

Advice on ADHD ADVICE

From the *ATTENTION* Editorial Advisory Board; compiled by Katherine McGavern

MY BROTHER SAYS FREE ADVICE IS WORTH JUST WHAT YOU PAY FOR IT. And while most people agree, that doesn't stop any of us (admit it) from sharing free advice from time to time—with best intentions, of course.

Recently, members of *Attention's* editorial advisory board happened to discuss the subject of ADHD advice. We thought it might be helpful for you, our readers, to hear our thoughts on how to respond to well-meaning advice.

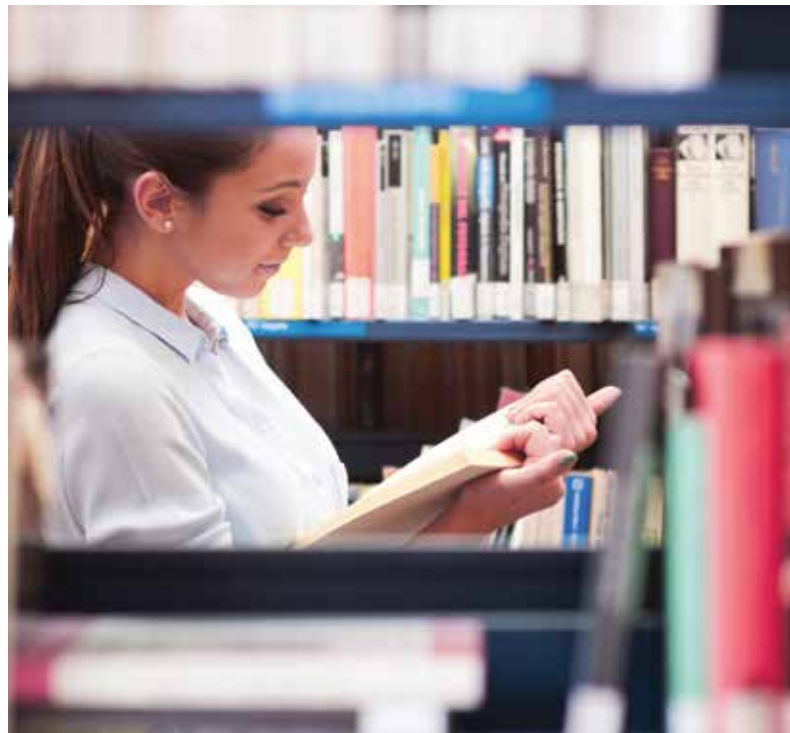
So herewith, some well-meaning ADHD advice about well-meaning ADHD advice (with thoughts from EAB members in quotes below each point). We hope it's worth a little more than what you paid for it.

1 Begin your ADHD journey by learning all you can about ADHD.

“The secret to living with ADHD is to become as **educated** as possible about the medical, academic, psychological, and behavioral components of ADHD. Join CHADD and take CHADD's Parent to Parent course (available locally and online); attend ADHD workshops and conferences; join an ADHD support group; talk with the child study team at your school; read books and articles by experts like Hallowell, Barkley, Brown, Tuckman; listen to webinars with ADHD. Learn all you can!”

“In the end, keep yourself well educated about ADHD and, with that foundation, rely on yourself to be most qualified to offer the last word.”

“My main tip to parents is to roll up your sleeves, get in there and be ADHD superlearners—become *experts*! This knowledge will help you design effective strategies, avoid needless struggles, destigmatize ADHD for your child and the people in his world, and enable you to be your child's best advocate.”



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2 Pay attention to the source of the advice. Look for sources with broad ADHD knowledge and experience. Avoid fanatics.

“If you are receiving advice from someone who has one family member with ADHD, and their advice is based on interactions with that one individual, it might not translate to your situation.”

“My advice is to always know the source. Ask yourself: Is the person offering this advice knowledgeable about ADHD or are they simply reacting to something in your child that is different from the way they think your child or teen should be?”



“When seeking ADHD advice, look to those who legitimize rather than stigmatize differences.”

“There are two sources of advice we generally run into. One is the person who is really not a member of our ‘community.’ That is, they don’t have or don’t live with and struggle to raise a person with ADHD. Their advice is usually of the general child-rearing kind, and it is generally useless to us.

Then there is the advice from someone in our ‘community’—but this advice can cause anxiety.

For example, you have given your child his deep-water krill or fish oil pill, stayed away from a breakfast that involves sugar or Red Dye No. 7, gone through the flip chart of photos in order to get your child dressed, just finished signing him up for a martial arts class and are on the way to the hardware store to buy him a piece of velcro to put under his seat in school, when a fellow ADHD parent tells you all about some new program, or beta-wave toy, or specialized glasses or new app that is ‘guaranteed’ to increase focus and attention. Panic sets in!! You think, ‘How did I miss this?’ or ‘Is it too late to do this?’

Don’t panic! Stay calm, trust your own instincts, and don’t let an advice source like this get your goat.”



3 When possible, fact-check any advice against reputable sources.

“In addition to chadd.org and help4adhd.org, most websites ending in .gov or .edu are reliable sources of accurate information.”

“This is especially important for advice about complementary or alternative ADHD treatments. It’s important to know the risk/reward ratio and as many facts as possible about these treatments.”

4 Always weigh the advice in the context of your own individual situation and family.

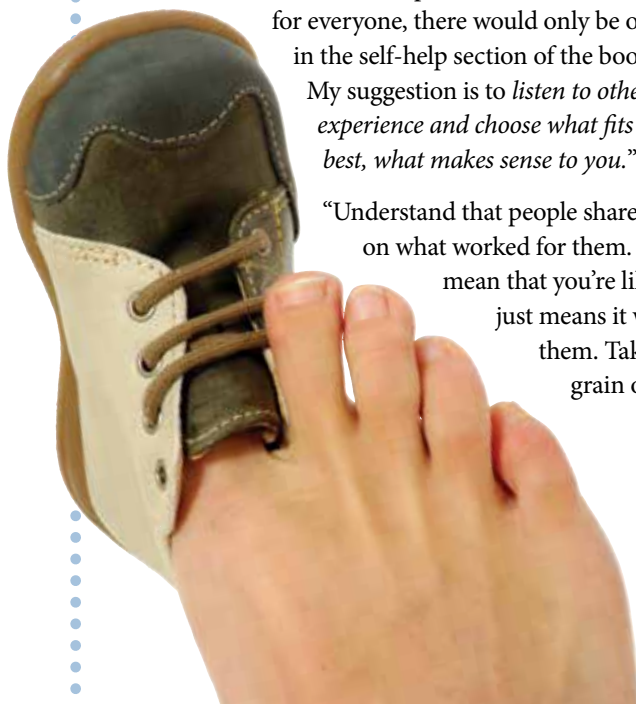
“Some things that work well for one family won’t work for another.”

“Human beings are not the same. They are similar. Similar is not the same, similar means we are all different.

If there were one piece of advice that worked for everyone, there would only be one book in the self-help section of the bookstore.

My suggestion is to listen to other peoples’ experience and choose what fits your situation best, what makes sense to you.”

“Understand that people share advice based on what worked for them. It doesn’t mean that you’re like them, it just means it worked for them. Take it all with a grain of salt.”



5 You may have to try new strategies several times before adopting or discarding them.



“I heard a psychologist at a local CHADD meeting point out that too often, parents try a new strategy once, and if it doesn’t work, they drop it. He suggested

that parents should try a new strategy several times before adopting or disregarding it. Yes, it’s difficult. After all, nobody likes change. And those with ADHD have trouble with transitions. Still, he suggests, unless a new strategy makes things dramatically worse, parents should try it several times before determining it is not useful.”

“Perhaps with help, set up a controlled experiment; a time-limited trial. Determine outcome measures. Observe. If it’s working, continue. If not, modify, and try again. And perhaps again. If after several tries it’s not working, then abandon it, recalling Einstein’s definition: ‘Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and over and expecting different results.’”

“If you’re new to the game it’s helpful to try some of the best practices and hopefully they will work. If they don’t, understand this: If the obvious advice isn’t helping, chances are you’re paying attention to the wrong advice. If this is the case, search for not-so-obvious solutions in unexpected places. Sometimes it’s best to try different, not just try harder.”



6 Don’t look for advice about the “one thing” that will solve all your ADHD-related challenges... because it doesn’t exist.

“You are going to have to explore several avenues for each challenge that you face. Looking for the magic bullet will leave you frustrated and demoralized. Since you will be looking for several approaches, this means you will be evaluating a lot of advice.”

7 And that brings us to our final piece of Free Advice: Put yourself on an “Advice Budget.”

“Evaluating a lot of advice means you will need to give yourself R&R, so you don’t become overwhelmed.”

“You have to understand that there’s a limit to your resources—and I am not only talking about money. I am also including time, patience, risk of failure, and burnout. Think of each of these as a finite asset that needs to be saved and doled out judiciously. These are like bank accounts that can run out, like a money account can— BUT we can’t afford to go bust in any of these areas.



Consider this: for each activity you bring your child to, that’s one less other activity you can attend. You have to assess its ADHD ‘value.’ How many different doctors or ‘shrinks’ can you bring your child to before there is burnout? You can’t download every new app or try every new computer program.”

“Keep your ears and eyes open—but don’t sweat it. The very fact that you are thinking about this means you are a great parent.”

Something with which the entire *Attention* Editorial Advisory Board agrees! 🗣️

EAB members who contributed to this article: Jeff Copper, Shari Gent, Maureen Gill, Mark Katz, Katherine McGavern, Meghan Miller, Marie Paxson, Dan Shapiro, and Jeffrey Spahr.