



## **Proud to be a Parent of a Child with an Attention Disorder:**

*They are Children- Who Happen to Have an Attention Disorder*

Children are filled with the enthusiasm of new life – new life with everything to be learned. Children remind us of the wonder of the individuality of people as we marvel at their unique development. All children present parents with new challenges, joys and experiences. ADD does not rob them or us of the gift of their individuality and the need to learn about their personal complexities as they mature.

The ability to attend allows us to connect with all aspects of our lives – memory/learning, language/math, motor skills, and social skills. An attention disorder is caused by brain formation or brain chemical differences. These differences make it difficult for children to focus their attention, execute, sustain attention and/or shift attention, and encode into memory. Because of these attending difficulties, children and ADD often require more repetition, more structure and more positive reassurance than others. As we parent children with ADD, we must become aware of their unique nature, basics of effective parenting and the profile that ADD brings to further challenge our parenting skills.

### **GET TO KNOW THE UNIQUE NATURE OF YOUR CHILD**

- Take time to notice and delight in the new point of view only this child expresses
  - Notice the situations which delight her and/or she repeats
  - Note the moments which he drifts away from or send her into a rage
  - Watch what he avoids
- The moments that she avoids are often those more difficult for her to pay attention to and accomplish.
  - Simplify those situations so he can attend more easily
  - Build toward increasing success and ability to manage greater
  - difficulty
- The activities he seeks out are probably easier for his brain to attend to, understand and continue to build upon.
  - Self-esteem is built through successful accomplishments

- Rejoice with her and help to stretch her strengths
- Recall that your sense of frustration is a mirror of your child's own frustration in dealing with a brain that has trouble paying attention. Any brain that has an open mood is able to work better. Try to adjust their world to minimize frustrations but continue to grow and learn.

### **THE BASICS OF EFFECTIVE PARENTING**

There are universal needs that all children share, regardless of their ability to intentionally focus and/or shift their attention.

1. Children must have their needs for safety, security and protection met:
  - a. Being physically nurtured, clean, comfortable and well rested
  - b. Being held, comforted and loved unconditionally
2. They need routine, structure and consistency
  - a. Regular routines help them feel more safe, secure and protected
  - b. Parents need to agree on basic home rules that consistently give the child a sense of order that makes life at home balanced. With fewer surprises, they are freer to trust their environment and develop more fully.
  - c. They need to know that breaking home rules is not acceptable and will result in "time out" ... CONSISTENTLY.
    - i. Time out is not a punishment but rather an opportunity for the child to calm down, the adult to calm down, and the child to shift gears.
    - ii. It gives him a chance to realize a sense of consequence for his actions and feel secure that the adults in his world will give him protective limits

### **EXTRA CHALLENGES OF CHILDREN WITH ATTENTION DISORDERS**

Children with ADD may push the limits more consistently due to attention problems, impulsivity, forgetfulness, and temperament.

- Rules are difficult to learn, apply and are easily forgotten. They need **MUCH, patient repetition**
- They miss many cues in their environment. As a result, they may:
  - Be in constant motion
  - Touch more items than other children
  - May "drift off" and miss moments throughout their day

- Not “hear” the whole direction they have been given
- Miss portions of explanations
- Not realize the sequence of events
- Not understand how to act or what to say in different situations

They can be very impulsive. They may:

- Do something without thinking of the consequences
- Say something without being aware of the impressions their words make

### **EFFECTIVE PARENTING OF CHILDREN WITH ADD**

- **Extra care** must be taken to keep them **safe, secure and protected**
- Be certain that your home has safety locks, safe furniture, and all poisonous or potentially harmful materials out of the reach of children
- Childproof the environment so “No”s are limited to important situations
- Keep your home simple with as few distractions as possible
- Maintain predictable routines as much as possible
  - Morning – washing, dressing and day’s preparation
  - Mealtimes – predictable times and procedures
  - Bedtime – washing, dressing and tomorrow preparation
- Use pictures, charts and picture sequences to help prevent “forget and “leaky” memory confusion
  - To learn routines
  - To prepare for the next day in advance
  - To prepare the children for change
  - Be aware of signs that they are becoming overwhelmed
- Purchase only sturdy, safe toys which allow the child to “do” as much as possible. Toys which work by themselves are quickly boring, discarded and do not help you child’s brain connections to be enhanced.
  - **Minimize electronic games and computers. Minimize TV.** They do not help build a more well rounded brain and actually interfere with healthy brain functioning if they consume too much of the child’s time. Young children need to touch, hold, do, talk, etc.
- Expose them to **child appropriate, real life experiences.**

- Guard their self-esteem through continued successes and a sense of being understood
- **Create exceedingly clear rules** which are followed through **consistently** by all caregivers
  - **Keep rules simple and specific.** Too many rules create confusion because there are too many to remember
  - **Keep your words simple.** Too many words cause loss of effectiveness
  - **Make sure consequences are presented in advance so the child can choose**
  - **Be sure that the consequences are reasonable and fit the situation**
  - **Follow broken rules with immediate consequences**
    - Rules that are not expected to be followed, continue to be rules that the child will test
    - Eventually, they become meaningless
    - The child begins to doubt your word
    - His world feels out of control and unsafe
  - **DO NOT BECOME ANGRY.** The child had a choice (if he was able to pay attention and remember what is acceptable or not). Anger confuses the situation and changes it from learning of consequences and rules into a punishment.
  - **Real “time out”**
    - “That’s “3”. Do you wish to walk to your room or do you need me to take you? .. 1-2-3.. “ If your child does not head to their room (or other time out space which is free of toys and items of harm) by the count of “3”, you carry them. Once in their room, they are to stay there with no feedback from you for the number of minutes equal to their age (4 year old = 4 minutes, etc.). If they come out of their room, you count to “3”. They must return to their room and stay there with the door open by “3” or you will need to carry them and close the door. You begin the timer when they have settled down. You may need to fix the door shut so it will remain closed. Never frighten the child by walking away when you have fixed the door shut. (See Tom Phelan’s book 1-2-3 Magic, Dinkmeyer’s STEP Handbook and Dreikur’s Children the Challenge).

#### **Help them handle social situations**

- 1:1 or smaller groups are usually better

- Social rules may need to be taught. Conversation may go in one ear and out the other. Emotional cues may be very difficult to read
  - Present a visual consequence of the social event so your child will understand what actually went on
  - Discuss his feelings and the feelings of the other person
  - Help your child remember and apply the social rules to new situations with gentle, non-embarrassing cues.
- Preparation for play situations may include
  - Carefully choosing guests with your child
  - Limiting the visiting time to a manageable amount
  - Carefully planning the activities in advance so your child will be comfortable sharing her toys and, then allowing the other child to choose
  - Include food preparation as part of the playtime. It is simple, pleasurable, experiential brain building and helps structure and pass the time
  - Slowly increase the time, complexity of the activities and amount of children included in the playtime
- **Medication** can have an extremely positive effect on children with ADD, allowing their brain to more fully develop and assisting their self-esteem.
  - Locate and consistently follow through with a quality, experienced neuropsychologist and neurologist or psychiatrist who can give you advice concerning medical and developmental issues.
  - If you choose to try medicine, use it carefully, consistently and keep in touch with your doctor so the medication can be monitored.

Children who have ADD are some of the most interesting children you may ever meet. Their unpredictability is part of their charm... and source of frustration. Let them know you love them as they are, although you may not always like what they have done. Give them the support they need to make sense of their world and become the best they can be.