to home life:

1. The secret to success is routine



- Getting children and young people to go to bed and get up on time can be a battleground for many parents, but **establishing a routine can help**
- **Work out (and write down) the routine with your child** so they can have input (and buy in to it) so **they feel part of the solution**, not the problem
- **Keep it simple** to start with; once you have the basics working, you can add more



2. Lists are great

- **Written and verbal instructions are helpful** for children with ADHD who are often inattentive
- **Pictures, particularly for younger children, are worth a thousand words**, so think about using pictures or photographs from magazines to show what you want done and what is expected – a 'visual calendar'
- You can stick them on a chart in the form of a **checklist** in the order that they need to be completed
- Put the checklist where your child can see it easily and maybe even tick the activity as it's finished



3. Use visual timetables of new routines



- We all like **visible signs of our progress and improvements**, so why not draw up a chart with your child showing what you expect in the new routine, how long you expect it to take and how your child has done over a week or a month?
- Maybe even set up a spreadsheet on the home computer or keep notes on your smartphone
- **Make sure that your child is involved** and buys in to the new routine



4. Focus on good behaviour, not bad



- **Praise your child's strengths and reward them** to encourage further good behaviour and increase their sense of self-worth
- Always try to **look for things to praise** and offer appropriate rewards after sustained positive behaviours
- Negative consequences or criticism should be used far less than positive consequences with children with ADHD – it just makes them feel bad about themselves and encourages further bad behaviour
- **Praise the good things** and try to ignore the bad unless it is dangerous to do so – and if you're going to have a battle pick your moment!

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5. Contracting – setting up a 'deal'

- Contracting is about talking to your child about the right way to behave, and **agreeing a plan together**, with rewards for them when they do what they are asked
- The contract – 'The Deal' – can be written down and it is **essential for the child to agree the behaviour change** – if they think it is their idea they are far more likely to stick to it
- The contract should be **specific, appropriate and sustainable** over the long term
- **Agree the reward** you are going to give your child in advance, make sure it is appropriate to the change you want, and your child is motivated by the reward

6. Eight-step method to stop your child from having an ADHD 'meltdown'[1]

- **Keep your child balanced**. Make sure they get enough sleep, eat regular and healthy meals, and have enough 'down time' to reduce stress
- **Pick your battles**, and be clear with your child – and yourself – about your expectations
- **Follow a routine**, then stick to your routine as much as possible
- **Set expectations**. Before it's time for a change – e.g. turning off the TV, getting ready for bed or stopping a game for dinner – give your child a count-down warning
- **Stay calm**. If your child does have a 'meltdown', it may be hard for you to stay calm, but it won't help the situation if you're both worked up
- **Be understanding**. If you see that your child is getting upset, ask what's wrong, acknowledge what the child tells you and explain that you can understand their point of view
- **Encourage deep breaths**, as they can be relaxing and can help relieve the stress that caused the 'meltdown' in the first place
- **Set rules for 'meltdowns.'** When an angry outburst is over and calm is restored, you and your child should discuss what happened, and agree what to do if they get upset or angry in the future

7. Managing sleep[2,3]

- **Exercise daily** (at least one hour) and **avoid trigger foods** (e.g. drinks and food containing caffeine)
- **Stick to a schedule** (e.g. night-time routine including a bath, brushing teeth, reading, etc.)
- Set a quiet/non-intrusive **bedtime alarm** so children associate their bedtime with a clock or timer instead of feeling like sleep is a parental demand
- Use **blackout curtains** and white noise or nature sounds to block neighbourhood or household sounds
- Try essential oil **aromatherapy** (e.g. lavender, chamomile, sandalwood or vanilla) – let your child choose a calming scent and dab a little oil on a cotton ball and place it on their pillowcase
- Give your child a **weighted blanket** to apply deep pressure to muscles and joints throughout the night, helping to support the body's natural ability to fall asleep
- **Reduce anxiety**, e.g. by using a sleep diary

8. Helping siblings

- **Take time with siblings**, one on one, to make them feel special
- **Set clear rules and tasks**, making sure that there isn't a disproportionate burden of work or responsibility on anyone

References

1. Everyday Health. 8 Steps to stop your child from having an ADHD meltdown. Available at: https://www.everydayhealth.com/add-adhd/8-steps-to-stop-your-child-from-having-an-adhd-meltdown.aspx [Accessed March 2020]
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3. Sleep tips for kids with ADHD and Asperger Syndrome (ASD). Available at: https://blog.brainbalancecenters.com/2014/05/sleep-tips-adhd-asperger-syndrome [Accessed March 2020]