

ADHD (Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) Supporting your child at home.

Learn how structure, consistency and healthy habits can help your child

Some of the signs of ADHD include difficulty planning, organizing, and controlling thoughts, feelings, and actions. When these are not managed well, they can cause stress not only for your child, but your family, too.

There are many treatments that can help reduce the symptoms of ADHD. But knowing the best way to help support your child at home isn't always clear. Catherine Karni, M.D., Medical Director of Outpatient Services at Children's HealthSM, offers tips that can help you and your child feel in control and on the right path.

Create structure

Dr. Karni suggests creating structure. Talk with your child about specific tasks you want them to work on. Also, choose together what reward they will get for doing each task. Rewards can be different for different tasks. But it must be something your child will want to earn.

For example, when your child does his homework on time, he can have a playdate or go to the movies with a friend. Be clear about what you expect them to do and what will happen if they don't finish the task.

She adds that this system of finishing tasks and getting a reward should be done for each child. "You don't want to make your child with ADHD feel out of the norm in the family. Everyone benefits from structure and clear expectations."

Keep this regular and normal

One of the most important things you can do is make sure to follow the plan every time. Everyone who takes care of your child needs to know and agree to follow the plan too.

Following the plan only sometimes, but not every time, can confuse your child. They never know if they need to follow the plan or not, which can add to their stress.

Focus on the positive

According to Dr. Karni, it's common for children with ADHD to think they aren't good enough or can't do something. "They think, 'No matter how hard I try to be good, I can't get it right,'" she says.

One way you can help is to balance criticism and praise. For every criticism you give, give them 4 statements or signs of praise. When they do well, take notice and reward it. A smile, high five or time spent doing something they enjoy together, can go a long way.

Exercise and a healthy diet

Exercise is a great way for a child with ADHD to burn off excess energy. Riding bikes and playing with friends outside helps your child wind down at bedtime. Any exercise that has structure and rules, like martial arts for instance, helps your child develop self-control and feel better about themselves.

When it comes to diet, children with ADHD, like everyone, should eat healthy foods. This includes lean meats or other forms of protein, dairy, whole grains and a mix of fruits and vegetables. Dr. Karni says it's a myth that things like excess sugar, artificial colors or gluten make the symptoms of ADHD worse.

"If eliminating or reducing sugar or gluten helps, then do it," she says. "Eating healthy is an important factor for all children's development. But there's no research showing that diet influences ADHD."

She says parents need to be cautious about reading anything online about ADHD treatment. Many of the statements about vitamins, supplements and alternative treatments have no research. Make sure you talk with your child's doctor about any ADHD treatments you read about.

Promote good sleep habits

Sleep is important to help your child focus and learn during the day. Children with ADHD are already working hard to focus, so not getting enough sleep only makes it more difficult.

Dr. Karni says good sleep hygiene means:

- 11–13 hours of sleep for 3–5-year-olds
- 10–11 hours of sleep for 5–12-year-olds
- 8 ½ –9 ½ hours of sleep for 13–18-year-olds

Dr. Karni reminds parents that electronics like TV, phone, tablets and computers can make it harder to sleep. Help all of your children sleep well by removing electronics from their bedrooms. If needed, finish phone or tablet use 1 hour before bedtime.

The whole family can support your child who has ADHD. Talk with your child's doctor and other experts to help you make the best plan for your child and your family.

[Learn more about ADHD](#) and how the doctors at Children's Health can help your child.

Dr. Karni also recommends the following books and websites for parents:

- *Taking Charge of ADHD: The Complete, Authoritative Guide for Parents*, by Russell Barkley
- *The ADHD Book of Lists*, by Sandra Reif
- CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), <https://chadd.org/>
- *Smart But Scattered: The Revolutionary "Executive Skills" Approach to Helping Kids Reach Their Potential*, by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare

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- *Late, Lost, and Unprepared: A Parent's Guide to Helping Children with Executive Functioning*, by Joyce Cooper-Kahn and Laurie Dietzel
 - *The Motivation Breakthrough: Six Secrets to Turning On the Tuned-Out Child*, by Richard Lavoie
 - *Putting on the Brakes: Young People's Guide to Understanding ADHD*, by P. Quinn and J. Stern