

Hands-On Support

by Cindy Goldrich, EdM, ACAC

BY NOW, you may realize that ADHD involves more than just difficulty with inattentiveness, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. For many children, it involves difficulty with managing their emotions, their ability to plan and carry out their goals, and much more. Children with ADHD often feel misunderstood, overwhelmed, and ill equipped to manage what is expected of them. When they don't seem to be working toward their potential or are acting defiant, parents find it difficult to know how to react in a way that will truly change their behavior.

When a child is diagnosed with ADHD, parents often are given little more than some reading material, general advice, and perhaps medication for their child. Yet the family's most pressing need, particularly for the parents, is to become as knowledgeable as possible about this complex and often misunderstood condition. Wonderful resources are available—books, magazines such as this, and websites such as CHADD.org. For many people, however, nothing replaces face-to-face contact with other individuals who can help

them understand their challenges and support them through a process of growth and change. Enter the world of parent training and parent coaching.

Parents often find they need support in addition to understanding the essential science and laws regarding ADHD. Some seek out therapy to help them understand and cope with their feelings; for many, however, support comes in the form of ADHD parent coaching.

A trained professional who combines the knowledge of coaching, parenting, and ADHD, an ADHD parent coach provides parents with appropriate tips, tools, strategies, and ongoing support to manage the complexities of raising a child with ADHD. Once a parent is educated about the impact that ADHD, executive function deficits, stress, anxiety, and pressure have on learning and behavior, the parent coach can help the parent set reasonable goals. Through ongoing encouragement, recommendations, feedback, and support, the coach can help the parent develop the tools, strategies, and confidence necessary to remain accountable to the changes he or she wishes to make.



for Parents

Parent the child you have

Every person is born with a unique chemistry, physique, and temperament. As parents become more educated and aware of how the traits of ADHD impact their child's life, they become more conscious of how they must adjust their parenting to match the needs of their child. This is what I call "Parent the child you have."

Family members, friends, and even well-meaning teachers and other professionals may offer advice and strategies with the intention of helping you "fix" or "teach" your child. You must learn to trust your inner voice and tailor your parenting to meet the needs of your unique child. For some, this will mean providing tighter control, for some it may mean offering more guidance and support, and for others, it may mean reducing certain obligations or expectations in the present time. These are some of the issues a parent coach can help you explore and resolve.

Children with ADHD, just like all children, are blessed with a range of strengths and talents. It is vital that we recognize and

CHADD's Parent To Parent Program

by Katherine McGavern

In 2006, CHADD created Parent to Parent, a comprehensive course taught by parents of children with ADHD who have been trained and certified by CHADD to teach the program. The seven-session course covers a wide range of information, starting with the science of ADHD and proper assessment. Then it outlines multimodal treatment options, including a comprehensive look at ADHD medications. The course introduces parenting strategies and positive behavioral interventions for ADHD management at home and school, a complete description of school accommodations (educational rights) and how to get them, guidelines for building an education team, advice about how to talk to the child about his or her very special brain, and a view of ADHD across the lifespan.

Parent to Parent encourages interaction among its "students," who experience the relief and comfort of being in a room filled with other parents who are struggling with the frustration, exasperation, confusion, and helplessness that usually accompany an ADHD diagnosis.

To find out where and when it's being taught, visit chadd.org and follow the Parent to Parent link for local options, or enroll in an Online Parent to Parent course.

Katherine McGavern coaches adults with ADHD and is a certified Parent to Parent teacher. She presents talks on ADHD to teachers (K-12), community organizations, and parent groups; provides training on ADHD to student teachers at The College of New Jersey; and is a member of the editorial advisory board of Attention. McGavern is a co-founding member of CHADD Mercer County, and facilitates at their monthly meetings in Princeton, New Jersey.



nurture their interests and passions even when it may seem to take time and energy away from some of their academic pursuits. One of the greatest challenges children (and adults) with ADHD face is that many of them have a slower processing speed and a less accurate sense of the passage of time. As a result of this and other challenges (distraction, organization, etc.), they often need more time to accomplish what their peers do. I refer to this as having a “disability perspective.”

No one wants to think of their child as having a disability; however, if we do not recognize the disabling aspects of our personal weaknesses, we do not make appropriate adjustments in our expectations. With limited hours afterschool and on weekends, it is important to balance the academic pressure and expectations with the activities that bring the child personal growth and satisfaction. Parents must coordinate and support this complex balancing act so that the child is not in a constant state of frustration and stress due to the range of demands and expectations placed on them at school.

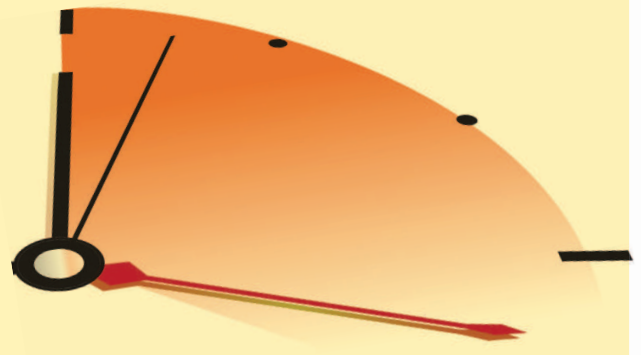
Two key principles and philosophies guide the work a parent coach can provide in educating and supporting parents. Each of these areas can require ongoing support to help lasting change and growth in the family to occur.

Shift your perspective from “manager” to “coach”

The goal in raising a child is that by the time they reach adulthood, they are ready to live and function independently. A lot of growing and skill development must occur before young adults can successfully manage their time, materials, finances, and relationships independent of regular parental input and support.

Children, especially teens, often have an inaccurate sense of what is involved in truly accomplishing what they are expected or desiring to complete. Parents often describe that their children act as if they can pull it all off at the last moment, and then in the end find that they can't. This is sometimes referred to as “magical thinking”—believing that somehow everything will get done and all will work out. Parents often recognize that their child is not yet ready for certain freedoms and responsibilities, fearing that if they leave too much room for their child's decisions, their child might fail. Some, in their love and parental anxiety, jump in to rescue their children from experiencing the harsh reality of their actions (or lack of actions). Others resort to enticing incentives and harsh consequences, only to find neither sufficient to change their child's behavior (except for limited time and activities). Both of these approaches often leave the child feeling frustrated or resentful, as they feel not respected, trusted, or worse, controlled.

To learn what they need to do to manage independently, children need to be taught the skills but also have ample opportunity to experiment and learn from their own experiences. For parents to be accepted as supportive and welcomed in their child's growth process, they need to have a deeply trusting, connected relationship



Parent Coach Tip

Teach your child that time is a limited commodity, just like money. The more effort and time the child puts into an activity or academic subject, the better he or she can do. However, the child's time is limited, so he or she may not be able to do his or her best in every area.

For example, suppose each hour of effort cost a certain amount of money. Let's say Johnny has \$10 worth of time/effort to spend on his core academic subjects. Based on his individual skill and profile, it cost Johnny \$2 to get an A in math, \$3 to get an A in science, \$5 to get an A in English, and \$4 to get an A in social studies. While he may be capable of getting an A in each subject individually, with the combined demands he will have to sacrifice some time/effort in some areas to do his best in others. Helping him understand this concept can help him make choices and also appreciate setting a realistic personal goal.

with their child. Constant parent-child conflict can be exasperating and detrimental to a child's growth and well-being, not to mention stressful on the entire family unit. Parents do a tremendous service if they collaborate with their children about the role each of them plays in making sure the child carries out certain roles and responsibilities. Discussing in advance how much help and under what conditions a parent will assist—whether with homework, maintaining an orderly room, or exploring new activities—the more the child will learn to develop important life skills.

A parent coach can effectively facilitate conversations between parents and children, opening the door to communication and allowing each to feel empowered and truly heard by one another. As an outside observer, a parent coach help a parent explore how to gradually shift the responsibility of managing all aspects of a child's life from the parent to the child, at reasonable and appropriate times. The parent can then take on the role of coach and will be able to provide the child with encouragement, recommendations, feedback, and practical techniques—without creating resentment and resistance.

Improve your connection with your child

“I try to help him, but he just won’t listen.” “We are fighting more than ever.” “She is a wonderful person, but somehow I can’t get through to her.”

The very nature of the disorder means that kids with ADHD are often off-task or emotionally deregulated. As a result, many parents spend so much time correcting or corralling their children that they feel they have lost some of the joy, love, and connection they crave. Parents often lose confidence, perspective, and hope when they feel they are in a constant battle to just get through the day. Children, including young adults, suffer as well. What may seem on the surface to be defiance or lack of care is often a wounded child who feels judged, scared, misunderstood, and sometimes helpless.

Without a safe, trusting relationship, children do not invite parents into their world. Sometimes, it is valuable to take a step back and acknowledge that there has been deterioration in the relationship. Parents must take the steps necessary to spend quality time on a more consistent basis. Sometimes it can start with a loving statement: “I love you very much and I realize that we are spending too much of our time arguing or stressed out with one another. I miss spending carefree time just one-on-one. Let’s make a plan to spend time together doing something that you want to do.” The goal here is to just enjoy—not to teach or make changes in your child. It is through building this connection that important conversations can happen more easily.

Coaching you to parent the child you have

Always keep in mind that ADHD looks different in each child. With “parent the child you have” as your guiding principle, you will be able to help your child thrive. The more you and your child can learn about how ADHD affects your child specifically, the more equipped you both will be to face the challenges ahead.

Change and growth take time, patience, and sometimes a little extra help and support from someone outside your family who can add insight and perspective. A trained parent coach will provide you with the support, strategies, and structure needed to make the real and sustainable changes in your family. With proper strategies and a proactive approach, the road may still be difficult, but success and satisfaction will be well within your reach. **A**

Cindy Goldrich, EdM, ACAC, a mental health counselor and a certified ADHD coach, specializes in coaching parents of children who have ADHD. She created, facilitates, and trains other professionals in *Calm and Connected: Parenting Children with ADHD®* and *Managing Homework for Kids with ADHD®*, two powerful workshops series designed to teach parents and caregivers how to manage and support their children’s unique needs. Goldrich conducts training workshops nationwide for teachers, mental health professionals, speech and language therapists, and paraprofessionals addressing how ADHD and executive function deficits impact children and how to help boost behavior and performance in school and at home. She is the cofounder of the Long Island Professional ADHD Consortium.



One-on-One Time

Plan to spend one-on-one time with each of your children on a regular basis. Depending on the age of your child, number of children you have, and other family obligations, aim to set aside half an hour a few days a week for each child. This time can be spent in a variety of ways; however, there are three basic guidelines:

- **Plan time with your child in advance.** This is a great way to say, “You are important to me.”
- **Make sure it is child-centered time.** Focus it on an activity of their choosing.
- **Make sure it is nonproductive time.** They can teach you, but you are not in teacher mode.