

*Tips to help improve*

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# EARLY MORNING

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## FUNCTIONING

A guide for parents and caregivers of  
**YOUNG CHILDREN WITH ADHD**



# THE EARLY MORNING CHALLENGE

Do you feel stressed and overwhelmed in the morning trying to get your child ready for school?

## **You're not alone.**

The early morning can be a time of chaos for everyone in the household trying to get ready to start the day. This is especially true for parents of children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

It is challenging trying to get children to stay on task and pay attention to the morning activities in order to get to school – and that's exactly where this booklet can help you.

It is designed to provide you with helpful tips and resources that address how to handle specific unwanted behaviors so that children stay focused on completing tasks, leaving the house on time and getting a good start to the day.

**Early morning functioning (EMF) occurs from the time of awakening until school or other morning activities.**

# TIPS TO HELP IMPROVE LISTENING SKILLS

LISTENING  
SKILLS

## Pause it

Why compete with distractions?

Create a clear communication environment with your child by asking him or her to turn off or pause music, the TV or a video game before talking or making a request. If your child is engaging in an activity that cannot be paused, find a better time to make your request when possible.

## Have fun with it!

A little play may go a long way in helping your child become a better listener.

Be creative:



Ring a bell to make an announcement or request.



Use different voices to capture his or her attention and facilitate listening.



Use bright markers to write or draw pictures of a morning “to do” list with check boxes. Your child can check off the boxes whenever a task is completed.

## Remind with kindness

Do you ask your child to get dressed only to find him or her playing with a toy?

A gentle reminder may help get him or her back on track such as,

“Remember you were going to get dressed? I’ll hold your toy so you can play again when you’re ready.”

# TIPS TO HELP IMPROVE YOUR CHILD'S ABILITY TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS

FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS

## Personalize with photos

A photo timeline may serve as a fun reminder for young children. Take pictures of your child during each step of the morning routine, including:



Getting dressed



Brushing teeth



Eating breakfast



Putting on their backpack

Post the photos on the wall so that your child has a personalized reminder of what to do each morning.

## Do it together. Repeat.

You may help your child follow directions with these simple steps:

1. Demonstrate the desired task
2. Do it together
3. Repeat the process

Whenever possible, break tasks into small sections that your child can master one at a time. Encourage them to practice each segment over and over until he or she has mastered the task.

## Pause

After you give a direction, be quiet and wait 10 seconds. This gives your child time to follow the directions. Sometimes he or she may be distracted by too many words. If he or she doesn't begin the task, address him or her by name and repeat the instruction, **"Amanda, I'd like you to please put your dishes in the sink."**



**Download:**  
**Chore Monster**



This helpful app allows you to create scheduled chores and assign point values. When your child has completed the task, you approve it and he or she receives points associated with the task. A fun way to get children to follow directions!

# TIPS TO HELP MANAGE OVERALL ORGANIZATION

ORGANIZATION



## Try sport/activity-specific containers

If your child plays multiple sports or participates in various activities, consider storing uniforms and any required equipment for each activity separately in clear, plastic containers or tote bags. This way, your child can find items at a glance needed on that activity day.



## Give your child a “launch pad”

Designate a small shelf or table by the door as your child’s place to put anything required for school the next day, such as library books, permission forms, or gym clothes. Have your child get in the habit of checking it each morning before heading out to school. You may even want to consider having him or her decorate the launch pad to personalize it.



## Schedule a regular backpack clean-out

Schedule a regular time for your child to clean out his or her backpack such as once a day or once a week.



## Set a nightly routine to get ready for the next day

Have your child get his or her clothes prepared for the next day the night before. Getting into this habit may help avoid last-minute searches for socks or other clothing items in the morning.



**Download:**  
**iRewardChart**



An app that helps keep children organized by allowing them to earn rewards for completing each task as they go through their morning routine.

# TIPS TO HELP MANAGE GETTING DRESSED IN THE MORNING

GETTING  
DRESSED



## **Decide now**

Does your child have trouble picking out clothes to wear each day?

It may help facilitate the decision by keeping matching tops and bottoms together in one drawer, either on the same hanger or in a clothing stacker.



## **Lay out clothes at bedtime**

With your child, lay out his or her clothes the night before school according to the order in which he or she gets dressed. This will help save time in the morning so that your child doesn't have to search for items of clothing.



## **Let your child choose**

Letting your child choose what to wear may make getting dressed in the morning easier for both of you. Of course, you can always reserve the right to change a selection if it is not reasonable or appropriate for the weather.



## **Ready, set, get dressed!**

If you feel your child is slow getting dressed in the morning, challenge him or her to a race. See who can dress the fastest: you or your child. To encourage the competition, give him or her a head start and make sure he or she wins at least half of the time to keep the interest.

## TIPS TO HELP IMPROVE ATTENTIVENESS

ATTENTIVENESS



### Play music in the morning

Play upbeat music in the morning to help your child get the day started and to improve their ability to pay attention to the tasks that need to be completed. Ask your child for input in creating the playlist.



### Make exercise a daily routine

Have your child participate in some form of physical activity each morning. Consider using Brain Gym exercises to see if it helps improve his or her attention and focus.



### Teach self-monitoring and self-talk

Help your child learn to notice when he or she is distracted. With practice, he or she may start recognizing when he or she is distracted and identifying the cause. Encourage your child to use positive affirmations such as,

“I will focus on getting dressed,” or self-talk such as, “I am getting dressed. I am getting dressed...”

This may help your child attend to the tasks at hand.



### Record the morning routine

Make a video recording that can help guide your child through the morning routine. Use narration, singing, music or humor to help your child attend to the tasks at hand.

## TIPS TO HELP YOUNG CHILDREN QUIET DOWN

QUIETING  
DOWN



### Play the conversation game

Play the conversation game if your child is either too quiet or not quiet enough. The rules are simple: listen and to take turns talking.

Start the game by quietly listening to your child until he or she is finished speaking, then take your turn to talk. Perhaps have your child count how many times you spoke and how many times he or she spoke.



### Use a secret code

Determine with your child a silent signal that you can use to indicate that it is time to quiet down. The signal can be as simple as putting a finger to your lips or a light hand on his or her shoulder.



### Discover what soothes

Notice which environments or activities may help quiet and calm your child.

Does he or she settle with music?

Is background noise more helpful than complete quiet?

Does a lively place like a crowded park or shopping center calm or agitate your child?

Every child is different. See what works best for yours.

## TIPS TO HELP MANAGE DISTRACTION

DISTRACTION



### Get physical for mental focus

Encourage your child to use physical techniques to get focused. When he or she is distracted, instruct him or her to take three slow, deep breaths or to rub his or her hands together for ten seconds. Noticing physical sensations may help your child better manage distractions.



### Get in the zone with headphones

Listening to music, especially without words, through headphones may help block outside sounds and limit distractions while getting ready in the morning.



### Block noise with noise

If sounds and noises are a distraction for your child, counteract them with white noise. You can run a fan, play background music, recordings of nature sounds or use an app that plays white noise.

If the television is a distraction, set your TV to turn itself off. Many televisions can be programmed to automatically shut down after a set period of time.

## TIPS TO HELP MANAGE PROCRASTINATION

PROCRASTINATION



### Just get started

It may be difficult to think about doing an entire task or set of tasks. Consider having your child just complete the "set up" to begin the task to give him or her something to work off of. For instance in the morning, have him or her just select clothing items or set up the food for breakfast.



### Give rewards for getting it done now

If your child has a tendency to procrastinate, reward him or her for completing tasks or parts of tasks within a specific time period. Keep the rewards simple, such as extra play time, treats or coins that can be given based on the size of the completed task(s).



### Motivate with a time sensitive game

Post a to-do list of morning tasks while assigning points for each task.

Let the game begin!

Keep score of tasks completed within a specific time period. You may even consider exchanging points for rewards.



**Download:**  
**Stop Go!**



An app that serves as a simple timer in the form of a traffic light can help you keep track of how long it takes to complete tasks. It can also help your child transition from one task to another.



## TIPS TO HELP MANAGE FORGETFULNESS

FORGETFULNESS



### Remember: It's forgetfulness

Keep it in perspective. Don't confuse forgetfulness for not listening to instruction.

Many children with ADHD have difficulty remembering rules, tasks and routines, even if they've done them before. Rather than punish forgetfulness, work with your child to develop strategies and tools to help him or her remember and deal with his or her working memory challenges.



### Make to-do lists

Help your child get in the habit of making to-do lists. Talk with him or her after dinner about plans for the next day. Write a to-do list together to help your child remember and keep track of what he or she has to do and in what order each task should be completed.



### Play a game of morning task cards

Consider making index cards into morning task cards. Put pictures or photos on the index cards to depict the morning tasks. Give your child a card with a task on it and tell him or her to bring it back after the task has been completed. Then give your child the next card. That way he or she won't need to focus on remembering each task that needs to be done.



### Tap into the strength of visual memory

If your child has a better visual memory (sights) rather than an auditory memory (sounds), consider using visual cues and reminders as often as you can. Try to use brightly colored post-it notes, pictures, or posters in strategic places as reminders for what needs to get done.

## TIPS TO HELP MANAGE THE MISPLACEMENT OF ITEMS

MISPLACING  
ITEMS



### Home sweet home

With your child's input, create a "home" for all important items that belong to your child. Use labels or templates to help your child recognize what items belong in each area. Check the house each night for any homeless items.



### Make a school zone

Create a space in your house specifically for school items. Use wall hooks, shelves, or big crates for your children to stow backpacks, lunch boxes, coats and hats. Having a designated place for school materials may help save time during the morning routine.



### Use a checklist

Create a checklist with your child for things that he or she needs to bring to school each day. To avoid rushing in the morning, have him or her go over the list at night to make sure that everything is packed and ready. This also allows for time to help locate any lost or missing items.

## TIPS TO HELP MANAGE HYPERACTIVITY

HYPERACTIVITY



### Use movement breaks

If sitting still or focusing on a task for extended periods of time is challenging for your child, have him or her take movement breaks every 5–7 minutes. Allow him or her to jump, dance, or run in place for a short time – such as 30 seconds, before returning to the task at hand. Adjust the length of the break to work for your child’s specific needs and it may help to use a timer.



### Burn energy

Encourage your child to participate in a physical activity before attending an event that requires him or her to stay seated for an extended period – such as during school. In the morning, they could play tag, have a race or run around the block before leaving the house.



### Try an exercise ball

Consider getting your child to sit on an exercise ball rather than a chair, or use a special cushion that wiggles whenever possible to allow movement and to develop balance.



**Download:**  
**Smiling Mind**



This app is designed to help regulate hyperactivity and to help you understand your child’s feelings and behaviors.

## TIPS TO HELP MINIMIZE TALKATIVENESS

TALKATIVENESS



### Pass the microphone

Here’s a fun way for your child to practice not talking too much in a conversation:

Choose any object to serve as a “microphone” to pass between yourself and your child. The person holding the object is the only one allowed to talk.



### Secret signal

With your child’s input, develop a visual cue aka a “secret signal” that means they are talking too much and need to allow the other person to talk.



### 3 questions

Encourage your child to ask the other person a question or two or three before continuing to talk. Perhaps a 1:1 ratio to start or, starting out with questions may help. You may need to provide your child with a cue, such as a physical gesture, or hand action, to indicate he or she needs to stop talking.

## TIPS TO HELP PREVENT INTERRUPTIONS

### INTERRUPTIONS



### Touch to talk

If your child needs to talk to you while you are in the middle of another conversation, teach him or her to touch you once on the arm as a “signal” that he or she wants to talk to you. Touch him or her back as a signal that you are aware that he or she wants your attention. Keep your hand on your child to communicate that you will talk in a moment.



### Give timely responses

Encourage your child’s effort to avoid interrupting by responding to him or her as quickly as possible. Estimating time can be challenging for many children with ADHD. A few seconds can feel like minutes, and this may cause impatience, frustration and more interruption. As he or she develops the ability to wait a few seconds, slowly extend your response time.



### Praise your child

Giving positive reinforcement can help boost your child’s efforts.

Be specific: “It made me feel good to see how you waited quietly for me to hang up the phone before you started talking.”



### Teach the polite use of “excuse me”

“Excuse me” can be a handy tool for helping your child to avoid blurting out information and interrupting. Point out that it is only polite when used with a pause. Teach your child to wait after saying “excuse me,” rather than launching right into what he or she wants to say. Once you indicate it’s ok to talk, then he or she can start speaking.



Download:

**Conversation Builder**



This app is designed to help young children learn how to have a conversational exchange with their peers in a variety of social settings.

## TIPS TO HELP MANAGE SILLINESS

### SILLINESS



### Give a signal to settle

Sometimes a gesture works better than words. Devise a silent signal with your child to indicate it is time to settle down. Use the signal anytime your child begins to get worked up.



### Keep it in perspective

Silly but annoying behaviors such as humming, making noises or faces and bouncing around can often be ignored.



### Redirect

Sometimes silly behavior may be able to be redirected rather than confronted head-on. Ask your child to do something or look at something that is incompatible with his or her current behavior.

## TIPS TO HELP ENCOURAGE TAKING TURNS

### TAKING TURNS



#### Choose words that motivate

Use phrases such as, “Wait a moment,” rather than, “It’s not your turn.”

Using words that invite a new, desired behavior may be more encouraging than reminding children of an undesired one.



#### Stagger routines to minimize turn taking

Does the morning ritual include siblings arguing over who gets to use the bathroom?

Try and space out your children’s routines. Get one child up and moving to be out of the “conflict zone” before the other wakes up to help minimize the need to take turns as much as possible.



#### Reward respectful behavior

When your child behaves in a respectful way, such as waiting patiently for his or her turn, consider rewarding him or her with a specific praise, a big hug or a sticker.

## TIPS TO MANAGE BREAKFAST IN THE MORNING

### BREAKFAST



#### Redefine the menu

Breakfasts don’t have to be limited to cereal, waffles, eggs, or pancakes. Consider burritos, pizza, pasta, or soup, for example – which may be more appealing and still offer nutrition.



#### Backup plan – Make grab-and-go breakfasts

Does your child sometimes run out of time for breakfast?

Assemble a couple portable breakfasts to grab if needed and eat on the way to school.



#### Lead by example

Show your child that breakfast is important by eating it with him or her whenever possible. It doesn’t have to be a big meal, just something nutritious.

# TIPS TO MANAGE HYGIENE

HYGIENE



## Brush teeth together

You can help your child establish good oral hygiene habits by brushing teeth together. Consider using a timer to teach how long it should take to brush.



## Mix it up

Consider stocking different kinds of toothpastes or toothbrushes if your child gets bored with flavors or textures.



## Consider other hygiene options

Does your child have physical sensitivities?

Provide alternative hygiene options like dry shampoo, body and facial wipes, electric toothbrushes, or showerheads with different settings.



## Show how long germs spread

Hand washing may not make sense to your child.

To help teach the importance, let your child see how germs can spread:

Cover your hands with a washable paint, pretend to sneeze – then go about your business for a couple minutes, touching things around the room. Have your child tally all the surfaces where you spread your “germs.”

# TIPS TO ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENCE

INDEPENDENCE



## Make three positive comments a day

One easy way to encourage your child's independence is to give specific praise:

"I like how you laid out your clothes tonight," or, "You worked hard to be on time today – and you were!"

Rather than giving blanket praise, being specific shines a light on your child's efforts. Try to find three opportunities each day.



## Make a backpack diagram

Draw a simple diagram of your child's backpack and label where his or her things belong. You and your child could draw it together, or if able, he or she could do it alone. Practice putting things away with him or her.

Stow the diagram in a small pocket so your child can practice and refer to it on his or her own.



## Post the morning routine

Create a chart or poster with your child to document the morning routine. If he or she is a pre-reader, use pictures to show tasks.

Post the chart in a strategic location. Help your child get in the habit of checking it daily to keep track of what needs to get done before school.



**Download:**  
**Happy Kids  
Timer**



This app is designed to help children complete their morning routine easily and on time. The app is operated solely by your child who will carry the mobile device with him or her throughout the house wherever tasks need to be completed. Your child can earn rewards along with a printable certificate.

# TIPS TO HELP YOUR CHILD'S SENSE OF AWARENESS

AWARENESS



## Have a “race the clock” contest

Here’s a fun way to teach your child to learn to keep track of time:

Set a timer and challenge him or her to complete one step of the morning routine before the timer goes off.

Give points for completing the task and bonus points if he or she beats the clock.

Repeat for different tasks.



## Modify the schedule as needed

Always running late in the morning?

See how long it takes your child to complete each task. If some tasks take longer than you originally imagined, rearrange the routine to help your child successfully complete what needs to get done within the timeframe. You may also want to consider moving certain tasks to the night before if possible.



## Give time reminders

Help your child know how much time is left by giving a countdown:

“Ten minutes left until we leave,” then “Five minutes left,” etc.

You may want to set alarms on your phone to help you remember to provide those reminders.



## Keep a clock or timer in view

Make time visible throughout the house. The more your child is able to see a clock, or timer, the better the possibilities are for him or her to be aware of time. A visual representation of time passing may also be very helpful in improving time awareness.

# TIPS TO HELP GET TO SCHOOL

GETTING TO  
SCHOOL



## **Decrease stress. Plan to arrive 15 minutes early.**

Does school start at 8:30? Plan to be there at 8:15.

This allows time for unplanned delays such as last-minute searches for missing items or traffic.

Enjoy the extra time with your child if you arrive early. Bring a game, book, magazine, or sketch pad to give your child something to do if he or she has to wait.



## **Have a goodbye ritual**

Before sending your child off to school, share a parting ritual. It only takes a moment and can help make goodbyes easier. It might be a hug, kiss, gesture, or song. It can be a good way to start off his or her morning and exchange a feeling of warmth and connection.



## **Deal with bus issues**

Does your child complain about the bus?

First, try to pinpoint how serious the problem is. If the issue is noise, have your child wear headphones and perhaps listen to music. A favorite book or magazine may help him or her avoid getting caught up in other children's drama. However, talk to the driver and school if your child feels really anxious about riding the bus. If you suspect he or she may be bullied, report it to the school right away.



## **Draw the line on backseat squabbles**

Are backseat squabbles a part of your morning travel routine?

Try setting physical boundaries and use masking tape to define each child's personal space. Tell them that their body parts and personal items should be kept on their own side of the dividing line.



## **Pull over**

If backseat brawling is distracting you from driving, take a rest stop. Calmly pull over the car, turn off the engine, look ahead and simply say:

"I'll just wait." or "I'll drive when you behave."

Take deep breaths and keep your cool. Your silence can send a clear message regarding your expectations for behavior in the car.



