



CHADD and the National Resource Center on ADHD

Ask the Expert Chat Series

Oct. 19, 2011 – Anger Management for Adults with ADHD

Moderators – NRC Staff

Expert – Steven Peer, CHADD president

Moderator 1: Thank you for joining us today for our monthly Ask the Expert chat. This month, CHADD President Steven Peer will address questions on Anger Management for Adults with ADHD.

If you have any questions, you may begin submitting them now. It's likely that many of you may have similar questions dealing with the same issue. Even though your particular question may not be posted, please try to see how Steve Peer responses to other questions may apply to your situation.

Thank you Mr. Peer for being our Expert today.

Steven Peer: Glad to be here

Moderator 1: And now, for our first question.

Eric84: Is anger a common symptom of ADHD?

Steven Peer: Great question. Yes, because frustration often precedes anger and Albert Ellis coined the term LFT "Low Frustration Tolerance" for folks – including those with ADHD. Add LFT to other contributors of ADHD, such as low self-esteem and distorted or limited thinking, to name a few, and you have a recipe for anger.

DavidADD: Is there an effective way to increase one's tolerance?

Steven Peer: My work is mainly behavioral and cognitive. Often frustration is based on unreal expectations, and folks comparing their 'insides' with others 'outsides' -- a sure basis for disappointment.

You can model better practices: Never compare you or your children to others, set perspective – ask "how bad is this" or "what IS a reasonable goal? Also, make sure your feedback is non-judgmental, to limit stress that can worsen frustration.

Moderator 1: [CHADD's Annual Conference](#) is a great way to learn more about ADHD and registration is filling up fast! Our annual conference is at Disney's Contemporary Resort, Orlando, Fla., Nov. 10-12, 2011. World-renowned experts will be on hand to provide the latest science-based information about ADHD in adulthood. The creators of *ADD & Loving It?!* will present on living successful with adult ADHD and host an Evening of Hope, Humor and Honors. [Register now!](#)

Nelle: My son is in his twenties and has ADHD. If I ask him a simple question, his response often sounds irritated or angry. He seems to have no self-awareness in this regard and if I bring attention to his "tone", then he gets mad. Any suggestions?

Steven Peer: I use this approach with teens: One word. Help him by cueing the emotion you think he is experiencing (e.g. Tired?). You needn't be RIGHT with the emotion (they'll correct you). Start by modeling this yourself. When frustrated, say, "Boy this is frustrating; I feel like I'll never finish... though I know I will..."

Two things to keep in mind. This works best AFTER the event – during a down time, and, again, must be done with an innocent, curious tone (NOT judgmental).

Finally, whatever emotion they state, it may not be the primary cause – what happened immediately AFTER the event?

Jane: I get angry and react quickly a lot. I feel like I'm setting a terrible example for my 9 year old. Now I see her 'modeling' my behavior. Am I teaching her these bad habits? How can I stop???

Steven Peer: Good for you for noticing this and addressing it. We often have a false belief about what they do, such as, "they're doing this on purpose," "that eye-rolling MEANS disrespect," etc...

We can go a long way to break these down, discover the triggers and get straight as to what really is happening. Quite often, they're doing age-typical behavior that we've demonized. I know for a fact, whenever I am REALLY mad at my son, part (most?) of it isn't about HIM.

And, notice that we unconsciously PRACTICE what we're going to say prior to a confrontation. Take that time to be more intentional with what we choose to say. Practice phrases that bind the relationship, and when you do explode, during a down time apologize and state what you'd meant to say.

harp2er: so how do you isolate the emotion of "anger" from the other emotion(s) that might have triggered the anger

Steven Peer: We practice getting to the original emotion, because that emotion has a purpose. I call my program Anger Management, but really, it is about Emotional Management. If we notice the original/primary emotion and DEAL with it, we never chain through to anger or rage or helpless or hopeless.

I work with clients as to the purpose of each emotion. Take frustration, it's telling us to try something different. When we don't (you 12-steppers will recognize this) you are essentially doing the same thing over and over – expecting different results.

In class we examine LOTS of emotions and their purpose, including helpless, overwhelmed, mourning, etc.

Moderator 1: [CHADD local groups](#) provide support and networking with other individuals who understand the difficulties of having and treating ADHD. In addition to supplying each other with local resources and support, the meetings usually have a speaker who talks about current events or research in the ADHD community. Each local group is different, so use the CHADD website to [find the group closest to you](#).

Nwad: So what are some strategies for increasing/building one's frustration tolerance?

Steven Peer: Noticing is half the answer. Then we can examine other approaches. Sometimes WE'RE the one with the (internal) non-judgment voice, making it hard to review things at a later date. And reviewing what we did, examining our timing, approach, interaction with others, these are all useful, but impossible if we're busy beating ourselves up around an event.

As a teen / young adult, I found I "severed" any feedback loop I had. I'd had so much negative feedback that I internally said, "screw this. I'm not listening to anything ever again!" This is typical of many I meet with. And, if we can pay attention to feedback, we automatically improve.

But, in the moment of frustration, we can excuse ourselves (there's always a bathroom around) in order to breathe, and regain the executive portion of our brain responsible for, amongst other things, logic and creativity – both important in problem solving or even a simple conversation.

More on that: Under stress the front or executive portion of the brain shuts-down. That's why, only an hour AFTER an argument, you think of all the things you MIGHT have said.

medip99: I have heard that Anger is just another form of fear, can you elaborate on this theory?

Steven Peer: I've just started looking into this myself, so I'll defer on a response. I will say, however, that I am thrilled to think that I may be announcing to my court-ordered folks that they are afraid. ;-}

Matt: What can a spouse do help the ADHD spouse cope with and control anger?

Steven Peer: (Possibly an aside) I am always sooooo glad when spouses join the adult with ADHD at a meeting. They begin to understand that ADHD-behavior is not done on purpose, allowing them to de-personalize. That alone can be a huge help.

I ask both parties to give each other permission to walk away from any argument, but only if they promise to reconvene to solve it. In practice, since so many arguments are based on bad information (have no real basis), often the coming back together is to discover this.

BUT, if my wife THINKS there's a problem, there is until

1. She comes to discover that it isn't a problem, or,
2. I discover that I'm wrong and there IS a problem.

BTW, Walking away with the intent to return is "going on hold," which can look a lot like abandoning the conversation unless a day and time are made. And if you DON'T reconvene as promised – well good luck.

Another strategy; just as with the child, during down time, let them know your emotional reaction to their attack. So often, simply saying "That hurt; did you mean to hurt me?" would be truer, more effective, and less confrontational.

Moderator 1: [Being a CHADD member](#) not only provides valuable products and services, such as Attention magazine, to you and your family, it also supports CHADD's work on behalf of individuals with ADHD at the local, state and national level. [Join CHADD today!](#)

Td: I have ADHD and my oldest son, 7, has it too. I have 3 children. When I was younger (probably all the way up to when I had children) I was described as laid back and calm. Now, I regularly get frustrated and angry - on a daily basis! Getting my kids ready for anything is a common cause for my anger. Where do I begin to regain that calmness and perform more effectively as a parent?

Steven Peer: Something I didn't have growing up, but have found hugely effective with other families, are family meetings. They are a 'meta' conversation on 'how we're doing as a family.'" I recommend that they be informal and "book-ended" with pleasant things (e.g. special pizza or dessert and a movie), at least to begin.

During these meetings, you can ask, "how are things going for you?" (and listen to the answer). Then comes your turn. You can express your frustration. Then, ask how they think it can be solved. You do this for TWO important reasons:

- It is respectful and they (sometimes) have pretty good answers. But even when they don't,
- It then gives you the floor to suggest ideas.

For some of you, if you are like me, this family meeting may sound silly, but consider two things.

- First, nothing changes if nothing changes. If you leave here today all energized, but try nothing new (which, by the way, will take courage), expect no changes.
- Secondly, I'd mentioned that I wasn't raised doing this. I DID have them for my two kids and I know it helped.

It's also essential in a 5-step model I used all the time while raising our kids.

Back to your Q though, there may be some INTERNAL work you can do. As folks seldom talk about their problems, you can seem alone in addressing these, or worse, have unrealistic expectations. CHADD

meetings are a great place to get honest about what's really going on. I recall asking a group of parents, "How many here have fist-size holes in their sheetrock somewhere in their homes?" Talk about an icebreaker!

Specific to your Q, I'd ask you to tease out any triggers and hold them up to the 'light of day' to see if the meaning to them is accurate. BTW: I LOVE when I'm part of the problem, because I have 100% control over me and only 40, no 30, no 10, no 0% control over others. I hope that helps.

Atlaubie: Is there a reason why so many of us with ADHD have issues with controlling our temper? How does the impulsivity from ADHD contribute?

Steven Peer: I mentioned that I'm mostly cognitive/behavioral. That said, I believe the [MTA study](#) (one of the largest around ADHD) that, simplified, says doing nothing is the worst option, meds alone do a better job than C/B, but meds PLUS C/B is the best. So here's my plug for determining if meds wouldn't address some of these issues best.

If you have the means, get a hold [of Barkley's keynote](#) at last-year's conference. He riveted us to our seats with brain-based correlations with emotions, ADHD, the brain, and how meds now (but especially in the future) may better target specific areas of the brain.

Steven Peer: Back to C/B, I can't say enough how, when we become gentle with ourselves, noticing our behavior without our inner voice shaming us, we become curious and quit believing everything we think. And then we can realize just because we don't *know* a better way doesn't mean there *isn't* a better way. Things changed for me when I became open for coaching, and I mean OPEN.

I would say to folks, "I am open for coaching." In fact, I said it to the staff at CHADD just before this started. Most of us, or our kids, do the things we do, not because we think they WORK, but because we don't know a better way, so kudos to you for being here and in a learning mode.

ADHD and the co-occurring diagnoses can blind us as to the change possible. Again, I hope this is seen as less rambling and more trying to address many possible circumstances out there.

Moderator 1: We have less than ten minutes left. Steve Peer will move through as many questions as possible. If we are unable to get to your question please contact one of our Health Information Specialists on ADHD by calling 1-800-233-4050 between 9 a.m. - 5p.m. EST or by clicking on the "[Ask A Question](#)" link on the top of [our website](#).

This will be our last question.

Eric84: What should you do when you notice one of your "triggers" coming on and what are some quick anger management takeaways?

Steven Peer: In the moment of anger, we have few choices but to retreat to get our mind back. Most of the work needs to be done prior to becoming angry. I do teach a pattern-interrupt where I have folks

create a consolidated image, with sound, smell, feeling of the consequences. In my case, many of my folks spent their first night in jail.

For them, a good pattern interrupt is their cell with no access to freedom or family. Instead, they have all the sights and sounds of jail. I ask them to practice evoking that complete image as they recall triggers of the past, but this time, choose a better outcome.

WE DO WHAT WE PRACTICE, so I have them practice this dozens of times. For you non-jailed participants, you have just a powerful a story/image, such as loss of love, family, job, etc. These can be a powerful 'interrupt' to otherwise routine behaviors.

One last suggestion; I mentioned that it takes courage to try any of these things. And, when you do, you may get "caught." If that happens, respond to your kids/spouse, "Yes, I'm trying to be a better parent/spouse. I hope that's OK by you."

No one, in any of the 1000s that went through my parenting class, answered "no" to that. And, you don't ask their permission because you NEED it, you ask because when they say "yes" (and they will), they've just given you permission to try LOTS of other things.

Steven Peer: This time went by so fast. No surprise I touched only a fraction of the 36 hour program. But, enough to get you started. My best wishes as you try these ideas.

Moderator 1: Thanks to everyone for all your questions! Join us November 16 at 2 PM Eastern time for our next chat on *Interacting with Others: Is there an App for That?* with Michele Novotni PhD, co-author of *What Does Everybody Else Know That I Don't?: Social Skills Help for Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder*.

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