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ABSTRACT

Practical suggestions are offered for parents of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) for managing the behavior of their children through the use of positive and negative consequences. Suggestions focus on the child getting up in the morning, getting ready for school, homework, chores, dinner time, free time, bed time, weekends, shopping, and relationships with siblings. In covering these aspects of family life, parents are reminded that children with ADHD need time to adjust to new situations and the transitions that occur in daily life. Parent are urged to keep in mind that the child's attention and concentration problems, rather than their attitude, are often issues when doing chores and other activities. An explanation of behavior management provides examples of positive and negative consequences and ineffective consequences. It is noted that two key factors in using consequences are consistency and timing: rules should be firm and consistently enforced, and consequences should occur as soon as possible after the behavior one is trying to change. (SW)

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Planning Good Days for Children with ADHD

Tips For Parents

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PLANNING GOOD DAYS FOR CHILDREN WITH ADHD

Tips for Parents

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Positive and Negative Consequences

Behavior management through the use of consequences is an important part of the treatment program when working with children with ADHD. These techniques should be used before considering the possible use of medication to alter behavior.

We change our behavior according to the consequences that result. If I do something and as a consequence I get hurt, the chances are I will stop doing it. If I do something that brings satisfaction, the chances are I will keep doing it.

If we do not experience consequences for our behavior we are unable to make effective changes. We learn behaviors best when consequences are clearly related to specific behavior.

For most children abstract rewards work very well and brief reprimands do the job. However, for children with ADHD, specific and tangible consequences are needed to encourage positive behavior in order to change disruptive or non-compliant behavior.

While talking may be effective with many children, for children with ADHD "doing" provides better results than "talking."



Two key factors in using consequences are **Consistency** and **Timing**. Rules should be firm and **consistently** enforced. Consequences should occur **as soon as possible** after the behavior you are attempting to change.

EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES

- Special treat for dinner.
- Special time with father and/or mother.
- An additional story at bed time.
- Specific tangible reward (small toy).
- Take him/her places.
- Rent a movie to watch together.
- Let him/her select the menu for next lunch or dinner.
- A star or check is earned to be "cashed" in later for a reward.

EXAMPLES OF NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

- Missing a favorite TV show
- Time-out for a short period of time (2 - 5 minutes).
- Removal of some privileges.
- TV is off earlier than usual.

INEFFECTIVE CONSEQUENCES

- Endless groundings.
- Consequence without warning.
- Inconsistent consequences (given one day but not the next).

Waking Up in the Morning

Children provide both pleasant and unpleasant experiences for their parents. Waking up in the morning to go to school is always a difficult time for many children. For children with ADHD this "difficult time" can be a major battle.

Parents usually complain about having a hard time trying to wake up their children with ADHD. Whatever they try usually results in turmoil. The child becomes grouchy, starts yelling and complaining and may come up with about 5,000 different reasons (excuses) to remain in bed.

In the beginning parents usually try to stay cool and patient, talking to the child with a soft voice, giving him/her 5,000 reasons why it is good to wake up right away. The child either ignores the statements or denies the benefits of waking up "so early." Some of the "easy" children with ADHD may request five more minutes in bed (that usually turns into 30 more minutes).

After several attempts, parents often become annoyed and start forcing the situation, which sometimes reaches a level comparable to a wrestling match.



Here are some suggestions that may help you and your child to wake up in the morning without a major fuss:

- **Going to bed at a reasonable and consistent hour** is always a good practice. You set the bed time and enforce it every night.
- **Transition period** between waking up and getting ready for school. Getting out of a warm bed to go to school becomes a very unpleasant task. This may be why many children delay getting out of bed in the morning.

On the other hand, they usually wake up early on weekends or holidays. In these situations they are usually waking up to a favorite TV show or fun time. Let's use the same principle. Wake him/her up early and allow some TV time. During this TV time your child may start awakening at his/her own pace. After one cartoon require that your child get dressed and have breakfast before a second period of fun. After this second TV time he/she will need to leave for school.

- **Follow through the first time** if you are going to wake your child up. Do not make halfhearted multiple attempts. Each one increases the chances for a major blow up and may make the child feel he/she can win the battle.
- **Do not talk too much to your child while waking him/her up.** The more you talk, the more the child feels they can bargain and delay getting up.
- **Set a consistent routine** in the morning with strong visual cues such as a big clock or following the sequence of TV shows or cartoons. This will alert your child to the time frame to follow each step of their morning routine.
- **If problems persist** check with school personnel to investigate whether your child is experiencing unpleasant situations that he/she attempts to avoid by not getting up.

Getting Ready for School

Most parents of children with ADHD agree that one of the most difficult times with their children is getting them ready to go to school.

These children usually find many things to do before getting dressed and ready to leave home. Everything seems to be more important than getting ready for school. Despite our best efforts and patience we often find ourselves in conflict with our children every morning.

The ordeal begins with waking them up. Then, if we succeed, taking them into the bathroom, getting them dressed and finishing breakfast represent tiring routines that upset family members.

It is not an easy task. There are no magic recipes that work with all the children. Even a good suggestion may work one day but not the next.

Cooperation from other family members is not just recommended, it **is needed** to help the whole family turn a difficult morning routine into a more positive experience. Let us refresh your memory about some of the symptoms of ADHD and present some suggestions that need to be adjusted for each individual case.



REMEMBER

1. Children with ADHD need time to adjust to new situations. Going from sleeping to waking up is a transition that is a new one every single morning. What happened yesterday belongs to yesterday. Because he/she did a good job waking up yesterday does not mean that it will happen again today.
2. Yelling and screaming may help you to release your frustration but does not help at all in creating a pleasant environment for your child. Many times the child may have good intentions but has difficulty initiating and maintaining appropriate behaviors.

SUGGESTIONS

- A. Allow yourself and your child "more than enough time" to get ready for school. This means that the "getting ready process" may have to begin no less than 90 minutes before leaving for school.
- B. Create a transition period between waking up and getting dressed. This transition can be a TV cartoon, or music on the radio, or a few minutes talking with the parents. It is helpful for the child to wake up to a pleasant activity rather than immediately facing activities the child may want to avoid. If he does not wake up, remind him that he is losing the opportunity for the pleasant situation but will not be allowed to be late for or miss school.
- C. Before going to bed review to see if homework was done and placed in his backpack. Tomorrow's clothes should be ready the night before. The morning is for waking up and getting ready to leave home. The morning is not for reviewing homework, finding clothes to wear or for making decisions about after school activities.
- D. Be firm and consistent. Do not allow the child to be late or miss school because of stalling tactics in the morning. It will only make for bigger problems in the future if the child is successful in avoiding responsibilities by dawdling.



Homework

Paying attention and sitting still are two of the most difficult things for children with ADHD.

Homework time is not a happy time for most children. For children with ADHD it is the closest thing to a nightmare.

Homework for Tommy, a child with ADHD, requires more effort than it would for any other child. He has to overcome messages from his brain telling him "get up..walk..this is boring..I cannot understand this."

More than any other activity, homework requires cooperation among the family members. Almost everybody has to play a role while Tommy is doing his school assignments. Siblings have to refrain from major activities that may distract Tommy and parents have to be ready to increase his motivation to finish the work.

Of course, some parents or siblings think that making special rules or giving extra time to Tommy is not fair, but, we are sure it is not fair either that Tommy has ADHD. Extra time and support is what Tommy may need to be successful with his homework.

School has to play its own role in helping with homework by taking into consideration the strengths and limitations of a child with ADHD.



REMEMBER

1. Homework requires attention, concentration and the ability to sit still, the major weaknesses in children with ADHD.
2. Homework is a monumental task for children with ADHD that may become manageable if school teachers and family members work in cooperation.
3. Remember that the goal is to learn by doing homework. We do not want to use this time for additional instructions or to test Tommy's compliant behavior.

SOME SUGGESTIONS

- A. Develop an activity schedule for after school hours. In this schedule we recommend including two study blocks with a 15 minute break in between. No fun activities are allowed before the second study block is completed. The same hours will be enforced every day of the week.
- B. Help your child be prepared to do homework and do not "forget" your child while he/she is doing homework. Provide assistance when necessary. It would be good practice to ask every five to ten minutes if he/she is still working on the school assignment.
- C. Be available for questions and when possible assist your child in finishing their work.
- D. Once the homework is done, be sure that your child takes his/her work to the school. Remember, doing homework and taking it to school are two different tasks.
- E. Work with your child's teacher to ensure that the amount of homework and its difficulty level are reasonable. No child should be asked to spend all evening doing homework.



Chores

Chores at home are not a favorite pastime for any child, anytime, anywhere. Many of them will attempt to avoid them.

Children with ADHD are not better or worse regarding these chores. Like other children, those with ADHD will try to avoid chores, but in addition to this, they tend to appear more uncooperative. Often this is because children with ADHD have not developed smooth social skills. For example, instead of stalling and talking their way out of jobs, they may simply refuse to do them.

The same techniques that we use to increase cooperation from most children can be used for those with ADHD. However, in these children the specific attention problems and impulsive behavior make it difficult to draw the line between being uncooperative and just showing ADHD symptoms.

When most children with ADHD say that they “forgot” the chores they were asked to do they are not lying. For them it is difficult to keep their focus on what you asked them to do. They did not do the chores because they were no longer paying attention to the fact that they were asked to do something.

Let’s review some ideas and suggestions, keeping in mind that we are talking about children with ADHD and not about children whose basic problem is oppositional and defiant behavior.



REMEMBER

1. When children are asked to do something, they must keep their attention on a command. If they do not attend to the command, chances are that they will not do what they are asked to do. We are talking about attention problems and not memory problems. Problems with attention are a characteristic of children with ADHD.
2. In most children with ADHD there is not a problem with wanting to comply; it is an attention and concentration problem that results in poor compliance.

SUGGESTIONS

- A. Because it is an attention problem we have to focus on getting and maintaining these children's attention. If you ask for help with chores remember this:
 - When you ask for something be sure that you have your child's full attention. Look at the child's face, speak clearly and ask them to repeat what you have requested.
 - Ask for a single chore at a time. Ask for a second chore only when the first is completed. Do not hope the child will remember what is next - you have to tell the child. Gradually increase the complexity of requests as indicated by consistent success.
 - Once you ask your child to do something, follow through in a consistent way. You may need to check every few minutes to maintain the child's efforts.
- B. Try to establish a routine for chores at home in such a way that the child already knows that for this particular day there are two well understood chores to complete before doing anything else.
- C. Use rewards right after your request is fulfilled. If consistent reminders and encouragement do not result in cooperation, demonstrate that this behavior is not acceptable by using a negative consequence.

Dinner Time

Lunch or dinner time is often an unpleasant time in families with children with ADHD.

Children with ADHD may say they are not hungry, they do not like what is for dinner, or they are simply too busy doing something else. Definitely, eating is not one of their priorities and it can wait.

Many children with ADHD see lunch or dinner time as an interruption of their activities, as a boring time, or something they have to do because their parents ask them. They often play at the dinner table, use poor table manners and have difficulty complying with rules.

As parents we are interested in meal time being a positive experience and not just another battleground. Since meal time can be an important time for family communication and togetherness, we want to avoid confrontation as much as possible.



REMEMBER

1. We do not want to use lunch and dinner time to practice our authority over the children. If we have a child with ADHD let's try to use this time for eating and relaxation.
2. If at one meal your child does not eat well, nothing is going to happen. Sometimes not forcing him/her to eat may alleviate a stressful situation and avoid a major confrontation.

SUGGESTIONS

- A. Lunch and dinner time have to be part of a predefined schedule. Ideally, lunch and dinner time will always come at the same time. If your child is engaged in a fascinating activity (such as video games) set a time limit on the games to end prior to meal time. Avoid having meal time interrupt a highly fascinating activity.
- B. Be aware of your child's food preference. We do not suggest that you cook exclusively what the child likes, but try to avoid what he/she definitely dislikes.
- C. Promote some positive family conversation during this time. Eating may not be fun by itself for the child, but if the conversation is interesting or fun the opportunities to get bored are reduced to the minimum. If parents are positive and enthusiastic meal time can become something to look forward to.
- D. Dinner time has to be dinner time and not dinner/TV time, or dinner/ homework time, or dinner/talking to friends time.
- E. It is a good practice to have dinner as a family rather than an individual activity.

Free Time

For most of us free time represents a highly desirable situation. This is true for children too. They enjoy the opportunity of free time to play and to do fun things.

Free time also represents an opportunity to finish uncompleted tasks, to plan future events, or to review past performances.

The meaning of free time for children with ADHD is often associated with a difficult time or a time to get in trouble. Free time represents time to do whatever comes to their minds and because what comes to their minds is a broad variety of activities, they tend to engage in a chain of unfinished and disorganized actions. This disorganized behavior usually results in conflicting situations for them and for others around them.

Free time, understood as time when they can do what they please, is not an easy time for parents of children with ADHD. Free time can easily result in behaviors that cause disruption.

To expect positive or productive behavior during free time for most children with ADHD is wishful thinking unless the parent plans ahead to avoid potential difficulties.

REMEMBER

1. Children with ADHD are usually very disorganized and perform poorly when there are no specific rules or routine to follow. Rules and routines restrain their impulsive behavior, enabling them to behave in an acceptable manner and obtain positive feedback from others.

SUGGESTIONS

- A. Knowing that free time can be problematic for children with ADHD, try to limit the extent of free time that is available.
- B. During free time activities provide some structure. For example, limiting the number of alternatives offered to the child, or establishing boundaries for his physical activities may reduce impulsive reactions and engaging in multiple unfinished tasks.
- C. Planning ahead is a good idea for teachers and parents dealing with children with ADHD. The use of calendars, visual aids, and other "reminders" help these children to stay organized, even if the activity is just for fun.
- D. If parents want to be relaxed in the company of their child with ADHD it is recommended that they prepare a sequence of activities in which the child will be completely engaged. Keeping the child busy decreases the opportunity for disorganized or disruptive behavior to occur.

Bed Time

It is characteristic in children with ADHD to have difficulty stopping an activity once started. It seems that they never get tired. The more activity they have the more "wound up" they become.

Many parents have already found out that the idea of "making them tired" by letting them jump, run, and play right before nap or bed time is useless. They do not get tired and they would prefer to continue with endless activities.

Bedtime, for many parents of children with ADHD, implies a very difficult, frustrating, and unpleasant time. Some parents take turns battling their children night after night. If this is your situation let me tell you. . . you are not alone.

How many times we have heard . . .

"I am not tired."

"I am not sleepy."

"It is too early to sleep."

"I can't sleep. Can you bring me some water?"

When putting these children to bed we have to remember some basic ideas regarding ADHD. Keep in mind these ideas may present some solutions to the problems that emerge because "I don't feel like going to bed now."

REMEMBER

1. Children with ADHD have difficulty stopping an activity. If you ask but they do not stop, it may not be due to defiance. It would be better if you do not take their refusal personally.
2. Children with ADHD improve behavior when they have to follow routines.
3. Children with ADHD respond better to directions when they are highly motivated to do it. This motivation can result from incentives for compliant behavior.

SOME SUGGESTIONS

- A. Prepare your children for bedtime far before the actual bedtime. Try to slow them down, avoid major activities before bedtime, and let them know that bedtime is coming. Once it is bedtime: stop television, video games and any other competing activity.
- B. Send them to bed at the same time every day. Try to establish a firm schedule. Use a clear signal to set bedtime such as the end of a particular TV show or any other event that occurs every night at the same time.
- C. Try to turn bedtime into a pleasant time. It is a good practice to offer an incentive such as a bedtime story or an in-bed activity that does not require much physical activity.

Weekends

Many families can hardly wait for the weekend to come so they can enjoy peaceful time.

Weekdays are usually structured with routines to follow. School occupies much of the time of the child with ADHD while the parents are dedicated to their own activities.

Weekends represent a challenge to the parents' patience. Weekend days are usually non-structured and there are no particular routines to follow.

During weekends the child with ADHD can become overly demanding. "Mom I'm bored, there's nothing to do" is a complaint often heard. It is not difficult to find one or two activities to entertain the child. The problem is that he/she needs one or two activities every ten minutes and not even the most creative parent is able to provide them.

The solution to this problem is not to find more and more activities. There are other ways in which we can cope with this particular problem.

REMEMBER

1. These children do not decide to get bored on purpose. Boredom is a symptom of ADHD. It is recognized that children with ADHD require more stimulation and novelty to retain their interest and concentration.
2. They really need help to cope with the problem of what to do when faced with a non-structured time with no routine to follow.
3. Do not expect that your child will prefer a quiet and peaceful time for his/her weekend - this will only lead to disappointment and resentment.
4. Certain activities are particularly likely to trigger disruptive behavior in children with ADHD. These include long church services, visits with older relatives or shopping trips to stores where quiet behavior is expected.

SOME SUGGESTIONS

- A. Try to keep some routine at home so that the time is not going to be totally unstructured.
- B. Do not let your child make you totally responsible for his/her activities during the weekend. It is one thing to help in planning and a different thing to do all the planning by yourself.
- C. It would be ideal if parents are available during the weekend to share some time with these children doing what is fun for them (which may not necessarily be fun for the parents). Seek a balance so that parents have some fun, and there are fun activities for the kids.
- D. When possible encourage outdoor activities.
- E. Encourage the child to engage in hobbies and activities that can become long- term pastimes. Learn about community opportunities for supervised pursuit of such activities.
- F. Avoid overusing TV or video games to occupy the child's time.

Shopping

Children with ADHD are usually very active and impulsive. These two characteristics, among others, are responsible for some of the problems that children with ADHD may experience.

Being overactive and impulsive are typical behaviors in children with ADHD. Asking them not to be active or expecting less impulsivity because you request it is generally a waste of time. These behaviors sometimes make shopping with the child an unpleasant experience.

Shopping, or just “window shopping” is one of America’s favorite pastimes. This fun hobby becomes a nightmare when we try to shop with a child who never stops asking questions, tries to touch everything, and runs all over the place.

Effective control for these disruptive symptoms has to come from external sources. The child with ADHD rarely will be able to be “nice” and “cooperative” from personal initiative. We have to be an active external source of control.

Children with ADHD may become pleasant companions for shopping if we help them to comply with directions.

Here are some suggestions that may help make shopping a pleasant experience:

- Before leaving home for shopping, **review the rules** to follow with your child. Ask the child to repeat the rules to be sure they understood the rules.
- Before going into the store or mall **ask your child to repeat the rules** to be followed. Help the child remember the rules. If they forgot a rule, repeat the rule and ask again for it.
- Before going into the store or mall **review the positive and negative consequences** for his/her behavior. Be sure that potential rewards or negative consequences are **readily available**.
- **Remember that it is a good practice to provide a positive consequence for good behavior** soon after you enter the store. Do not wait more than 10 minutes before rewarding good behavior.
- Your child may sustain good behavior if you **keep reinforcing** good performance.
- Be ready to **leave the store** before disruptive behavior becomes out of control behavior.
- If the shopping experience went okay, take your child for a special treat. If it did not go well review your plan, revise it and try again. Consistency, persistence and a positive attitude will lead to eventual success!

Siblings

Children with ADHD demand so much individual attention that it is very common to hear from siblings...“Why does Johnny receive so many prizes and I don’t?”... or “You pay too much attention to my brother and not enough to me.”

Sibling rivalry is commonly found in any home with two or more children. Sibling rivalry can be more intense where one of the children has ADHD. The siblings notice a different treatment of this child and become jealous.

Repeated explanations and answers such as “Your brother/sister has a problem” are not convincing enough to alleviate this rivalry. Siblings do not consider the brother or sister as different. They feel that he/she is treated as a special person and they want to be treated as special people too.

It is important as parents to observe the siblings and to assess their reactions when the child with ADHD receives a positive or negative consequence for his/her behavior. By ignoring the reaction of the siblings rather than avoiding a problem we are creating a bigger one.

REMEMBER

1. It is normal for siblings to react negatively when they feel that one of them is receiving special treatment.
2. Treatment for a child with ADHD is not an individual treatment, it is a family treatment where every member has to be involved. Siblings, like it or not, are going to play a very active role in treatment. This role may be positive or negative. Let's try to get them on our side which will make our job easier.

SOME SUGGESTIONS

- A. If you set a reward system for compliant behavior with your child with ADHD, set similar programs for other siblings at home. They may not need it, but it is not going to hurt and even may improve some of their behaviors.
- B. With older siblings, try to get their cooperation in helping the brother/sister with ADHD to improve academic performance or to acquire better socialization skills.
- C. Never tell **young children** that their brother/sister has a problem and he/she needs special attention. Older children may be able to understand and accept this explanation.
- D. Call for family meetings where behavior management issues (rewards, negative consequences and others) will be introduced to the family routine without mentioning that the reason is exclusively for the one with ADHD.

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