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***Ask the Expert* Chat Series**

**May 12, 2010 – Set Your Teen up for Success**

**Moderators – NRC Staff**

**Expert – Ari Tuckman, PsyD**

**Ari Tuckman:** Hi everyone. I'm looking forward to a good discussion in our chat today, starting in a few minutes.

**Moderator 1:** Thank you for joining us today. We will begin shortly. Just to remind everybody, this is a moderated chat. All questions go to the moderator for review. We will do our best to post as many of your questions as possible.

And now, on to our chat!

Ari Tuckman, PsyD, MBA is a psychologist in private practice. He specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of children, teens, and adults with ADHD, anxiety, and depression. Dr. Tuckman has appeared on CNN, National Public Radio, and XM Radio. He has also been quoted in the Washington Post.

Before moving to West Chester, PA, he facilitated a monthly adult ADHD support group for the Northern Virginia chapter of CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) for five years. He has facilitated a monthly teen ADHD support group for the Chester County, PA chapter of CHADD since 2005.

Dr. Tuckman has written two books about ADHD. *More Attention, Less Deficit* is written in a style that is friendly to those with ADHD and is geared towards adults with the disorder. *Integrative Treatment for Adult ADHD*, while about adults with ADHD is targeted towards clinicians and acts as a guide for treating and interacting with adults who have the disorder. Dr. Tuckman has also written for CHADD's *Attention* magazine. More information about Dr. Tuckman is available on his <http://adultadhdbook.com>.

Welcome Dr. Tuckman! Are you ready for our first question?

**Ari Tuckman:** I am!

**Lisa:** What are some suggestions for Mother's to handle teenage daughters that can be disrespectful or have emotional outburst knowing that it stems from their ADHD. I feel that there should be some type of discipline but, I also don't want to escalate the situation. She does well in school and is respectful to teachers and other adults. I know she dumps all of frustrations from her day on me.

**Ari Tuckman:** A common situation! Teens who struggle in school can hold it together in public and then let it rip when they get home.

The first suggestion is to try to help her do her best at school--work with the teachers and treatment providers to help her do her best there with the least stress.

My preference is always to prevent a problem rather than have to deal with it when things are blowing up. It might be too hard for her to hold it together and deal with her frustrations productively and respectfully when she's all worked up.

In those moments, it may be better to take a break from the discussion and say that you will discuss it when she has had time to calm down--then make a point of actually having that discussion. Also remember that it's best to try to stay calm and not take her comments too personally when she's all worked up.

The more worked up you get when she's worked up, the more you both will escalate. So if she can't stay calm, then you need to try your best to stay calm. I'm sure we'll talk today about various other strategies which will also help.

**MJG:** Regarding medication, at what point 1) should the teenager be responsible for taking this? 2) Transition from pediatric specialist to adult physician for ongoing treatment?

**Ari Tuckman:** I would base it on to what extent the teen can be reliable – if they are able to remember to take their meds consistently, then give them that responsibility. If not, then you need to be involved or at least monitor it. The same goes for any other responsibility.

I like for kids and teens to have as much responsibility as they can handle – but not too much more. A little failure is a good thing because that's how we learn, but too much failure is a set-up for disappointment and giving up.

Lots of teens and young adults take themselves off of meds because they either don't see the benefit (but others sure do!) or because they don't like the idea of being different and having to take meds.

As for when to switch docs, I would talk to your current doc. Some will want to transition at a younger age, some at a higher age. The most important thing is that the doc get the meds right

and that your teen/young adult feels comfortable talking to the doc and is able to be honest with them.

**Moderator 1:** To learn more about Managing Medication, please see our [What We Know Sheet #3](#), for children and adolescents, and our [What We Know Sheet #10](#) for adults at: [www.help4adhd.org/en/about/wwk](http://www.help4adhd.org/en/about/wwk).

**rubes01:** What talking points would you suggest for a teen who's constantly comparing what activities (driving, holding a job) he can't do that his non-ADHD siblings had no problem achieving? He thinks he should be on the same timeline as his siblings yet he doesn't have the same degree of responsibility with his actions.

**Ari Tuckman:** I would start by saying that fair doesn't always mean equal and that you have reasons for the differences between what each of the kids gets. I would also point out other situations where this child got more than his/her siblings did, so it doesn't seem that only he is getting the short end of the stick.

I would then talk about your specific reasons why you're holding off on a license etc--reasons that come out of his behavior, rather than you deciding to punish him.

Talk about what your concerns are for the future (e.g. a car accident) without getting hung up on the past (e.g. cutting school). Also you should expect that your child will find a way to justify his actions and/or place responsibility on someone else.

Acknowledge that some of what he says may be true, but that there is an ongoing pattern here and that is what worries you. The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior, so you only have that to go on.

Acknowledge why he would want this new privilege/responsibility, and then tell him what he can do, specifically, to show you that he's ready for it. Give him specific examples and then talk along the way about how he's doing. This way he sees that it is in his hands, not just a matter of your opinion.

You're trying to get your kids to see that they have the ability to influence their fate, rather than being the passive victims of circumstance.

**Jules:** My son lies about doing homework. He will say he has it completed when in reality he doesn't. I have tried taking away privileges but it only helps for a short time. Math is usually the problem subject. We have had him tutored and the next day he will lie about doing it. Any suggestions on how to stop this behavior?

**Ari Tuckman:** Common problem! Sometimes the problem isn't actually lying – he genuinely forgot that he had homework or never heard the teacher say the homework because he got distracted.

Other times he truly knows that he has HW but doesn't want to do it, so he lies about it. A lie is when we say something that we know is not true, with the hope of convincing someone that it is true. So it is an intentional manipulation.

For some folks with ADHD, they are incorrect but because they genuinely believe what they are saying, it isn't actually lying. So that is important to distinguish.

It can be hard to tease it apart. When you know that he is lying, then deal with it directly, explaining how his lying about this makes it harder to trust him in other ways. Also that his lying makes it that you have to check his HW more – if he wants you less involved, then he needs to manage it better on his own.

Sometimes it's best to not get too caught up in determining if he's lying or really believes it, but instead to focus on the idea that he needs to get his work done.

So this means that you need to be more involved in checking his HW as it comes in but also check it after the fact. Many schools have websites where teachers post grades. This obviously only tells you after they missed it, not before.

But you can check each day or once or twice a week and have him do the HW then – this way he doesn't get out of it by lying about it. Even if the teacher doesn't give credit for the HW, tell your son and the teacher that he should still do it because HW exists to give kids practice and build skills.

Even if the HW is completely worthless, we all have pointless things in life that we have to do, so this is good practice for that! You can also tie something he values (like texting or cell phone use, video games, etc.) to his doing his HW.

The trick is to keep the time lines short – this means that what he does now has an effect within a few days. If the time line is too long (e.g. certain grades on the quarterly report card) it probably won't have enough of an effect on tonight's HW.

I would also look at where your kids do their HW – somewhere without too many distractions, cell phones off, computers off when they're not actually using it for HW, etc. This may require more oversight on your part, but if your teens can't manage it himself, then you need to step in.

**Sharon R:** My daughter is 17. She struggles in many areas – completing homework, making friends, etc. Since she is approaching adulthood, I am constantly conflicted about when I should offer to help and what types of help I should offer. Any guidance is appreciated.

**Ari Tuckman:** 17 is a tough age – not a kid, but not an adult. It's a slippery balance to strike – you want your kids to have the opportunity to practice various life skills and make decisions themselves, but you don't want to sit on your hands while they go off the rails.

You need to make a judgment call and sometimes let her fail, if: 1. The cost (of various kinds) won't be too high 2. She will learn valuable lessons from it without getting discouraged.

I have a saying that the later we learn a life lesson, usually the more painful it is. So it's better to fail early and then learn some good lessons from it rather than waiting. For example, wasting allowance money and then not going out this weekend, rather than winding up in massive credit card debt as an adult.

So talk to your daughter about what she wants you involved in and what she wants to do herself. Try to avoid inserting yourself too much so that she fights your good advice. You may sometimes need to tolerate the anxiety of watching her struggle until she decides to come to you.

If you pick your battles, then you will be able to have a greater impact on the things that really matter. Also, every kid takes their own path in life and your daughter may need to learn some things in her own way.

**Moderator 1:** Before our next question, you should know that the NRC produces a series of Information Sheets and all of these "[What We Know](#)" Sheets are found at [www.help4adhd.org](http://www.help4adhd.org), in the "[About ADHD](#)" section, including our [WWK #20A](#) and [#20B](#) on ADHD and Teens.

**Wonder:** The impact of video game and violent themes? What control should be placed on kids?

**Ari Tuckman:** First off, I don't necessarily support all the violent content in video games (or elsewhere in the media), but I don't necessarily think that we need to ban them all.

Instead, these are things to talk about with your kids, to help them see that what is common and acceptable in a video game is very different than in real life. Some kids know this very well and don't need to be told. Others (often younger kids) need more monitoring.

Video games are very exciting, so it's easy for some folks (especially stimulus-seeking ADHD folks) to spend too much time on them. Some people also get sucked into video games because they're not doing as well in other parts of their life and then of course they do worse because they aren't working on those areas – like homework, building friendships with local friends, etc.

So as a parent, you need to assess whether the video games are playing too big a part of your child's life. That is, if your child can't self-regulate how much time goes into video games and what kind of video games they play, then you need to do that for them.

This may also be a place that you talk about "work before play" or at least striking a balance between the two. The goal is to have a balanced life where no one thing takes over.

**Judith:** How can a parent deal with a teen who is insistent about stopping his medication, despite school problems.

**Ari Tuckman:** I would suggest taking a brief break. You will talk about, and write down the agreement. The child will stop the meds for a week or two, but everything else will be exactly the same. Write down who will do what.

Then write down the requirements to stay off the meds – e.g. if he has all B's or better, then he can stay off the meds another two weeks. If they drop below a B, then he has to go back on. It's really important to write it all down and make sure that everyone agrees.

Then get him to agree to it and to agree that he won't fight you on it or try to justify why he got lower grades, blame the teacher, etc. Talk about what your concerns are, but say that you will agree to give it a shot.

Of course, make sure with the prescriber that it's OK to take a break – for some meds it is, but for others it isn't.

You also need to pick the time well – the week before finals is probably not a good time, but somewhere in the beginning or middle of the marking period might be. You need to be willing to let the kid struggle without your getting overwhelmed by anxiety and jumping in.

Of course, it may also be helpful to put in an escape clause in the agreement – if you are missing more than 5 HWs, then the deal is off and you're going back on the meds.

Tell your kids that the meds aren't just for school, but for other things as well – e.g. interacting with friends, less yelling at home, etc. Explain the importance of taking them. Maybe use the analogy of glasses; that the meds help your child focus better and bring more of his innate intelligence to his work.

This is especially hard for college students where you aren't there to see them take the meds. Unfortunately, they often go off their meds at the worst time, when the demands on them are the highest and the other supports are the lowest. So you will probably have lots of conversations about this topic!

**Susan:** My 17-year-old son recently started hanging out with kids I feel are a negative influence on him (laid back attitude about school & possible drug use). How can I approach him about this without him getting defensive?

**Ari Tuckman:** Approach him carefully! Don't knock on the kids or he will automatically defend them. Although there are things about the kids that you don't like, there must be some good qualities too that your son likes.

Just talk with him about your concerns about what these kids are doing and how it won't serve them well. That you wish the best for these kids too, but that your main concern is your kid.

Talk with your kid about your goals for him and why they are important. Have these conversations sometimes without mentioning these other kids. That way, when you bring up these other kids, it isn't just about them.

You may also want to think about why it is that your son likes these kids – what is it about them that appeals to him. Ask him about it. Ask him about why he doesn't want to hang out with some other kids who (as far you can tell) are a better influence.

Ask these questions with genuine interest, that you're trying to understand him. Avoid leading questions or questions where he knows that you're just waiting for him to say something that you will correct or take as an opportunity to lecture him.

This means sometimes letting certain things go by and letting him talk his way through it and come to his own conclusions. This often works better than just telling him what to do.

Also, although you can say that he can't hang out with them, remember that that is almost impossible to fully enforce – they may see the kids at school, text them, chat on Facebook, etc., so a total lack of contact may be hard to pull off.

Some contact may be OK, as long as your son is doing well overall or has other friends who seem to be on a better path.

So talk about that – what your overall goals are for your son and how actions now lead to things in the future. He may not fully appreciate it, but keep saying it – eventually it will sink in.

Definitely try to make it to one of these conferences--you will learn a lot and meet a lot of good and interesting people. I highly recommend it!

**Susan:** I have a 17-year-old son, who for the most part, does not utilize the tools his therapist/organizational tutor/psychiatrist have supplied him with to help him succeed in school. He consistently hands in HWw late (if at all) and misses classes. He is very resistant and seems to lack the motivation to perform up to his potential. I feel like he needs some kind of breakthrough to break this cycle.

**Ari Tuckman:** I hear this a lot. For some kids, they just don't realize how what they're doing is setting them up for trouble, or how it is their actions, not other people, who are making their lives difficult.

All the strategies in the world mean nothing if someone doesn't apply them. For some kids with ADHD, they feel like they have been told what to do too much and now don't want to hear any of it.

They probably have been told what to do more than other kids – because being off task, distracted, and impulsive tends to cause parents and teachers to tell that kid what to do. So these kids are right that they get a lot more commands than other kids do.

Try to talk to your son about what HE wants out of life – now and in the future. If his goals are unrealistic or incompatible (e.g. I don't want to go to college or learn a trade but I want a BMW) then talk about how that probably won't work. So he needs to either change his goals or find another way to get there.

It may also help to talk about why he doesn't want to try these strategies – does he not think they will work? Does he think that he will stand out if he uses these strategies and other kids will make fun of him? Does he think that no one else uses any strategies so therefore he must be defective if he has to use them?

Try to identify why he is resisting. To do this, you have to have an open conversation, where you're just trying to understand him, not change him.

You may need to try this several times before he believes you. Also, at 17, you can talk to him more as an adult and to tell him that he soon will be an adult, so he needs to be able to make good choices for himself. These conversations are intended to help him figure out what he wants.

Your goal is to raise a young adult who has a good process of figuring things out and knows when to ask for help. Give examples from your life when you're asked for help. Maybe also some examples where you didn't ask for help and now see that you should have.

Although I feel that meds and coaching can be helpful, sometimes some therapy is needed to get the person to buy into it and make the most of these other interventions.

Ultimately, you can't make your son do anything he doesn't want to do. So present the problem to him – how does he want to solve it? He has certain goals – what is he going to do to accomplish them? He may need to struggle and suffer a bit before realizing that his way isn't working.

**Mom:** How can an ADHD parent support a child with ADHD in his education if the skills he is lacking are the same skills the parent lacks?

**Ari Tuckman:** This is pretty common. First, I would talk to the child about your own struggles, about how hard it was, about how much you hated it, but how you can see it differently now.

Then if you can't provide the extra help that your child needs, find someone else who can - the other parent, an older sibling, a tutor, an older neighbor, the teacher, etc.

Model for your child that it is a sign of strength and wisdom (not weakness) to ask for help when needed.

**Moderator 1:** Want to receive well-rounded comprehensive knowledge about ADHD? [Parent to Parent](#) courses offered in local communities and online, provide educational information and support for individuals and families dealing with ADHD and learning to navigate the challenges of ADHD across the lifespan.

**Babybird:** I have a 14-year-old daughter who will be entering high school in the fall. She struggles developing friendships anyway, but now will be entering a new school with very few familiar faces. Any suggestions in helping her through this coming year?

**Ari Tuckman:** Help her find ways to break a big school down into more manageable pieces – like by joining a sports team or other activity. It's easier to make friends with 20 kids than 1000. Talk about what activities she might like to do. Even if she isn't very interested in the activity, remind her that the other goal is to meet people.

Maybe even look for some activities for this summer where she can meet some kids from her new school. This way she knows a few faces beforehand.

Ask her current guidance counselor for suggestions. Also, maybe contact the HS guidance office for suggestions, both for this summer and also for the start of the school year.

Encourage her to keep trying and to not give up too early. For example, someone may not call her back – maybe they are too busy or have other things going on in their life, rather than that they didn't like her. Some people already have enough friends and don't want to add any new ones.

It's OK to feel disappointed, but try to encourage her to not take it too personally or give up too easily. Finding the right friends can take time and she may need to go through a number of new friends before she finds the people who she fits best with. We try out new friends when we start a new school. That's OK.

The hard part is when the feelings are imbalanced – one person wants to be friends but the other doesn't. This is disappointing but is a part of life that we all need to deal with. So keep encouraging her, especially when she feels discouraged.

**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!!!](#)

**Dadam:** My son has an extremely difficult time waking up in the morning, does not hear the alarm clocks/loud noises etc., and usually has to be physically pulled out of bed so he's frequently late for school. Any tips for this?

**Ari Tuckman:** My first suggestion is to try to get him to bed earlier. Most teens don't get enough sleep, so that makes it much harder to get up in time or in a good mood. It also helps to avoid long naps (more than 30 minutes) after school or sleeping in really late on weekends because that sets up Sunday night/Monday morning for trouble.

If your son isn't able to self-regulate his use of the computer, TV, cell phone etc and is staying up too late with those, then you need to remove those from his room or have him hand them over at a designated time.

Part of the problem is that many high schools start too early and teens are more night owls, so even if they get into bed at ten, they may not fall asleep until midnight. This can be a challenge.

To the extent that they can try to be fairly consistent about when they get into and out of bed, they will do better. There is also some evidence that melatonin can be helpful, but I don't think it has been definitively proven or that it works for everyone.

You're fighting an uphill battle on this one, but do your best and try to be consistent!

**Cjshaleen:** My 15-year-old son is not interested in anything. He doesn't care about anything and all he wants to do is be on the computer and listen to music. Is there anything I can do to help him find his passions and interests?

**Ari Tuckman:** I would ask him why the computer and music is so interesting to him, is there any way to get some of that stuff met in other ways.

You may need to limit his time on the computer and in his room so that he has the opportunity to seek out other things. As long as he spends all his time there, he won't look for anything else. He will probably lay around for a while saying he's bored, but let him be bored.

Then when he seems more willing to talk about it, start talking about other things he could do. Tell him that it's important to have a balanced life that includes multiple activities and interests.

You may also want to consider that he may be feeling depressed. Is nothing as fun as it used to be? Is he more moody? Is he more irritable? Is this a change from how he used to be?

Alternatively, if he was always kind of like this, he may just be a more introverted, less social kind of guy. Although this may change, this may be mostly who he is. Then the challenge for him will be to be able to be more outgoing at least to the extent that it gets him what he needs. For example, pushing himself to reach out to people and network when job hunting.

Express your concerns about his not doing more and ask what you can do to help him find some other activities.

**3chocolate:** My daughter , ADHD, ODD has a very messy bedroom. This is a source of conflict for us. Do you have some suggestions to help us manage this? She never wants to give or throw things away.

**Moderator 1:** While we are waiting to learn more about ODD, please see our What We Know Sheet #5: ADHD and Coexisting Disorders found in the list at <http://www.help4adhd.org/en/about/wwk>.

**Ari Tuckman:** My first goal for how a teen or adult keeps a bedroom is functional – can she find what she needs to without spending too much time, are things getting lost in there, etc. If it works for the person then that's what matters most, even if it doesn't look good. So you may want to let some of it go and just close the door.

Some people won't throw things away because they don't want to deal with the boredom of going through it all. Some people have trouble making decisions about what should be kept and tossed, so they just give up and don't deal with it.

Depending on which it is for your daughter, your approach in trying to work on it will differ. I'm going to assume that part of the mess is clothes. If you still do her laundry, you can say that you only do what is in the hamper – not what is around it. That may motivate her to actually put the dirty clothes away. If she needs an article of clothing and it's dirty on the floor, then that isn't your problem.

Of course, she may then cram everything into the hamper, including clean things that she tried on and threw on the floor. In that case, she needs to do her own laundry since it isn't fair to have you wash clean clothes.

Perhaps you can work together on getting her room organized, where you gently help her. She needs to do most of the work, rather than watching you do it. For example, you could hold something up and ask what she wants to do with it.

If she gets too worked up, say you will take a break. Several shorter sessions will probably work better than a marathon. As long as she isn't trashing communal living space, let her keep her room the way she wants it.

When she's angry because she can't find something, gently point out that it would be easier to find things if her room was less messy. Or maybe wait until she has calmed down.

**Moderator 1:** Are you an NRC Facebook Fan? If not, please click on the Facebook icon on the NRC homepage – <http://www.help4adhd.org/en/about/wwk> – and keep informed of all NRC activities and updates!

**Agwhite:** My son was diagnosed with ADHD last summer and he is still resistant to help in dealing with the challenges he is facing. Even though I have tried to educate myself and have tried to pass on some of that education to him, he still feels like admitting he has ADHD means there is something wrong with him. Do you have any suggestions for how we can help him to accept his ADHD so he can forward with focusing on his strengths rather than his weaknesses or challenges in life.

**Ari Tuckman:** Talk to him about how ADHD is a part of who he is, but not all of who he is. He has other strengths and good qualities, just as everyone does. We all have strengths and weaknesses. Also, remind him that he was distracted and forgetful before you guys had a name for it. So the label doesn't change the facts – it just changes our understanding of the situation and what to do about it.

By understanding that this is ADHD, you and he are in a better position to know what to do about it. This will help him be more successful in life and be better able to meet his goals.

For everyone, accurate self-knowledge is a key to success - what we're good at, what we're not as good at, how we best get things done, etc. So, knowing that he has ADHD is part of this. Understanding how his brain works will help make the most of his abilities and potential.

I wouldn't tell him that ADHD is a gift or that it gives him other good qualities (like creativity) because it doesn't. But everyone has some things that they wished they did better. These ADHD symptoms may be some of his.

Remind him of his other strengths and how he does better with them than some other people do. Talk about how seeing his treatment providers will help him do better in life. Also point out that even the best professional athletes still have coaches who help them do even better – asking for help is a sign of strength and wisdom.

**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

**Nspiegel:** What do you suggest a parent do if they suspect their teen is not taking their medication?

**Ari Tuckman:** I would ask directly and express your concerns – e.g. the teen's behaviors suggests that he isn't taking them, there are too many pills left in the bottle, etc.

You can also count the pills to see if there are the expected number there. Of course, a sneaky kid will take the daily pill out and throw it away!

If you suspect this or really doubt that the teen is taking them, then you may need to watch them take it. This isn't ideal but is better than the alternative.

Talk about why the meds are important and how they can help. Then ask if the teen has any hesitations about taking them. It may help to talk about this together with the prescriber and/or therapist.

**Moderator 1:** This will be our last question of the chat. Missed part of the chat? Past chat transcripts are available to CHADD members as a benefit. To learn more about joining CHADD, visit: <http://www.chadd.org>.

**Trekerjo:** In facilitating a teen support group, what do you find to be the most important components for success?

**Ari Tuckman:** The most important is to have the teens feel comfortable there. This means that they get something that **THEY** want from the group (like meeting other kids) not just something that you think they should get from it (like more reasons why HW is important).

Keep it casual and keep your expectations low for what you will accomplish. An adult group where the adults show up of their own desire will be very different than a teen group where parents often drag the teens in.

Of course, this applies to everything dealing with teens – try to appeal to what is interesting to them and what they will get out of it, not just what we think they should want. Running a teen group can be a lot of fun, so I encourage you to give a shot!

Thanks everyone for tuning in and asking a bunch of really great questions. My fingers are sore, so that must be a good sign!

**Moderator 1:** Thank you Dr. Tuckman for all your insightful responses! Our participants will now be more comfortable in helping their adolescence reach the independence that they desire. Your answers were very thoughtful and practical. Thank you!

**Ari Tuckman:** Thanks also to our moderators, Avery and Bryan, for doing a great job.

**Moderator 1:** If you have a question that was not answered today, please contact us online (National Resource Center's Web site at <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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