8 Secret Tips for Parents of Children with ADHD-

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

For parents of a child with ADHD, everyday tasks into battles-from getting the child out the door in the morning to getting him to bed at night. Parents look for help everywhere. They may read one book after another and hear a parade of behavioral experts speak who give them parenting tips that don’t seem to work. The more books they read and experts they seek out, the worse their child’s behavior seems to get. “ADHD is a ‘brain difference’. Your child’s brain works differently that 95% of his peers. So ‘one size fits all’ parenting techniques won’t necessarily fit your child.”

* **ADHD Secret #1: Parenting techniques must be adapted to kids with ADHD-** What works for adolescents with ADHD may not work for a seven-year-old with this diagnosis. Likewise, if a behavior modification technique works for 95% of children, that doesn’t mean it will be effective for the 5% of kids with ADHD.

The time out is a classic example of a behavior modification tool that is often misused with children who have ADHD. Timeouts are often recommended to help children with ADHD learn to control impulsive behavior such as talking back, hitting or hyperactivity. However, standard application of this popular intervention may not work in the presence of ADHD.

Parents are usually told to apply 1 minute of timeout for each year of age, thus 6 minutes for a six year-old. For a child this young with ADHD, this may be too much time. Psychologists suggest applying the 30% rule to kids with ADHD and learning disabilities, which means that social-emotional development for these kids may be 30% less than their peers. Thus, a 6 year-old should be considered to react more like a 4 year-old. Therefore, 4 minutes would be more appropriate. Understanding the effects of ADHD in children can make parenting much easier.

* **ADHD Secret #2: Use reward, not punishment-** One of the most important things to realize about children with ADHD is that these kids respond much better to reward than to punish. So here’s how to adapt the time out to a child with this diagnosis so that the tool is more effective. If your 6 year-old won’t sit quietly in timeout, tell him the timeout is 8 minutes (double the time based on the 30% rule). But he can reduce it to 4 minutes by sitting quietly. Then watch how hard he tried to ear the “reward.” By moving away from punishment and giving the child a reward, albeit a simple one, you are speaking the language that an ADHD child understands.

**Helpful tip: Don’t nag! Help your child to correct errors and mistakes by showing or demonstrating what he should do rather than focusing on what he did wrong.**

* **ADHD Secret #3: Leverage the child’s desire for positive attention-** Children with ADHD usually crave positive attention while being more likely to have a severe over-reaction to negative attention or punishment. Using what is called “selective attention” can be very helpful in increasing appropriate behavior while decreasing inappropriate behavior. Begin to pay attention to appropriate behavior through praise while ignoring inappropriate behavior. For example, your child is wiggling around and making silly noises while you are helping him with homework. Ignore the behavior and say, “Let’s see how fast we can get this work done.” When he settles down you can say “Wow!, you are really working hard and look, we’re almost done now.” This may difficult at first because it’s usually the opposite of how parents tent to respond to behavior. It’s our instinct to jump on irritating behaviors and try to correct them, simply to make them go away. But without knowing it, we are rewarding the inappropriate behavior because, with these children, any kind of attention is better than no attention at all. Even worse, when we ignore appropriate behavior, we don’t reinforce it. So the child with ADHD doesn’t learn that appropriate behavior often leads to positive attention. It’s a parental 180-degree turnaround that can work wonders with a young child who has attention and hyperactivity problems.

**Helpful tip: Inappropriate or irritating behavior should be ignored 100% of the time while appropriate behavior should be praised 70% to 80% of the time at first, and then to less than half the time as things improve. The goal is for the child to gradually be able to control their behavior on their own.**

* **ADHD Secret #4: Teamwork works with ADHD:** You + Your child= The Team

Most programs for kids with ADHD focus on training parents, which is very important, but these programs do not speak directly to the child. Instead, it is recommended that parents and kids work together as a team. For instance, in the *Total Focus Program,* the parents and the child are shown ways of working together on relaxation exercises that improve concentration and reduce frustration. The exercises are fun, and a chart is kept to track progress. They end up having a good time, improving their relationship and learning new skills together.

May of the programs for kids that are on the market focus on improving only one skill. But they offer no magic cure. There has been success using a broad spectrum of approaches (cognitive rehabilitation, behavior modification, and relaxation therapy) that are integrated together with a newfound “I can” attitude to produce results that lead to major improvements in behavior and learning achievement. Working with kids and parents, it is good to teach problem solving skills and social skills to improve motivation and self-esteem. By doing this, the child learns to put in the work to achieve the major skills he needs to master: improved attention, concentration, and functions including memory and self-control. As a result, the whole family benefits.

**Caution: Parents want a quick fix and are tempted to try advertised products that sound good but usually are not comprehensive (only one type of intervention), not based on research, are expensive and (in the case of some supplements) may be harmful. If you are willing to invest a few hours of your time per week for a few months to implement this program, you and your child will receive years of success and freedom from daily hassles.**

* **ADHD Secret #5-Young children with ADHD respond well to touch-** Most kids with ADHD need lots of physical contact. Love them by touching them, hugging them, tickling them, wrestling with them.
* **ADHD Secret #6: Focus on the child’s strengths daily- and more than you would with a child who does not have ADHD-** Look for and encourage their strengths, interests, and abilities. Help them to use these as compensations for any limitations or disabilities. Reward your child with praise, good words, smiles, and a pat on the back as often as you can.
* **ADHD Secret #7-Practice motor skill improvement to reduce frustration-** Make a game of practicing motor activities that will stimulate them in their development. For example, skipping to music, playing catch or tossing a bean bag at a stack of blocks improves coordination and the ability to follow directions without frustration, giving the child more self-confidence as well. Children with ADHD may have problems in motor coordination so these tips can make a big difference.
* **ADHD Secret #8- Consistency pays-** Being consistent is good advice for any parent. For parents of young children with ADHD, it is vitally important. Exhausted parents crave a “quick fix” to impulsive, unmanageable behavior. So they tend not to stay with one strategy long enough to see it work. When you use the techniques suggested here, remember that consistency is important to achieving success with a young, attention disordered child.
* **ADHD is a “brain difference.”-**You child’s brain works differently than 95% of his peers. So “one size fits all” parenting techniques won’t necessarily fit your child. Your parenting strategies may need to be administered in smaller doses with more emphasis on rewards and on your child’s strengths. I teach parents how to understand the unique traits and behaviors of their child and how to adapt “tried and true” approaches so they will work for their child. I also help parents to develop a positive approach that helps them to be able to develop patience and insight that will result in happier days for parent and child. Recently there have been significant findings from research on ADHD in children that can help parents and professionals to better understand what goes on in the brain.