



# MDwise

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## ADHD: Helping Your Child Get Things Done

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### Introduction

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One of the most difficult things about parenting a child with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is getting your child to do what you ask. Daily routines, such as getting ready for school or bed and getting homework done, can become battlegrounds.

ADHD symptoms—inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity—are obstacles to understanding and following instructions. Unless your child learns how to overcome or adapt to his or her symptoms, he or she may fail to develop the skills for success in life. Fortunately, you can help.

- Your child is not intentionally ignoring, defying, or disobeying your instructions. He or she is not dumb or lazy.
- Unexpected changes in daily routines are upsetting for a child who has ADHD.
- Remove as many distractions as possible from your child's surroundings when he or she is doing a task.

### How can you help your child with ADHD accomplish tasks at home?

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You can help your child have the greatest chance of accomplishing tasks at home by using the following suggestions.

#### Be a role model

Use the following suggestions to model the behavior you want your child to develop.

- Set family rules. Have as few family rules as possible, and enforce them consistently. Write down your family's rules and consequences for when those rules are broken. Post these rules in an area that will help remind everyone.
- Establish daily routines. An action becomes a habit through continual reminders and repetition. For example, brushing teeth eventually becomes a habit when you repeatedly remind the child to do so twice a day, such as after breakfast and before going to bed. Write down your daily routines and post them where you will see them often. It will help your child if you use colorful pictures, such as a picture of a toothbrush, to identify routines.

- Have a family calendar. Put family activities on the calendar as well as special occasions. Encourage everyone to refer to the calendar often. Use eye-catching stickers as visual reminders.
- Have family meetings. Talk about important events that are coming up. Discuss goals for the family and how you as a group plan to reach them.
- Problem solve. When you notice a problem, such as your child forgetting to brush his or her teeth before bed, help your child design a routine that will help him or her remember. Even silly routines can be effective in jogging memory. It may help you to write a plan for establishing a routine .

### **Use novel ideas in a consistent way**

Children with ADHD respond to novelty. They are attracted to new events and sounds, but they are not able to sort through which ones are most important. You can make the best of this quality by following these suggestions:

- Use colorful reminders. Put short notes on colorful paper in areas of the home to remind the child about a task. For example, you may place a blue note in your child's study area that says "Stop, slow down, and think."
- Make a list of your child's daily responsibilities. Periodically remind your child to look at the list. Have your child check off the items as they are completed. Review the list with your child at the end of the day. And praise him or her for accomplishments even if all the tasks were not completed to your standard.
- Create hands-on learning experiences to help a child with ADHD grasp a concept. For example, when your child is learning about volcanoes, help him or her form a model volcano and label the parts. Talk about why volcanoes erupt and what happens.
- Use pictures. Since most children with ADHD are visual learners, they learn better when their textbooks have lots of pictures. Teach your child to use the pictures to learn concepts or to associate with important information.
- Use computers or other aids to do homework or look up information about projects. Some computer learning games can help your child gain skills more effectively than written information. But limit the amount of time your child spends on computer games.

### **Concentrate on the present**

Use immediate consequences for your child's misbehavior. Your child will learn by repeating actions until they become habits, not from past learning.

- Start fresh each day. Your child does not have a solid concept of past or future, so allow him or her to start with a clean slate in the morning. Build success one day at a time.
- Organize. Have your child use a special notebook to list homework assignments, their due dates, and the items he or she needs to do the work, such as library books or art supplies. At night, make a list of items to take to school the next day and things that need to be done before leaving home. Place the list where it will be a convenient reminder the next morning.
- Break projects down into small steps so your child can see his or her progress.
- Use a timer. A timer can remind your child when to have tasks completed. This method usually is more successful than nagging and is less frustrating for both of you.
- Estimate time. Have your child practice estimating the amount of time a chore or homework assignment will take. Time the task and reward your child for his or her efforts. With practice, your child will improve his or her ability to estimate time for assigned work.
- Check things off. As your child completes a household chore or a sheet of homework, have him or her go over the sheet for completeness and check it off the list.
- Remind. Don't remind your child about all the things he or she has to do at one time. Tell your child that he or she is to start a particular task in a few minutes. If you have a written schedule for your child, you may ask your child to stop what he or she is doing and go check his or her routine schedule.

- **Stop and look.** Have your child practice stopping and looking before leaving home for school or other activities. Teach your child to first scan his or her body, making sure that he or she is dressed appropriately. Then, scan his or her bag or other equipment to make sure that he or she has everything that is needed. Post a stop and look reminder near the door so that it can be seen easily.
- **Praise.** Praise your child for his or her daily accomplishments in completing tasks at home. You may use a daily checklist of tasks, including brushing teeth. Have your child check items off as they are done. Review the checklist at the end of the day. Praise your child for his or her efforts, even if the effort did not meet your standard.

## Allow movement

Some children with ADHD feel driven to keep some part of their bodies moving.

- Let your child fidget, even when you are giving him or her instructions. If you are not sure your child heard or understood you, establish eye contact and get his or her attention first. Then, ask your child to repeat your instructions.
- Use movement to accomplish tasks. Teach your child to whisper or create mental pictures of words that he or she is trying to memorize for school. Teach your child how to take notes in class to help him actively listen. Let your child underline important information in textbooks when he or she is reading.
- Allow free time. Allow your child time to actively play and release energy. If a child with ADHD is allowed some time to be active, he or she is more likely to pay attention to tasks.
- Reward your child for behavior that is appropriate for the situation with a comment or hug. Let your child know that less active behavior is helpful in trying to complete tasks. Some children respond well to earning a portion of their allowance by completing homework assignments.

## Credits

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