A stylized illustration of a person with short dark hair, wearing an orange collared shirt. They are holding a large blue folder or document in front of their chest. The background is white.

ADHD COACHING *for Students*

by Jodi Sleeper-Triplett, MCC, SCAC, BCC

A TEACHER MENTIONED TO YOU that one of her students benefited from ADHD coaching. He is more organized, uses his planner, and works with his coach regularly to schedule all his life events from academics to sports and family activities. The student's mother says she is less stressed and likes having someone else work directly with her son. She can step back from the daily nagging and give him space to learn and grow. The student is becoming more independent and empowered to move forward, step by step, to work on strategies to make schoolwork more manageable.

A light bulb goes on in your head. "Wow, this sounds amazing—just what we need!" Before you rush off to find ADHD coaching resources, hold on a moment. Let's look at the details of the ADHD coaching process and how it may benefit students with ADHD.

ADHD coaching is a relatively new field of practice, dating back to the mid-1990s. You may be more familiar with life coaching. Think of ADHD coaching as a niche developed using the core concepts of life coaching as a foundation.

ADHD coaching helps individuals to set goals, acknowledge strengths, increase self-awareness, develop social skills, and create strategies that enable them to be more effective in managing their day-to-day lives. ADHD coaches establish a pattern of frequent communication and accountability with students to make sure they are focused and working steadily toward their goals. Academic coaching is a subset of ADHD coaching that focuses on the *whole child* and all the life areas impacting the individual student's success.

Benefits of coaching

By providing coaching to students, we have an opportunity to help bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood while simultaneously helping parents to step back and allow the maturation process to proceed at a pace that is right for their child. Parents often have a

difficult time accepting that many students with ADHD, executive dysfunction, and learning disabilities are still in their preteens emotionally. Parents and other adults expect these students to be mature enough to manage their lives. Yet, there is no one-size-fits-all timetable for maturity. Coaches help to guide and support young people in getting ready for the future at their own pace. Through coaching, the student receives support in creating plans and setting goals in an environment of structure, support, and encouragement.

When coaching students, the core focus is on academics, just as work is the core focus of coaching for most adults. We are coaching around the issues that are first and foremost for students.

They are encouraged by the coach to give “equal time” to other life areas to insure a well-rounded, healthy and happy life. Let’s face it, none of us do well in our jobs without sleep and good nutrition. How can we expect our children to be any different?

The coaching process

As in coaching with adults, the student sets the agenda for the coaching process, while the coach elicits information to clarify and identify the details of the student’s agenda and the plan for how to reach the student’s goals. The coach is careful not to redirect the coaching toward an agenda that has been predetermined by the parents or one that the coach views as a better alternative for the student. Coaching is not a quick fix and it is not a process that changes anyone overnight. Coach training programs are offered in a variety of formats and coaching models. It is valuable for the prospective student to seek out a coach who has both life coach training (non-ADHD specific) and ADHD coach training, plus experience in coaching youth students. Having a teenager of one’s own is not a qualification for being able to coach others.

It is the coach’s responsibility to listen carefully to questions and concerns that might get in the way of the student’s path toward the agreed-upon goals. For example, the student may set a goal to learn how to ski, only to find out that skiing is cost-prohibitive at this time. (Note that questions related to the feasibility of the students’ goals are posed during the coaching process.) The student chooses instead to put the goal of learning to ski on the back burner and to find a more affordable option (such as taking up ice hockey or running). In addition, the coach will listen for any hesitation that might be coming from the student due to lack of skill or knowledge of how to go after the selected goal. The coach will then encourage the student to explore what it might take to increase skill or knowledge in order to accomplish the goal.

A typical coaching session lasts thirty to forty-five minutes. This can be an in-person meeting, a Skype session or a phone call, depending on the student’s availability and learning style. For example, if student is a visual learner but has many extracurricular

activities, she may choose Skype coaching to see her coach without having to travel to the coach’s office. The coach and student review the results of the past week—what worked, what did not—and plan ahead for the upcoming week. This may include breaking down homework assignments, planning the stages of a new project, discussing upcoming social events and how to juggle homework and personal time, developing self-advocacy skills or reviewing organizational strategies for both school and home. The coaching plan that was developed at the start of the coaching relationship provides a framework for the goals and action steps each student chooses to focus on in his or her coaching sessions.

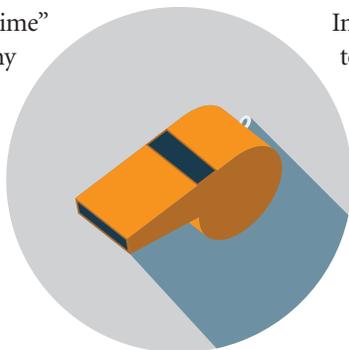
In addition to the weekly session, students are asked to exchange emails and/or text messages with the coach on a regular basis to foster accountability and allow the coach to monitor progress. Details of the coaching sessions are confidential, while students are encouraged to share their goals and progress with their parents.

You are probably wondering what happens if a student is not following the coaching plan or his interim grades are less than acceptable. The key to the success of coaching is the trust and connection between the coach and the student. When problems arise, parents are encouraged to talk directly to their student and if that does not work, reach out to the coach.

A good rule for parents to follow is to send an email to the coach and copy the student on the email. The coach will do the same, and, with permission from the student (the parent for minors),

teachers and professors may do the same. This keeps everyone in the loop when a problem arises and lets the student know that teachers and the coach are not communicating privately.

Once a student decides to move forward with coaching, be patient with the process. It takes time to build new habits and develop skills for success. Coaching is a month-to-month process with a recommendation of six months or longer to allow all the strategies to gel. Parents are encouraged to be patient and allow the student to progress at a pace that fits his needs. There will be bumps along the way, not unlike those we experience in other new life endeavors. With the added support of a coach, students will have a wonderful opportunity to pursue their goals and dreams with greater confidence and success. 🗨️



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Jodi Sleeper-Triplett, MCC, SCAC, BCC, is a world-renowned expert in youth coaching and ADHD youth coaching. She is the founder of the ADHD youth coaching movement and has been working with young people for nearly thirty-five years. She developed the first training course focused on coaching youth with ADHD, which is now offered around the world in English, Spanish, and Turkish. Sleeper-Triplett is the author of *Empowering Youth with ADHD: Your Guide to Coaching Adolescents and Young Adults for Coaches, Parents, and Professionals* (Specialty Press/ADD Warehouse, 2010).