



ADHD: Helping Your Child Get Things Done

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Overview

One of the hardest things about parenting a child with ADHD is getting your child to do what you ask. ADHD symptoms—trouble paying attention, being impulsive, and being hyperactive—can get in the way of understanding and following instructions. But if your child learns how to overcome or adapt to their symptoms, they can develop the skills needed for success in life.

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

Make sure to use treatment methods as recommended by your child's doctor. These may include medicine and/or behavior therapy techniques. You can take classes in behavior therapy to help learn these techniques. They can help your child manage symptoms of ADHD at home and school. You may also help your child get things done at home by trying these tips.

- Be a role model.
Use these 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.
 - **Set 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 it 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 their teeth before bed, help your child design a routine that will help. Even silly routines can be effective at helping your child remember.
- Use novel ideas in a consistent way.
Children with ADHD respond to newness (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 your home to remind your 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. Praise your child's accomplishments even if all the tasks weren't completed to your standard.
- **Create hands-on learning experiences to help your child grasp a concept.** For example, when your child is learning about volcanoes, help 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 doesn't have a solid concept of past or future, so 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 needed 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.** Breaking projects into steps can help your child see 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's efforts. With practice, your child will improve their ability to estimate time for assigned work.
 - **Check things off.** As your child completes a household chore or a sheet of homework, have them go over the sheet for completeness and check it off the list.
 - **Remind.** Don't remind your child about all the things they have to do at one time. Tell your child that they need to start a certain task in a few minutes. If you have a written schedule for your child, you may ask your child to stop what they are doing and go check their 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 their body to make sure that they are dressed appropriately. Then, scan their bag or other equipment to make sure that they have everything they need. Post a stop-and-look reminder near the door so that it's easy to see.
 - **Praise.** Praise your child for their 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 their efforts, even if the effort didn't meet your standard.
- Allow movement.
Some children with ADHD feel driven to keep some part of their body moving.
 - **Let your child fidget, even when you are giving him or her instructions.** If you aren't sure that your child heard or understood you, establish eye contact and get their 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 need to be memorized for school. Teach your child how to take notes in class to help your child actively listen. Let your child underline important information in textbooks when 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, they are more likely to pay attention to tasks.
- **Reward your child for behavior that is appropriate for the situation.** Even a comment or a hug can let them know that you noticed. 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.

Related Information

- ADHD and Hyperactivity
- ADHD: Impulsivity and Inattention
- Family Meetings

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