



**National  
Resource  
Center  
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A Program of CHADD

## **CHADD and the National Resource Center on ADHD**

### ***Ask the Expert Chat Series***

**February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2011 – Living with Your Adult Child who has ADHD**

**Moderators – NRC Staff**

**Expert – Arthur L. Robin, PhD**

**Moderator 1:** We will begin shortly. As a reminder, this is a moderated chat. All questions go first to the moderator for review. We will do our best to post as many of your questions as possible

When formulating your questions, please remember the following guidelines: (1) Be sure your question relates to today's topic; (2) Include only as much information as is necessary to get to the heart of your question; (3) Do not include personal information; and (4) Be as brief and to the point as possible.

Please note that questions that do not conform to the above guidelines may be edited by the moderators.

And now, on to our chat!

Welcome to today's Ask the Expert Chat sponsored by the National Resource Center on ADHD (NRC). The NRC is a program of CHADD and is funded by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to provide science-based information on all aspects of ADHD. This will be the first of a 4-part Ask the Expert chat series about young adults. The entire series will be spread throughout the year, with one chat taking place every 3 months, during the months of February, May, August, and November.

**Moderator 2:** Today's expert, Dr. Arthur Robin, will be speaking on the topic, "Living with Your Adult Child who has ADHD."

Arthur L. Robin, PhD, specializes in the assessment and treatment of children, adolescents, and adults with ADHD, adolescents with eating disorders, and parent-teen conflict. He has extensive clinical and research experience in these areas. In addition to many articles, chapters, and grants, he has authored and co-authored several books on ADHD including: *Your Defiant Teen: 10 Steps to Resolve Conflict and Rebuild Your Relationship*; *ADHD in Adolescents*; *Defiant Teens: A Clinician's Manual*; and *Negotiating Parent-Adolescent Conflict*.

Dr. Robin received his PhD in Clinical Psychology from the State University of New York at Stony Brook in 1975. After earning his degree, he began a career teaching at the University of Maryland. In 1979, he

came to Wayne State University and Children's Hospital of Michigan, where he remains today. He is currently a Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences, and Pediatrics at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, and the Chief of Psychology and the Director of Psychology Training at the Children's Hospital of Michigan.

Welcome Dr. Robin!

**Arthur Robin:** Thanks. Glad to be here.

**Moderator 2:** Now, for our first question

**Fiona:** My 18-yr-old daughter is never ready on time. I have bought her watches and timers and helped her to make schedules, but 9 out of 10 times, she is frantically running for the bus or I am fuming at the dinner table, in the car, etc while I wait for her. Can you recommend any strategies and/or resources?

**Arthur Robin:** When it comes to being ready in the morning for school or work, I have helped parents and older adolescents develop contract. For example, assume a parent had to drive the teen to school or work, the parent may say that if you are ready within 5 minutes of the designated time, I drive you. If not, you find alternative transportation.

This could mean paying for a taxi out of earned money, or if the destination is nearby, walking. This is a short term solution, but it does not address the underlying executive function deficit in time management.

To address that deficit, the adolescent or young adult needs to "buy into" a coaching-oriented Cognitive Behavior Therapy, which research has shown can help willing adolescents or young adults acquire techniques to get around procrastination.

**Marie:** I have a 22 year old adult son with ADHD who lives at home. How do I give him rules fit for him being an adult so he doesn't feel like he's been treated as teenager even though that's how he acts?

**Arthur Robin:** You cannot "give him" the rules and make that work. It is complex. You should make a distinction between non-negotiable rules; basic values for living in a civilized world- No violence, no drugs, be respectful, etc - and negotiable rules- everything other than basic values.

For non-negotiables, you make them conditions for him continuing to live under your roof. For the rest, you invite him to discuss them, issue by issue. You may want to find a therapist trained to do Motivational Interviewing, a technique that helps people gain motivation to change, and offer to pay for this.

It is a long process. Remember, the ADHD brain matures several years later than other people's brains- so researchers tell us.

**Maria:** Under U.S. law, I no longer have the authority to discuss my adult son's condition with our family physician. Would it be appropriate to ask our physician, who also prescribes the ADD medication for my

son, to now take over my former function as coach (setting goals, checking on progress, etc), considering that my son will probably listen more to our doctor than to me?

**Arthur Robin:** If the MD is included to function in this capacity, that would be great. We actually have in Michigan a few physicians who are also ADHD coaches- rare but wonderful. Most MDs won't want to do this. It is better to ask your son to sign a release permitting you to talk to the physician.

You could sweeten the pot by making this a contract- you will do something for him in return for signing the release, if you need to. Offering to help your son find a ADHD coach would also be a great idea, if your son will cooperate.

**Moderator 1:** While waiting for our next question... It's never too early to start planning! CHADD's 2011 Annual Conference will be held at the Disney Contemporary Resort, Orlando, FL, Nov. 10-12. See [www.chadd.org/annualconference](http://www.chadd.org/annualconference) for more information.

**Debra:** My daughter loses everything. License, cell phone, money etc. She is totally disorganized. Her room is a mess. She tries to clean it but she can't. This seems to be a reflection of how her brain works in a scattered fashion. She is not too open to our suggestions. Is there anything that can help her with her losing important things?

**Arthur Robin:** It will be best to get the help of someone outside the family, if the adolescent or young adult will cooperate. There are many very dynamic, highly personable, professional organizers who will come to the home, teach the individual with ADHD strategies for organizing and keeping things better, and provide regular follow-up. Difficulty with organizing is a central executive function in deficit for individuals with ADHD. It lasts a lifetime.

If a parent wants to help an adolescent/ young adult organize better, get their "buy in" to organizing their prize possessions first. Give them simple strategies for that, and later move onto things of less value to them (but high value to you).

If they lose cell phones, iPods, etc., make them earn the money to replace these possessions. Don't just replace them for the youngsters.

**Moderator 1:** If you're new to CHADD, CHADD local groups provide support and networking with others who understand the challenges of ADHD. Meetings usually have a speaker who talks about current events or research in the ADHD community. Use the CHADD website to see if there's a local CHADD group near you. See [www.chadd.org/chapterlocator](http://www.chadd.org/chapterlocator).

**klk619:** My 20 year old son seems less mature than his friends of the same age. Do ADHD kids mature a lot later?

Yes, they mature later, but they may always seem less mature than their peers. Divide up "immaturity" into its elements. Let the teen/ young adult deal with "social immaturity." "Academic immaturity" leading to failure in college is another matter altogether.

Set contingencies. For example, if a young adult, like your son, gets on academic probation at an away from home college, bring him home to do community college until he proves he can be successful in higher education.

If a young adult drives recklessly, restrict access to the car temporarily, then give him another chance. Often, using cognitive and behavioral strategies, you can help the young adult with ADHD move along in some areas of maturity.

**Kbaileya:** My son will be 19 next week. He flunked out of his first semester at college and is back home with us. He finally got a job which lasted 3 weeks and we don't seem to be able to motivate him to do anything beyond sleep and play video games. How do we help him?

**Arthur Robin:** Unfortunately, this is too common a situation for young adults with ADHD. I will make a few suggestions, but such young adult must get into Cognitive Behavior Therapy with a therapist familiar with young adult ADHD. You or he can't fix it on your own.

If you are fortunate enough to have an expert in cyber and video game recovery in your community, set your son up to meet with such a person. In Michigan we have such experts. There is a recently published book by Mr. Kevin Roberts on Cyber and Videogame addiction. Read it. I don't have the exact reference, but you can look it up on the internet.

**Moderator 1:** The title of the book is Cyber Junkie: Escape the Gaming and Internet Trap.

Set basic conditions for living in your home; work or school. If no work can be found, require the young adult to do volunteer work. A skillful therapist can help you set a deadline off in the future for the young adult being engaged in a useful activity, and if not, he can't live in your home anymore.

**Arthur Robin:** Don't yell, scream, and carry on, though. That won't work. In an earlier question, I mentioned Motivational Interviewing. See if you can get your son to a therapist skilled in this technique of encouraging positive change. Don't give up. It may take several years to turn him around. He will thank you 10 years from now (but not until then).

**Moderator 1:** Take the CHADD Spring Fling Escape! On Friday, April 8th, the Hyatt Regency Hotel ballroom in Bethesda, MD will be transformed into a mini-Cherry Blossom Festival for an evening extravaganza featuring getaway trips to Hawaii, Florida, South Carolina, and New Mexico; Caribbean cruises to the Bahamas; theatre and sports event tickets; and certificates to many well-known restaurants. For more information visit: [www.chadd.org/auction](http://www.chadd.org/auction).

**Sajini:** How can I persuade my 20 year old son with ADHD to take medication for ADHD?

**Arthur Robin:** Finds him a physician who knows how to talk to adolescents and young adults with ADHD about medication. Usually, physicians board certified in Adolescent Medicine are the ones you want. Such physicians put the teen in charge of all decision making about medication and look for areas of the teen's life where the teen might see benefits of medication.

Perhaps your son wants to improve sports performance. The physician can help with that. Perhaps some other talent. The key is not to exercise authority but offer options. You can't persuade. You can guide and offer options.

If all fails and the teen/ young adult still won't take medication, pinpoint the behaviors that need changing, set performance goals/ objectives, and get the help of a Cognitive Behavior Therapist in using behavioral techniques to move towards those goals.

Contact the Society for Adolescent Health to locate appropriate physicians in your area who are experienced with older adolescents and young adults with ADHD.

**Moderator 1:** To learn more about Managing Medication, please see our [What We Know Sheet #10 Managing Medication for Adults with ADHD](#) at: [www.help4adhd.org/en/about/wwk](http://www.help4adhd.org/en/about/wwk)

**Val:** Our son feels more left behind every year, watching his high school friends progress through college and work. How can we help our young adult child with ADHD not feel defeated?

**Arthur Robin:** First, provide a great deal of empathy and support. Offer to listen when the young adult needs to talk.

Second, identify the young adult's talents and gifts. We all have things we excel at. Help him nourish those talents. Music, art, sports, cooking, computers, whatever they may be.

Realistically and objectively identify the specific things the peers are doing that the young adult with ADHD is not doing. Offer to get the young adult the right type of professional help for each area. For example, a special program at a local community college for students with ADHD may make college possible. Cognitive Behavior Therapy may help combat defeatist, depressive thinking and feeling.

Finally, help your young adult with ADHD compete against his own goals and desires, not against the standards of his peers. Find role models through local CHADD chapter meetings or the National Conference for similar young adults who have done well.

**Pony:** Our son will go off to college next year. We have always acted as his coach, which he is resenting more and more as he gets older. How do we find a good and inexpensive ADD Coach for him when he goes off to college?

**Arthur Robin:** Most Universities and colleges have programs for students with special needs which sometimes include free ADHD coaches. Ask first at his college. Second, look in the CHADD Yellow Pages on the website for coaches- they don't have to be physically at the college. They often work by phone. Ask the coordinator of the local CHADD chapter near the college for recommendations. Finally, look in Attention magazine and contact some of the coaches advertising there to see whether they are suitable for your son.

**Moderator 1:** The CHADD Yellow Pages Dr. Robin referred to in his answer is the CHADD Professional Directory, which can be found on the CHADD website - <http://www.chadd.org/Content/CHADD/Support/ProfessionalDirectory/default.htm>

**Bhealthy:** Are there sources you can recommend for "sample contracts" that parents might use to outline/document expectations/responsibilities and consequences for not following through?

**Arthur Robin:** I will list a few books, but there are many others too.

- Surviving Your Adolescents by Tom Phelan is one.
- In the area of defiant behavior, Dr. Barkley and my book *Your Defiant Teen* is another.
- *ADD Friendly Ways to Organize Your Life* by Kolberg and Nadeau has lots of good ideas that you might convert into contracts.
- With regard to college, *Survival Guide for College Students with ADD or LD* by Dr. Nadeau is also useful.

You will have to pull ideas from different sources and put them together.

**MomQ:** Since the ADHD brain matures later than others, is there hope that my 20 year old son will not need medication as he matures? What signs do I need to look for to make this transition?

**Arthur Robin:** Wouldn't it be great if this were true? Yes, researchers found that the ADHD brain matures later than the non-ADHD brain. This only pertained to the anatomy and physiology of the brain. They did not link brain maturity to improvements in behavior, emotions, and life functioning.

Having said this, changes in life circumstances change the tools in our toolbox needed to cope with ADHD. When sustained attention to boring details or strong self-control of emotions and behavior are needed, nothing really beats medication at any age. If we get into a job or vocation that we love, we don't need medication to stay focused on it. So, guide your children with ADHD to follow their passions, when reasonable.

There are, however, always the boring details of life – bills, listening to spouses (hopefully not boring, but most adults with ADHD I work with have trouble in this area), income taxes, etc. Adults with ADHD might find ways to work around these details and get them done without medication, or they may selectively use it as a tool some of the time.

**Beefgir:** I always have trouble going to sleep. As someone with ADHD, sitting in bed and waiting for something to happen is the worst feeling around. So I avoid sleep until I'm tired. This causes me to go to bed consistently at 5 in the morning. My parents only see me waking up at 12 pm, exhausted and incoherent, and they assume I'm just slacking off. This leads to tension in the family since they are out working from 9 – 5.

**Arthur Robin:** I appreciate your honesty and willingness to work on this problem.

First, you need to rule out any type of Sleep Disorder. If you have not done so, find a referral to a Sleep Center and go through their evaluation. A surprising number of people with ADHD have Sleep Disorders and don't know it. If you are among them, a sleep disorder clinic will have some suggestions.

There are the usual home remedies – soft music, quiet activities before bedtime, etc. You may have tried them all and they don't work. Some adults with ADHD are able to arrange their lives to work at night or even take classes on line at night, then sleep during the day.

It depends where you are in your life. Try to have an open discussion with your parents about what is happening. It is difficult for adults with ADHD to turn off the restless mind. Talk to an experienced adult ADHD physician about bedtime medications for adults with ADHD – not stimulants, not sleeping pills, but several others that work about 50% of the time.

**Moderator 1:** To learn more about the relationship between ADHD, Sleep and Sleep Disorders please see our [What We Know Sheet #5](#).

**Momofmydomain:** Are there specific boundaries that are appropriate when an adult son returns to living at home to prevent disruption of the rest of the family due to impulsivity?

**Arthur Robin:** These boundaries are what I called earlier "Non-negotiable Rules." For most families they include:

- Respect privacy.
- Use appropriate language.
- No violence or drugs.
- Keep noise down late at night.

You make these conditions for living at home. If your adult son is not able to pay your rent (if he can, this is a good idea), explain that his "rent" is compliance with these non-negotiables. Failure to comply is akin to failure to pay the rent. You get evicted.

Have a "pleasant" conversation about this, and offer to help your adult son find the resources necessary to go along with the guidelines (therapy, medication, etc.). But be firm that they are conditions to live at home.

If your son has had a "taste of freedom" living on his own for 6-12 months, accept that there will be a difficult adjustment. I find that college students coming home for the summer and their families have the worst time adjusting.

**dp5341:** I have been watching this chat and see where a lot of parents are being told to speak with Behavior Therapist, Sleep disorder places and other specialist. Times are hard and so many of us parents have lost jobs or cut back to part time. How do we help our kids when the insurance or income is not there to take them to the specialist they need?

**Arthur Robin:** I understand times are hard. I live in Michigan where we have been very hard hit economically. First, use all the free resources you can. There are three more chats in this series. Invite your young adult with ADHD to participate in the chats, as several have done today.

Talk to your local CHADD chapter coordinator about having panel discussions with young adults who are coping well on the panel at CHADD meetings. In our CHADD of Eastern Oakland County we have two such panels per year.

Look for free therapy. I direct a Psychology Internship. Psychology interns usually provide services free in hospitals, clinics, and major university psychology department clinics. Some are trained in adult ADHD. They are young, enthusiastic and able to help. Contact local Universities about this.

If you can make it to a National CHADD conference with your young adult, you will get a lot of ideas free. Many regions also have regional conferences. One is coming up in New York soon. We have one in Michigan at the end of September.

**Moderator 1:** Thanks to everyone for all your questions! While we try to post as many specific questions as possible, we also try to post questions about different issues. We appreciate your patience and will continue trying to get through as many questions as possible in our time remaining

**Pat:** Are there supported living educational/work/service learning facilities for 20-something ADD adults of normal intelligence who can't get through school due to the executive functioning deficits inherent in ADD?

**Arthur Robin:** There are junior colleges such as Landmark College in Vermont that help with study skills and preparation for college. There are some residential living programs around the United States where young adults with ADHD can live, work, and receive coaching/ therapy. I don't have a specific reference, but only the wealthy can honestly afford them – in light of the last question, I cannot be enthusiastic about such options.

In some communities such as mine, there are 10-12 week outpatient motivational programs run by charismatic leaders designed to get such adults motivated to take positive steps in their lives. I don't know the extent to which such programs exist around the United States.

**Becky:** So, are there any other alternatives to kicking him/her out? There are always scenarios in which that is not a viable option. I need advice on other ways to handle an immature kid who is struggling with motivation. What about no car, no money, etc?

**Arthur Robin:** You listed some of the privileges that you control. Make everything in life aside from a room and food an earned privilege. You have to have a non-violent young adult to do this, though. I can't advice it with those who are aggressive. Offer the "choice" to live with you and earn back privileges or to leave on his/her own free will and find another place to live. They choose. You don't kick him/her out. Require attendance at some type of therapy- individual, family, etc., as a condition to earn some of the privileges.

There are no easy answers. I help parents daily make the decision as to how much to put up with and how to get the young adult functioning adequately. If you are religious, pray a lot. Find activities to do with your young adult that re-builds a bond so he/she might want to please you.

**Stella:** Can you address ways to shore up our own reserves? I know that drawing boundaries and following through is important, as you suggested for the guest whose daughter is always late. I want my son to be able to see that it is his choices that get him into hot water and not me. He blames me for the consequences and our relationship suffers. It goes downhill from there.

**Arthur Robin:** If you mean charge your own batteries, take vacations from your teen or young adult with ADHD several times per year. Go to CHADD meetings and chats like this.

You also mean getting your son to own up to his own problem behavior, not blame you. Simple logic won't prevail. Do "responsibility taking training trials." Take silly things that your son does which are not sources of conflict and ask him whether he did each act. Of course, he will say YES. Like, did you turn the TV on? Gradually shift to more meaningful acts that he normally would blame on you.

If you are clever (and even playful and humorous about it), he may half jokingly take responsibility. And you may see some improvement taking responsibility for meaningful issues over time. This is an application of the behavioral principle of "shaping."

**Moderator 1:** This will be our final question.

Missed part of the chat? [Past chat transcripts are available](#) to CHADD members as a benefit. To learn more about joining CHADD, visit: [www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org).

**JC:** I have been reading about the new type of "coach" available to individuals who have ADD. Is there a "coach" for the parents of these young adults? Or other suggestions to support the parents who are working with these young adults?

**Arthur Robin:** Coaches trained to work with families can help you as well as your young adults with ADHD. Check Attention magazine or the Professional Resources section of the CHADD website. Ask your local CHADD coordinators to organize sessions on these topics.

**Moderator 1:** Thank you Dr. Robin for your insightful answers! Your knowledge on parent-child conflict and experience in working with adolescents, adults, and parents has been more than valuable to many households across the nation. For more of Dr. Robin's expertise advice, you may purchase his books through the CHADD Store at Amazon by visiting [www.chadd.org/AmazonStore](http://www.chadd.org/AmazonStore).

If you have a question that was not answered today, please contact us online (National Resource Center's Web site at [www.help4adhd.org](http://www.help4adhd.org)) or by phone (800-233-4050) between 9AM and 5PM EST and one of our health information specialists will respond.

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*The views expressed in this chat are those of the guest expert and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), the National Resource Center on ADHD, or the CDC.*

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