

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Living with ADHD

At Home

Developing a thoughtful and coordinated approach to living with ADHD that all family members understand and can agree to is an important strategy. One of the most important aspects of a family plan is that the parents consistently express love and support to the child. ADHD is not the child's fault, and rather than assign blame, parents must provide support and encouragement as children struggle to improve their self-management skills. Remember, a child's misbehavior is often the result of stress and not a desire or tendency to be naughty. Maintaining a close positive relationship between parent and child is perhaps the most important factor in the child's willingness to face the difficult challenges ahead.

Maintaining a positive attitude, and a sense of humor can decrease the likelihood that the child will respond negatively to parental requests. It can be very hard to keep calm and avoid getting angry even if you know your child is in distress. Be patient! Children with ADHD can learn how to behave appropriately in different situations. They can also learn self-awareness and the ability to manage their behavior. The lessons just may need to be repeated and demonstrated more often than with some other kids.

The challenge in raising children with ADHD is to manage them in positive ways, to encourage them to use their assets and strengths to their advantage, and to guide them to achieve their potential. Planning ahead can reduce some of the stress involved in various situations. The chances are that if you find something stressful, your child will probably find it stressful too. For example, long trips may always be difficult for your family. Knowing this ahead of time can allow the opportunity to plan a strategy to manage the situation.

Although managing and raising children with ADHD can be extremely difficult, watching these children beam as they begin to demonstrate more control over their behavior or improve their grades or graduate from high school, can make it all worthwhile.

At School

Children with ADHD, even those with high intelligence, typically do less well than their peers in school. Often, ADHD symptoms lead to other associated problems, all of which are not improved with treatment. As a result, many children with ADHD end up with a cascade of problems that may well result in the resentment of both school and authority figures in general.

This type of attitude can have lifelong consequences. For example, children with ADHD may gradually get defensive about their failure to do homework correctly. This tendency may be accentuated if family members attribute negative characteristics to their child's school performance (e.g., calling the child lazy, or even worse, stupid). The child rightly resents such treatment and becomes angry. Thus, oppositional tendencies can develop as part of a systemic family dynamic problem. Although these additional concerns don't develop in all cases, early identification and treatment can help avoid the development of secondary problems altogether.

A child with ADHD may tend to perform better in certain extracurricular activities such as individual sports (e.g., martial arts, swimming, golf, biking, etc.) rather than team sports (e.g., soccer, baseball). The close social interaction involved in team sports may place additional burdens on children with

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ADHD that they are unable to successfully manage. For example, a child may care very much about their position on the field and link their self-esteem to performance in this arena. In addition, there may be frequent conflict with other members of the team, making team cohesion difficult. Individual sports allow ADHD children to be members of a team without the expectation of close social interactions, thus allowing them the opportunity to perform without the need to face one of their most significant challenges (peer relationships) in the process.

Individuals with ADHD should also be encouraged to establish early involvement with multi-age groups such as Boys or Girls clubs or scouting. Groups should have close adult supervision that can minimize negative interactions and facilitate social maturation. At first, older children can be important role models. By middle school, a child with ADHD may benefit from a mentor that is a coach or tutor, etc.

Another critical area at school involves medication management (if relevant). Although children with ADHD who are being treated with medication are less likely than others to develop a substance abuse problem, their friends are not. Teenagers who take stimulant medication may be asked to provide their peers with the "good stuff". Children with ADHD are not well suited to resist this type of peer pressure. Although they may want to fit in with their peers and are thus tempted to comply; they also recognize that they need the medication for themselves in order to function well. This can create a burdensome dilemma for Teens.

The most helpful solution is for parents to limit their child's control over the medication, thus providing the adolescent with an automatic excuse for resisting peer pressure. Another reason for parental control of a child's medication involves missed doses. A child who is distracted may forget to take medication at the proper times. Parents should not let a child with ADHD manage their own medication until they are much older.