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Parenting an ADHD Child: Helpful Suggestions

1. Have a great deal of structure and organization built into the day. Children with attention difficulties need their environment to be structured because they have trouble structuring it on their own. Eventually, as they see how productive they can be in the face of structure and organization, they will learn to internalize these qualities and impose structure and organization into their own lives.
2. Help your child know what's coming in the day by having a predictable routine. Behavioral issues sometimes emerge when children are caught off-guard in terms of demands and expectations.
3. Before specific activities (e.g. soccer practice, art lesson, birthday party) preview what will happen and try to prepare the child for potentially difficulty moments that may occur over the course of the activity.
4. Try to have certain activities occur at the same place each day (e.g. brushing teeth in the downstairs bathroom before school, eating only in the kitchen, etc.).
5. Designate a specific place for the child's important things, such as a cubby or shelf.
6. Develop a calendar or checklist with words or pictures that cues the child about what to expect or anticipate, either in terms of a daily routine or a difficult activity. Hang the calendar or checklist at the child's eye level.
7. Create an environment that helps your child do what is expected. Children with attentional difficulties are often pulled to respond to everything in their environment. They can also have trouble getting their attention off something that is of particular interest to them. Eliminate constant reminders and nagging by using yourself and the environment to show the child what is expected. Use language such as "please keep your hands to yourself" rather than "don't touch him!"

8. Reduce distractions when it is time for your child to complete a daily activity.
9. Make sure your child is looking at you before you speak to him or her.
10. Insist that your child make direct eye contact with the person to whom s/he is speaking.
11. You may need to restate directions in order for your child to understand what is expected. Have your child paraphrase the directions to check for comprehension.
12. Try to keep yourself physically near the child and check in frequently.
13. A private signal system can help you cue your child to attend to tasks without words.
14. Alternate tedious activities with more fun ones. Children with attention difficulties do well when given incentives (e.g. “When you finish cleaning up the toy cars, you can have a snack.”).
15. Watch for times of the day or situations that can overstimulate your child. Structure transitions and changes as much as possible (e.g. give child something to carry into the car; have child check off the days on a calendar before a special event or holiday).
16. Be unconventional! Build novelty and excitement into the structure. Children with attentional difficulties find it easier to pay attention to what is different and interesting, but often they need help in channeling their behavior.
17. Provide opportunities for the child to burn off excess energy in productive ways. Have your child help with your chores such as watering the plants, bringing in the mail, etc.
18. Help your child to accept mistakes and present them as opportunities to learn. Remove failure from the family’s vocabulary.
19. Praise efforts and acknowledge the little steps and accomplishments.
20. Give immediate and frequent feedback.
21. “Catch” the child being good whenever possible. Positive feedback goes a long way.
22. Present multi-task activities one step at a time using simple language and avoiding excess talk. Eventually build up to two and three steps.

23. Teach your child study skills. Children with attention difficulties need to be taught how to tackle schoolwork. Because they understand better that they can actually execute tasks, they need strategies to help them follow through to completion.
24. Before beginning homework, take a few minutes to overview and pre-plan what is expected and how long it should take.
25. Teach your child to highlight critical features of worksheets such as arithmetic signs. Show him/her how to fold the paper so only a small amount of work shows at one time. Add lines, dots, or other cues to provide additional organization to task.
26. After finishing homework, help your child check his/her work for errors.
27. Teach social skills directly. Tell the child what s/he should do in a situation and provide praise for trying it.
28. Help your child think of alternatives when faced with a conflict. For example, when you feel angry you can: count to 10, say how you feel, ask a grownup for help, draw a picture about it, etc.
29. Praise your child for efforts around good self-control, good listening and good sportsmanship.
30. Model the behaviors you want to see. All children learn a great deal from observing and modeling the behaviors of others.
31. Educate yourself about ADHD by reading, attending conferences and joining support groups. Any books by Edward Hallowell are recommended. The non-profit organization CHADD (Children with Attention Deficit Disorders) publishes a helpful newsletter (www.chadd.org). The ADD Warehouse sells and distributes a large collection of ADHD related books, videos, training programs, games and professional texts (www.addwarehouse.com).