

13 Parenting Strategies *for* ADHD Kids

Most parents are good parents. But if your son or daughter has ADHD, “good” may not be enough. To ensure that your child is happy and well adjusted now and in the future—and to create a tranquil home environment—you’ve got to be a great parent.

Fortunately, it’s easier than you’d imagine to go from good to great. All it takes is a few adjustments in your parenting skills and the way you interact with your child. Here’s what works, and why.

Believe in Your Child’s Future

It’s not easy to accept that there’s something not quite “normal” about your child. But a child who senses his parents’ resentment—and their pessimism about his prospects—is unlikely to develop the self-esteem and can-do spirit he’ll need in order to become a well-adjusted adult.

Treat your kid as if he were already the person you would like him to be. That will help him become that person.

Be a Good Role Model

Parents are a child’s most influential role model, so think carefully about your own behaviour. If you’re unable to control yourself, how can you expect your child to exercise self-control?

It’s perfectly normal to feel angry at your child from time to time. It’s not OK to continually shout at her. You wouldn’t dream of screaming and swearing at friends or co-workers, so you know you can control your anger if you must.

Don’t Be Too Quick to Say No

All children need to be told “no” at certain times—to keep them from doing something dangerous. But many parents say “no” reflexively. And a kid who hears “no” a lot is apt to rebel—especially if she’s impulsive to begin with.

Smart parents know when to say “no,” and when it makes more sense to take a deep breath and answer in the affirmative—and avoid a nasty confrontation.

Pay Attention to Positive Behaviour

Many parents overlook all the positive ways in which their child behaves. The resulting negativity can cast a pall over the household that affects every aspect of life.

Catch your child being good or doing something well, and praise her. By praising desirable behaviours, you teach her what you want—not what you don't want.

Anticipate Potentially Explosive Situations

Parents spend a lot of time in reactive mode instead of thinking and planning ahead. A simple plan, is all it takes to keep a positive experience from turning negative for all concerned.

Whatever you do, be consistent. All kids benefit from consistency, but ADD kids, in particular, need consistency. It's not a luxury for them. A last-minute change in schedule or an interruption of a familiar routine can wreak havoc with a child who already feels like he spends most of his time off-balance.

Avoid Buying into Negative Remarks

It's no fun to hear others describe your child as "slow" or unmotivated. But don't let negative remarks deter you from advocating for his educational needs. After all, kids with ADD can succeed if they get the help they need.

While it's true that your child's mind works differently, he certainly has the ability to learn and succeed just like any other kid.

Discipline, Not Punishment

How often have you complained to friends, "I've yelled, lectured, threatened, given time-outs, and even spanked—and nothing works!" Do you see the problem with this approach? Any child exposed to such a variety of "sticks" would be confused.

Instead of punishing every infraction, stick to a consistent behaviour modification program: Define attainable goals and reward each achievement until the behaviour becomes routine.

Distinguish Between Defiance and Distraction

Imagine telling your child to make his bed. Now imagine finding him, minutes later, lying on his unmade bed playing cards. What should you do?

The best approach might be to remind your child what you want him to do. Punishment makes sense if it's clear that your child is being defiant—if he refuses to make the bed. But, in many cases, an ADHDer fails to comply because he becomes distracted. When you repeatedly punish a child for behaviour he can't control, you set him up to fail.