

# For Parents of Children with ADHD

## Common Daily Problems and What You Can Do About Them

### General Tips

- Rules should be clear and brief.
- Give your child chores. This will give him/her a sense of responsibility and boost self-esteem.
- Short lists of tasks are excellent to help a child remember.
- Routines are extremely important for children with ADHD. Set up regular times for meals, homework, TV, getting up, and going to bed. Follow through on schedule!
- Identify what your child is good at doing (like art, math, computer skills) and build on it.
- Tell your child that you love him/her unconditionally.
- Catch your child being good and give immediate positive feedback.

### It is very hard to get my child ready for school in the morning.

- Get ready the night before. Set out clothes, accessories for the next day before going to bed.
- Create a consistent and predictable schedule.
- A routine allows your child to predict the order of events. Put this routine in writing or in pictures on a poster for your child.
- Create a checklist that your kids can check off in the morning. For younger children, create a visual checklist using pictures (of your child or from a magazine) of each task.  
Checklist/Schedule example:  
Alarm goes off→Brush Teeth→Wash face→Get dressed→Take medication→Get on school bus
- Eliminate distractions. It is hard for your child to focus on getting ready if there are lots of other things going on. Impose a "no morning television" rule to keep kids on track.
- Buy identical socks. Having all of your child's socks identical will cut down on time trying to find matching pairs.
- Use labeled baskets. Keep clothes separated in colorful, labeled baskets. Clean laundry can be tossed in these baskets instead of folded away in drawers.
- Keep a supply of quick "Grab and Go" breakfast, so you can make it to school on time and

provide your child a healthful breakfast (i.e. yogurt, multigrain muffins, bagels, protein bars).

- Reward and praise your child. This will motivate your child to succeed. Even if your child does not succeed in all parts of "morning routine", use praise to reward your child when he/she is successful.
- If your child is on medication, try waking your child up 30 to 45 minutes before the usual waking time and give him or her the medication immediately. Then allow your child to "rest" in bed for the next 30 minutes. This rest period will allow the medication to begin working and your child will be better able to participate in the morning routine.

### My child is very irritable in the late afternoon/early evening.

#### (Common side effects of stimulant medication).

- The late afternoon and evening is often a very stressful time for all children in all families because parents and children have had to "hold it all together" at work and at school.
- If your child is on medication, your child may also be experiencing "rebound"-the time when your child's medication is wearing off and ADHD symptoms may reappear.
- Adjust your child's closing schedule so that the medication is not wearing off during a time of "high demand" (for example, when homework or chores are usually being done).
- Create a period of "downtime" when your child can do calm activities like listen to music, take a bath, read etc.
- Alternatively, let your child "blow off extra energy and tension" by doing some physical exercise.
- Talk to your child's doctor about giving a smaller dose of medication in the late afternoon. This is called "stepped down" dose and helps a child transition off a medication in the evening.

### **My child has trouble sleeping.**

(Parents often describe their kids as being “on the go” and collapsing late at night. Stimulant medication has worn off, making it more difficult for children with ADHD to manage their behavior. Also, some kids are affected by stimulants the same way caffeine affects adults.)

- Develop bedtime rituals. (A bedtime ritual is a powerful sign that it is time to sleep. It needs to be simple so the child can “recreate” the ritual, even if the parent is not present. Try writing it out in order to make it consistent. Share these rituals with other caregivers.
- Pay attention to the sleeping environment. Background noises, location, sleep partners, bedding, favorite toys, and lighting can all affect a child’s ability to fall asleep. A cool, dark, quiet room is best.
- Letting children cry themselves to sleep is not recommended. Teach them to soothe themselves, such as giving the child a special blanket, a picture of the parent(s), or a stuffed animal to hold while falling asleep. Avoid activities that depend on the parent’s presence, including rocking or holding the child until he/she falls asleep.
- Make the bedroom a sleep-only-zone. Remove most toys, games, televisions, computers, and radios from your child’s bedroom. One or two stuffed animals are acceptable; adolescents may need a “home office” outside the bedroom to do homework.
- Limit time in bed. Hours spent awake in bed interfere with good sleep patterns; the goal is to make the child’s bed a place for sleeping only. Be aware of how much sleep kids need at different ages. Avoid putting the child to bed too early (i.e. before he/she is tired).
- Establish consistent waking times. Bed times and waking times should be the same seven days a week.
- Avoid drinks with caffeine, especially in the afternoon (i.e. tea, soda, cocoa, coffee).
- Consider medical problems. Allergy, asthma or conditions that cause pain to disrupt sleep. Watch for snoring or pauses in breathing and consult your physician for help.
- Establish daytime routines.
- Chart your child’s progress. Praise your child for successful quiet nights. Consider marking successful nights on a star chart. Provide reward at the end of the week.

- Try medications to help your child sleep only under the care of your child’s doctor.

### **My child is losing weight or not eating enough.**

(Common side effect of stimulant medication use).

- Encourage breakfast with calorie-dense foods.
- Give the morning dose of medication after your child has already eaten breakfast. Afternoon doses should also be given after lunch.
- Provide your child with nutritious after school and bedtime snacks that are high in protein and in complex carbohydrates, such as protein bars, shakes/drinks made with protein powder/liquid meals.
- Get eating started with any highly preferred food before giving other foods.
- Consider shifting dinner to a time later in the evening when your child’s medication has worn off. Alternatively, allow your child to “graze” in the evening on healthy snacks, as he or she may be hungriest right before bed.
- Follow your child’s height and weight with careful measurements at your doctor’s office and talk to your child’s doctor.

### **Homework Tips**

- Establish a routine and schedule for homework (a specific time and place). Don’t allow your child to wait until the evening to get started.
- Limit distractions in the home during homework hours (reducing unnecessary noise, activity, and phone calls, and turning off the TV).
- Praise and compliment your child when he or she puts forth good effort and completes tasks. In a supportive, noncritical manner, it is appropriate and helpful to assist in pointing out and making some corrections of errors on the homework.
- It is not your responsibility to correct all of your child’s errors on homework or make him or her turn in a perfect paper.
- Remind your child to do homework and offer incentives: “When you finish your homework, you can watch TV or play a game”.
- If your child struggles with reading, help by reading the material together or reading it to your son or daughter.
- Work a certain amount of time and then stop working on homework.

# Working with Your Child's School

## Why is my child having trouble in school?

It is very common for children with ADHD to have difficulties in school. These problems can occur for several reasons:

- Symptoms of ADHD like distractibility and hyperactivity make it hard for children with ADHD to pay attention or stay focused on their work, even though they may be capable learners and bright enough to understand the material.
- Many children with ADHD also have trouble organizing themselves, breaking an assignment down into smaller steps, and staying on a schedule.
- Some children with ADHD have difficulty with self-control and get into trouble with peers and/or teachers.
- Many children with ADHD also have a learning disability. Schools usually define a learning disability as a discrepancy between a child's IQ score and his or her performance on achievement tests. A child with a learning disability has difficulty understanding information they see or hear OR trouble putting together information from different parts of the brain.
- Children with ADHD often can learn material but it may take longer and require more repetition.
- Children with ADHD often show inconsistency in their work because of their ADHD; one day they may know the information and the next day they cannot seem to remember.

## What kind of help can my child get from his or her school?

There are several avenues for getting help for your child:

- Your child's teacher may have some very good ideas. It is important to talk with him or her to try to work together to ensure your child's success.
- **Section 504 plans and Individualized Education Plans** are other options for your child. These provide access to education services. Talk with your child's teacher and your pediatrician about these two options.
- If you are concerned that your child may have a learning disability, he or she would need a complete psychoeducational evaluation, either through your child's school or by professionals qualified in the evaluation of ADHD/Learning Disabilities in the community. *Note: Even if your child attends a private or parochial school, he or she is still eligible for testing through their public school.*

## What can I personally do to help?

There are many different ways that a parent can make a difference in a child's school experience. Some ideas for parents to try include:

- Spending time in the classroom (if your work schedule allows), and observing your child's behavior.
- Talking with your child's teacher to identify where your child is having the most problems.
- Working with your child's teacher to make a plan for how you will address these problems and what strategies at school and at home will help your child be successful at learning and completing work.
- Acknowledging the extra efforts your child's teacher may have to make to help your child.
- Reading all you can about ADHD and sharing it with your child's teacher and other school officials.
- Becoming an expert on ADHD and on your child.
- Finding out about tutoring options through your child's school or local community groups. Children with ADHD may take longer to learn material compared with other children, even though they are just as smart. Tutoring may help your child master new materials.
- Making sure your child has actually mastered new material, so that he or she doesn't get behind academically.
- Acknowledging how much harder it is for your child to get organized, stay on tasks, complete assignments, and learn material compared to other children. Help your child to get organized, break tasks down into smaller pieces, and expend his or her excess physical energy in ways that are "okay" at home and in the classroom.
- Praising your child and rewarding him or her for a job well done immediately after completing tasks or homework.
- Joining a support group for parents of children with ADHD or learning disabilities. Other parents may help you with ideas to help your child.

## **What is a 504 Plan?**

A 504 is a document that specifies the “reasonable accommodations” the school will provide to help children with disabilities, including children with ADHD, achieve a “meaningful equal opportunity” to benefit from their education. Eligibility for section 504 is based on the existence of an identified physical or mental condition that substantially limits a major life activity. Children with disabilities are eligible when their disability is substantially limiting their ability to learn.

Some of the classroom accommodations under a 504 plan might include:

- Taped textbooks/extra set of books at home
- Reduction of the amount of written work/extra time to complete assignments for tests
- Modified homework assignments/modified testing
- Supervision of the writing of homework assignments
- Preferential seating close to teacher
- Access to a computer for written work
- Use of electric spell checker, tape recorder, and/or calculator
- Daily/weekly progress reports (for behavior and assignments)
- Behavioral intervention plan/social skills training

## **How do I get a 504 plan for a child?**

Each school district handles 504 plans differently, so ask your child’s teacher and/or school administrators how to contact the district 504 coordinators.

If a child is eligible under Section 504, the school district must develop a Section 504 plan. However, unlike the IEP process, the 504 regulations do not dictate the frequency of review of the 504 plan, and do not specify the right of parents to participate in its development.

## **What is the difference between an IEP and a 504 plan?**

Children who are not eligible for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) may still be guaranteed accommodations in the classroom and access to related services if they meet the section 504 eligibility criteria.

Eligibility for IDEA mandates that a child with a disability requires special education services, while eligibility for section 504 may occur when the child needs special education OR related services.

Children who have less severe disabilities, who need minor accommodations, may be covered under section 504 compared to children who are covered under IDEA (and section 504). Section 504 may also cover children whose disabilities do not fit neatly under the eligibility categories of IDEA.

Although Section 504 requires testing that is non-discriminatory, there are far fewer regulations placed on the testing procedure that are found with IDEA. For example, Section 504 does not:

- Address the frequency of testing
- Discuss the role of outside evaluations
- Require parental consent for testing

The 504 procedure does require that an evaluation be conducted before a child receives a 504 plan and before any changes are made to the plan.