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ADHD and Your Child: Change for the Better

ADHD & Your Child

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Behavioral Techniques for Children ADHD

WebMD Medical Reference provided in collaboration with The Cleveland Clinic



Learning behavior management techniques is considered to be an essential part of any successful ADHD treatment program. Most experts agree that combining [medication treatments](#) with extended behavior management is the most effective way to manage ADHD in children and adolescents.

There are three basic categories or levels of ADHD behavioral training for children:

1. Parent training in effective child behavior management methods.
2. Classroom behavior modification techniques and academic interventions.
3. Special educational placement.

Behavior management is most often used with younger children, but it can be used in adolescents up to 18 years old and even adults. In children and adolescents, the two basic principles are:

- Modeling behavior by encouraging good behavior with healthy praise or rewards. This works best if the reward or praise immediately follows the positive behavior.
- Negatively reinforcing bad behavior by allowing appropriate consequences to occur naturally.

Behavior Management Strategies for Preschoolers (Age 5 and Younger)

- Provide a consistent routine to the days and structure to the environment. Let them know when the routine is changing or something unusual is going to happen, such as a visit from a relative, a trip to the store or a vacation.
- Give your child clear boundaries and expectations. These instructions and guidelines are best given right before the activity or situation.
- Devise an appropriate reward system for good behavior or for completing a certain number of positive behaviors, such as a merit point or gold star program with a specific reward, such as a favorite activity. Avoid using food and especially candy for rewards.
- Engage your child in constructive and mind-building activities, such as reading, games and puzzles by participating in the activities yourself.
- Some parents find that using a timer for activities is a good way to build and reinforce structure. For example, setting a reasonable time limit for a bath or playtime helps train the child to expect limitations, even on pleasurable activities. Giving a child a time limit for chore completion is also useful, especially if a reward is given for finishing on time.

Behavior Management Strategies for Children Ages 6-12

- As much as possible, give clear instructions and explanations for tasks throughout the day. If a task is complex or lengthy, break it down into steps that are more manageable, keeping in mind that as the child learns to manage their behavior, the steps and tasks can become more complex.
- Reward the child appropriately for good behavior and tasks completed. Set up a clear system of rewards (point system, gold stars) so that the child knows what to expect when they complete a task or refine their behavior.
- Bear in mind that as your child gets older they will be more sensitive to how they appear to others and may overreact or be unduly ashamed when they are disciplined in front of others. It is important to have a plan for appropriate discipline for misbehaving that does not require carrying out in front of others. Setting up a specific consequence for a certain behavior is probably the best method of providing consistency and fairness for your child.
- Communicate regularly with your child's teachers so that behavior patterns can be dealt with before they become a major problem and before the

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Successfully treating ADHD



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What best describes your child?

- Fidgety and disruptive
- Easily distracted
- Can't play quietly
- All of the above

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teachers get overly frustrated with the situation

- Always set a good example for your child. Children with ADHD need role models for behavior more than other children, and the adults in their lives are very important.

Behavior Management Strategies for Teenagers

- As your child matures, it is important to involve them in setting expectations, rewards and consequences. Empowering them in this manner will improve their self-esteem and reinforce the concept that they are ultimately the masters of their own behavior and can create positive results with good behavior.
- Teenagers are often very sensitive of how they appear to others and may overreact or be unduly ashamed when they are disciplined in front of others. As adolescents they are experiencing hormonal changes and sexual development, and this brings up a whole host of new issues. Teenage years can be tough enough without ADHD, so be gentle and understanding. Communicate openly with them about the issues surrounding physical and sexual maturation.
- Continue to communicate regularly with your child's teachers so that behavior patterns can be dealt with before they become a major problem and before the teachers get overly frustrated with the situation.
- Continue to be consistent and fair in your own behavior. Having a predictable, reasonable parent is always an asset for children with ADHD.
- Continue to set a good example for your child. Children with ADHD need role models for behavior more than other children, and the adults in their lives are very important.
- If you find yourself becoming overwhelmed by the situation, speak to a professional. It is only natural that you have needs and questions in this process, so seek help when needed.

[Get tips on parenting a child with ADHD.](#)

View the full [table of contents](#) for the ADHD guide.

Reviewed by the doctors at [The Cleveland Clinic Children's Hospital](#).

Edited by [Cynthia Haines, MD](#), WebMD, October 2005.

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