

ADHD Parenting

POSITIVE PARENTING

3 Clarifying Principles for Raising a Child with ADHD

“Raising happy, healthy children with ADHD comes down to these core actions: accepting your child for who they are, setting them up to succeed with their unique abilities in mind, and understanding that mistakes – on your part and your child’s – are inevitable.”



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What does good, effective parenting look like? In my many decades of research and clinical practice with all kinds of families touched by ADHD, a few key principles have surfaced time and time again.

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Keys to Good ADHD Parenting

1. Stop Trying to Change Your Child

You cannot engineer ADHD out of your child.

[ADHD](#) is far more than just being inattentive and/or restless. It is a neurodevelopmental disorder of self-regulation that disrupts [all seven executive functions](#). It is also largely genetic and biological. These factors make ADHD a very impairing disorder, as we need self-regulation in just about every aspect of life. At the same time, ADHD is among the most treatable disorders – bar none.

You have been blessed with a neurodivergent child. Since your child cannot change or be “redesigned” into someone else, you must be the one to change your expectations. Realizing this sooner rather than later can mitigate lots of undue conflict with your child and open the pathway to a [positive parent-child relationship](#).

[Read: [How to Process and Accept Your Child’s Neurodiversity](#)]

Begin by identifying and celebrating your child’s strengths. What does your child love to do? Where do they excel? Whether your child shows interest in music, sports, culinary arts, or entrepreneurship, validate their aptitudes, no matter how unusual, unique, or nontraditional. Help them pursue their interests to the max – make changes to your schedules, if possible, so that your child can further develop their talents. Look for area resources that can further promote your child’s aptitudes. Advocate for your child unconditionally in their efforts; tough love doesn’t work!

2. Mitigate Executive Function Impairments

ADHD impairs executive functioning, or the several brain-based skills we may take for granted in everyday life, like our ability to plan and our working memory. Find ways to help your child compensate for these deficits to reduce their degree of impairment.

Time blindness is one executive dysfunction that many families overlook. If your child struggles with meeting deadlines, doing things in timed intervals, planning, anticipating future needs, and even practicing patience, it's because they struggle with the concept of time – something inherent to ADHD. To help a child with time blindness, try the following:

- Minimize delays. All of the arrangements in our life can be described in E-R-Os: Events that need to be addressed, Responses to prepare for them, and Outcomes or consequences from them. These arrangements happen over time, and they are usually not close together. The larger the space between these events, the more we have to rely on executive functioning to keep track. To fix this, we can artificially shorten the delays between EROs. One way is by breaking down tasks into shorter time frames.
- Externalize time. Make time physical by using timers, clocks, counters or other devices that show the passage of time, and how fast time is passing.

[Q&A: My Child Has No Concept of Time!]

Working memory is another skill impaired in ADHD. It allows us to hold information in the mind and act on what we know. Poor working memory creates a performance problem, wherein the issue is not with not knowing what to do, but with actually doing it. You may be tempted to help your child with this issue by providing them with more prompts, but this is not the answer. It is better instead to provide supports to help them recall and use the skills they actually have. As with time blindness, you can help by externalizing information and offloading it from their heads:

- Use sticky notes, index cards, pictures, and other sequence cues to physically represent information
- Encourage your child to use paper journals, take notes, and create to-do lists
- Use lists and charts for important rules, reminders, and schedules
- Rehearse “when-then” plans to help prime their recall of what to do

3. Expect Mistakes

Understand that you are going to make a lot of mistakes in raising your child – and that's OK. We all make mistakes. (I made mistakes in raising my kids, and I'm supposed to be an expert psychologist!) There is no such thing as the perfect parent, and that's not our goal.

What really matters, research shows, is being a coping parent – a parent who might make mistakes, but who **apologizes, asks for forgiveness, and strives to do better the next time around.**

All that's left, then, is to openly practice forgiveness. It helps to get rid of the vindictiveness, spitefulness, anger, and hurt that builds up over time. So forgive yourself for occasional screw-ups. Forgive others who misjudge your child and your parenting. Forgive your child for their mistakes – they will likely make more than the average neurotypical child. Do away with framing their mistakes in moral or judgmental terms, and recognize that it's just part of the disorder. Approach their mishaps instead from a place of compassion, and model for them what it means to try to get it right the next time.

Make forgiving your child easier by **creating positive moments with them**. If necessary, create a ritual around restoring a positive view of your child. It may be looking at a favorite photo of your child at their best or watching them as they sleep peacefully and soundly.