

## Social-Emotional Concerns: What to Know, Say, and Do

Compiled by Karen Sampson Hoffman, MA

### Strategies to Help with Social-Emotional Concerns



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#### How do you encourage a middle-school student to join social groups and clubs or activities?

One way of increasing the likelihood of his joining an activity is to get him involved in something that is very interesting or motivating. Parents want teens to be joiners, and it's very frustrating when kids don't want to join groups. Seek out things the child is very interested in doing, activities with other kids who have the same interests. Often we as parents suggest trying a lot of different things. Instead, ask the child to look around at a drama class or soccer practice. Many of these kids have very idiosyncratic tastes, and they won't join just any group. It is a lot of trial and error.

#### How do I resolve conflicts between my child with ADHD and her sibling who doesn't have the disorder?

Look at the situations they are fighting over. I would try to make it more of a cooperative situation.

I'd say, "You two can do this and here are the rules. If you come to get me because you can't get along, you're telling me that I have to stop this activity." If you tell the kids that once you get involved, it's over, they will really try to work things out themselves because they don't want to stop the activity. Often they want you to referee the argument, but when they learn they have to be their own referee, they will work to solve the situation. They will learn to negotiate and work out their own battles.

If they fight over almost everything, you may need to be present to teach them how to be together during the activity, same as when you are teaching them other skills.

#### How can parents keep routines going when the child is at school or in other environments?

A school-note system, where there's communication between the teacher and the parents, can help. The teacher can report on the good things the child is doing and any difficulties at school. It's both positive and proactive. That's really nice, especially if there isn't an IEP or a 504 Plan in place. Many teachers are very cooperative in communicating with parents during the day.

In other situations, like soccer practice, ask the coach to give you some feedback about your child's interaction with other kids that day. You'd be surprised at how many people are willing to help kids be successful. You just have to ask.

### Helping Kids Understand Social-Emotional Aspects of ADHD



Jerome Schultz, PhD | Clinical neuropsychologist, author, and speaker; member of the faculty of Harvard Medical School in the department of psychiatry; author of *Nowhere to Hide: Why Kids with ADHD and LD Hate School and What We Can Do About It* (Wiley, 2011).

#### At what age—and how—should parents tell a child about her ADHD diagnosis?

Unless you give a developmentally appropriate explanation, the labels he or she gives to him- or herself, or the labels other people give to the child, are much worse than any label of ADHD could be.

You don't have to say "ADHD." But you can say, "When you have to focus or settle down or show self-control, it may be harder for you than for other kids because that's just one of the ways you are different from other kids." It doesn't have to be a deep, long clinical discussion. But kids do need to understand what they are experiencing. It's better to pick something that is difficult for the kids to do and acknowledge that you know it is difficult, but you know what to do about it.

I think it's important to pair the explanation with the strategy that helps the child. That lays the foundation for a more detailed explanation when the child is older.

#### How can a parent help when his child with ADHD is being bullied and is struggling to form friendships?

If the behaviors the child is showing are related to the ADHD, it's important to help him understand that those behaviors may be shaping other people's reactions to him.

First and foremost, it is the school's responsibility to form a safe environment for any child. The parent needs to go to the school and tell them what is going on, and then follow up with them.

If the parent has the opportunity to create social activities or events for his child at home, that's something he can do.

#### What is an appropriate age for a student to tell his friends that he has ADHD?

This can be a risky business, because it depends on the environment. When it's a safe environment, a good situation, when kids trust each other and know the information won't be used against them, I think it's great when kids have the confidence to share that information.

If the child is in a position to explain the condition he should also think of explaining the ways he can do something about it. Then he's not just seen as a kid with problems but as a kid with solutions. I think that's important in shaping a kid's

self-concept. They don't talk about ADHD as liability, but something they've learned to live with and master. 🗣️

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