

Parenting an ADHD Child – Seven Tips

As parents, we want nothing more than to *get it right* with our kids - especially if our child is atypical and we see them struggling with school, homework and relationships. We are willing to do almost anything in our Herculean efforts to set the stage for their eventual success – at school and in life.

And yet it's frustrating.

You read all the books, speak to the school counsellor, try different strategies, adjust their diet, maybe you help with their homework, take them to therapy, buy the latest ADHD app, you pick them up, drop them off ... you're doing everything that's recommended and expected of you as a "good" parent. In return, some days you feel like you're making progress. Your ADHD child is on top of it. Other days, it can feel like you're dealing with an unpredictable (and out-of-control) tornado.

But you persist. You persist because that's what great parents do. YOU are a great parent! I know that because you're reading this article. If you didn't care, you wouldn't bother.

Here, then, are seven tips/strategies that will hopefully assist you in your efforts –

Tip #1: Get Curious & Let Go

Sometimes we need to "let go" of old practices and paradigms, before we can move forward with an atypical child. As a parent we have expectations for our children AND expectations for ourselves. In our efforts to "get it right" and help our child, if we're not careful, we may inadvertently make things worse. Pushing forward is not always the best approach. Sometimes it helps to step back and reflect. For example –

*What expectations do I have for my child, which are currently not matching reality?
Where do I think I'm failing as a parent? Can I let that go?
Where am I currently 'messing up' in my relationship with my child, and what is perfect about that?*

Tip #2: Lean In to What Is

We may wish things to be better, but fighting with current reality can be futile. At the moment, this is where your child is at. Tomorrow may be different, but for today, this is where he or she is at. If we can *lean in* to where our child is (at this moment in time), without needing to change or "fix" them, it takes the pressure off everyone. At the same time, your child will feel your love and support. Leaning in is a process of surrender in the moment. It's not about giving up. Reflect –

*What aspect/s of my child's behaviour, if any, do I secretly wish would "go away"?
What fears do I have around my child's developmental time line? Are those fears based in reality?
How might I choose to surrender the next time my child "annoys" me?*

Tip #3: What Is Your Child Trying to Communicate?

It helps to remember that “all communication is communication” and that everything our child does – every action, every outburst, every word or shutdown – is their way of sharing important information with us. The question is, are we listening? Do we hear the message? Or are we caught up in the moment, busily trying to “parent” them?

Another powerful and effective way to understand our child’s *unruly* behaviour is to look for the positive intent. If we assume there is a positive intent behind everything he or she does (there is!) we can take a less reactive approach to parenting and become a little more inquisitive. In so doing, we have an opportunity to deepen our connection. For example –

What might my daughter be seeking through her angry outbursts? Could it be she is seeking my approval or attention?

When my son forgets to do his homework, could there be an alternative reason for that (other than simply “forgetting”)?

Tip #4: Children Need Security

ADHD children are keenly aware that they don’t quite fit in, and so they become super sensitive to people and environments that threaten their sense of safety. Because they’ve been labelled “ADHD” they find themselves constantly in fight-or-flight mode. It’s hard to relax and feel secure when you know the world is watching your every move.

As parents, we may not be able to control what goes on at school, but if we can provide a calm, supportive space at home, our child will feel safe and unthreatened. A safe child is much more capable of learning, growing, and staying on task. Reflect –

In what environments (or with whom) does my child typically become anxious?

Under what conditions does my child feel most relaxed and/or safe?

Are there particular classes (or teachers) that seem to be “no issue” for my child? Why might that be?

Tip #5: Presence is Love

In adult conversations, we intuitively know when someone is not really paying attention. And so it is with our ADHD child. It’s easy to get caught up in the hustle & bustle of daily life, however if we can make a conscious effort to be fully present at certain times each day with our child, our presence is like a warm cup of love.

By the way, there is no need to be fully present *at all times* with your child. That’s neither practical nor necessary. Even 5 or 10 minutes each day will pay massive dividends. Consider –

How often do I create deep and meaningful connections with my child?

When was the last time I was truly present with him or her?

How might it affect my child, if he/she felt my presence on a daily basis?

Tip #6: Teamwork

As parents, in general, we really do know “what’s best” for our kids. We’re older, wiser and have a lifetime of experiences. However, because we *think* we know what’s best, we tend to parent our children from a position of authority and power. We tell them what to do and they’re expected to “follow the rules” and respect us.

For the most part, this works. But could there be a better way? Especially when it comes to an atypical child who is being reprimanded or told what to do (or not do), over and over again – both at home and school.

When faced with a challenge, instead of *telling* our children how to respond or behave, an alternative is to engage them and ask for their input in coming up with possible solutions. It’s a more collaborative experience, one that makes children feel empowered and respected. And because of that, they’ll be more inclined to follow through and take action. Ponder –

How do I typically communicate with my child – by telling or asking?

What challenge is my child currently facing that might be better addressed using a collaborative solution-based approach (vs telling him/her what to do)?

How does my child feel when he or she is part of the decision-making process?

Tip #7: Take Time to Celebrate!

Learning to live with ADHD requires developing new skills and coping mechanisms. If a child doesn’t feel like they’re making progress, they will eventually lose confidence and motivation and may even give up (“see, it’s not working”). On the flip side, if they can see results AND they’re rewarded for the results with positive praise, they build momentum and they have more confidence to try again. It becomes a self-fulfilling wheel of progress.

Again, with busy lives it can be hard to find moments to celebrate our child’s progress. But as parents, our words have tremendous power – more power than we think! A simple sentence of encouragement can pierce through to our child’s self-esteem, lifting them up and letting them know we believe in them. Reflect –

When was the last time I praised my child’s effort or progress?

In what simple way can we “celebrate” his or her next achievement?

In general, what do I do more – try to correct my child’s mistakes or praise his progress?

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*“We’re all imperfect parents and that’s perfectly ok.
Tiny humans need connection not perfection.”*

L.R. Knost