

Parenting Techniques for the ADHD Child

ADHD children like children who do not have ADHD do not always do what they are told. No child behaves perfectly all the time every single day, however a child with ADHD seems to be at a greater risk of noncompliant behaviors that will anger, infuriate or disappoint their parents. By very definition, children with ADHD have difficulty with self-control and do not organize well, have problems controlling their behaviors and predicting that there are consequences for their behaviors. Russell Barkley, a psychologist and leading expert on ADHD says it well when he advises parents of some simple instructions in dealing and correcting behavioral problems. (1) It is much more effective to give clear instructions (2) rearrange work so that it is more interesting and motivating for them (3) redirect the child's behavior towards future goals versus immediate gratification and (4) provide immediate rewards for a completed task or adherence to rules.

As a therapist, what I frequently find when a parent brings their child in for counseling, is that the parent is angry; frustrated and seems to have lost perspective of what the problem actually is. Parents when they are angry or frustrated end up yelling at their child and this usually will provide a reverse effect in your child (they become even more noncompliant and end up tuning you out). Try to keep things in perspective and remember that your child has a disability and never argue with your child when they are not listening to you. **Here are some simple rules to follow when parenting your ADHD child.** By no means is this list conclusive in nature and a health care professional may be of instance in developing a behavioral management plan with you and provide feedback on it's effectiveness.

Children with ADHD have difficulty staying on task and they usually live for the moment and often do not see future consequences for behavior. On tasks which they perceive as boring (often homework) you have to provide immediate feedback that they are doing a good job. Positive feedback can be given a number of ways, but it is most often given as praise or as a compliment. Often it can be given as a reward such as increased privileges or special treats or snacks. Be sure to be specific when you tell your child the behavior that they did that was positive. When you are trying to **CHANGE** a negative behavior, make sure you provide a quick reward and feedback for behavior that is done correctly and have quick negative consequences for acting inappropriately.

A mistake that is often made in parenting a child with ADHD that is displaying noncompliant behaviors is that we as parents forget to praise positive behaviors and we focus on the behaviors that are negative that we want to change. ADHD children require feedback and consequences that are VERY frequent. We as parents often get caught up in our own work and household chores that we forget to praise our children when they are behaving themselves at home. What I often tell parents is to put post-it notes in conspicuous places in their house reminding them to praise their child often. There is no better way to change a negative behavior than by providing frequent and consistent praise. Positive behaviors should be rewarded more often than punishing negative behaviors. DO NOT punish your child for everything they are doing wrong, this will not motivate your child to do well. The positive's have to outweigh the negative's in order to change behavior.

Be consistent in disciplining your child. If you reward or punish your child use the same reward or punishment every time!! Parents become so frustrated with their child's behavior that they punish a behavior and because their child becomes angry or throws a temper tantrum they "cave in" and let them have their way. What I often hear is that a parent gets tired of saying the same thing over and over and "gives up" and lets the child have their way. (For example, your child refuses to do their homework and you tell them if they finish their homework they can watch their favorite television program when they are done. Halfway through completing their homework, your child throws a temper tantrum and tells you they are not going to do it. You as the parent let them watch television because you are tired of fighting with them and you try to get them to finish their homework later. However, what you have done here is reward noncompliance with your rules and you have just undermined yourself. You as the parent are going to have to go through this all over again when you try to get them to finish their homework later).

When you are trying to teach a new behavior, it is the most effective if you reward the behavior every single time it occurs. The reward should occur IMMEDIATELY after it happens and if you are implementing a behavior change program it should be utilized for at least two weeks before you call it quits and decide what you are doing is not working. Lastly, repeating yourself and repeating yourself and repeating yourself will not work with the ADHD child for sure. Talking and telling them about their negative behavior certainly is NOT going to change it. We need action here!! Consequences have to be used to change a negative behavior in your child. If you tell them that you are going to do something for a bad behavior make sure you do it and do it every single time. Don't try to reason with your child, you are the parent and rules need to be followed. At the end of the day, your child is your greatest gift and you as a parent want to produce the best possible child so they have all the tools to become a successful adult.

Above all else, never blame yourself and think that you are a BAD parent. I here this all the time as a therapist!! You are doing your best and there is no such thing as a perfect parent or a perfect person. Never give up!!

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