



A young boy with dark hair, wearing a white t-shirt and blue jeans, is sitting on a patterned couch. He is looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

How to Talk to Your Child About Your Own ADHD

by Jonathan D. Carroll, MA

B EING AN ADULT WITH ADHD has its moments. Trying to manage the day-to-day happenings of life presents some interesting moments. If you have children, you can add another dimension to this already challenging experience. So how do you explain ADHD to your children—the ups/downs, twists/turns of daily life? Based on my personal and professional experiences as an adult with ADHD, here are some suggestions.

LET'S FACE IT: The term ADHD isn't a secret anymore. The cat is out of the bag, so to speak. The mainstream media is well aware of it; we see it referred to in movies, on television, and in music. However, just because it is out there, it isn't always a good thing. There is a lot of misinformation floating around, which can lead to some frustrating misconceptions and stereotypes.

Because of this, I believe in being as transparent as possible. **If you're honest and open about ADHD, your children will begin to learn more about it.**

I cannot tell you how many times I've heard things about ADHD that just aren't true (and frankly hurtful). But when you're given the opportunity to talk about ADHD openly, many misconceptions will be clarified and the disorder better understood.

As I like to tell folks new to ADHD, this is a disorder not a disease. While there is no cure, there are ways to compensate for it. That statement alone opens the door to effective dialogue. Instead of a burden, ADHD requires success strategies. When you're able to apply them, you're

able to live successfully. Your children need to hear and understand this!

It is difficult for parents to show that we have challenges. We want our children to see us as invincible. It can also be difficult for children to see our struggles. Being selectively vulnerable, however, teaches our children that it is okay to have areas of struggle. I would not recommend opening the floodgates on information, but I would suggest sharing some truths. You'd be surprised!

I would also recommend the in-the-moment learning opportunities. I caution you against using ADHD as an excuse, but as an explanation for what potentially hinders you. For example, let's say you forget something at the store. **You can tell your child that sometimes you struggle to remember things if you do not write them down.** Then, when you go shopping together, show your child why making a list is important. Explain why lists are an important tool for you to use. Having ADHD doesn't mean you cannot remember things; it just





makes it a little more challenging. By developing compensatory strategies, you're able to function like everyone else.

Encouraging your children to ask questions is essential. Creating open and constructive dialogue helps this process. Children *will* ask questions, so allow them to do so. This method of discovery is key to improving understanding. Once children start asking questions, they're showing us they actually care and are engaged. **Perhaps you and your child can create a shared journal where you can answer their questions.** This will act as a good resource moving forward.

We learn as much from ourselves as we do from others. I would recommend connecting with other adults with ADHD and learning more about their conversations. Other parents who have been successful at having these conversations with children are an excellent resource. **Do not be afraid to ask them questions.** Local ADHD support groups are always a good resource.

Talk with the professionals assisting you with your ADHD as well. The more information you gather from others, the better equipped you'll be for any difficult conversations. If possible, invite your children to a meeting so they can also ask questions. I find that this is helpful and comforting for children as well as parents. It shows our children that we don't always have the answers, but we can always ask others for help.

These are but a few suggestions about telling your children about ADHD. I cannot stress enough the importance for open and clear communication as well as transparency. Because your relationship with your children is so important, open and effective dialogue is a great way of keeping things strong. You might learn something from this process as well. 🗣️

Jonathan D. Carroll, MA, is an ADHD and executive function coach as well as a special education advocate and educational advisor. He is based in the Chicago area, but also works remotely with both US-based and international clients. Visit his website, adhdefcoach.com, to learn more.

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