

# COACHING and Youth with ADHD

## FOR ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS

with ADHD, it can be both difficult and daunting to step out on one's own into the world and try to be successful.

This is where a coach can come in and help a young person transform daily life from chaos into clarity.

Coaching provides a reliable, trusting environment in which a client can create a vision for his or her life, brainstorm on how to bring that vision into reality, and engage with a supportive partner—the coach—along the way. Imagine the value of such an

environment to a client who not only is young and just gaining access to a world in which he or she has greater responsibilities and more need to direct his or her own life, but who also needs to figure out how to manage all of these things while struggling with challenges in executive functioning, attention, and focus.

From an emotional and life-skills perspective, adolescents with ADHD are typically not prepared for the transition from dependence on parents, teachers, and other important figures in their lives to the increasing independence they face as budding, near adults. These young people are typically behind their peers in terms of their readiness for independent life and lack the skills necessary to make good choices or to understand the consequences of their actions. They often find it hard to understand what's going on around them and don't know how to react appropriately in different situations.

Coaching offers young people with ADHD a supportive structure through which they can explore life options, learn new skills, and start to be more independent while in a safe space. Coaching provides a sounding board, a source for ideas, and a safety net that all help the young person with ADHD try new ways of operating, go after what he or she wants, collect him or herself when things



go differently than planned, and then try again, each time growing a little wiser and a little more confident.

### How is coaching useful?

When coaching focuses on social skills, the coach helps young people understand that a future full of friends and positive relationships is out there for them. Young adult clients begin to realize and recognize that they may not get what they want right now, a big area of frustration for the more impulsive and immature, but they also learn that with the support of a coach and a solid plan for success, they can move along a path toward their goals in a more independent fashion.

By offering coaching to young people, coaches 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. Oftentimes, parents have a difficult time accepting that adolescents and young adults with ADHD and learning disabilities are still in their preteens emotionally. Parents and others often expect these individuals to be mature enough to manage their lives. Yet, there is no “one size fits all” timetable for maturity. Coaches guide and support these young people in getting ready for the future while moving forward at their own pace.

ADHD coaching can help young people with ADHD in a number of ways. For example, it can help individuals

- › become organized, learn time management skills, and learn how to prioritize
- › develop and maintain focus and concentration
- › create and maintain a medication journal (I like to call it “Meds & Moods”)
- › gain independence and self-advocacy skills
- › enjoy a safe space to work on social skills
- › manage ADHD issues at home, at school, and at their job.

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Adapted from Sleeper-Triplett, Jodi (2010). Empowering Youth with ADHD: Your Guide to Coaching Adolescents and Young Adults for Coaches, Parents, and Professionals. Excerpt reprinted with permission of Specialty Press, Inc. [addwarehouse.com](http://addwarehouse.com).



## CHADD CONFERENCE

November 11-13 • Atlanta, GA  
Hear Jodi Sleeper-Triplett speak;  
learn more at [chadd.org](http://chadd.org).

These positive aspects of coaching are all in addition to the benefits of more general coaching, in which the young person receives support in creating plans and setting goals in an environment of structure, support, and encouragement.

### How ADHD coaching differs from life coaching

ADHD coaching is like life coaching in that it involves helping clients through the process of exploration, goal-setting, identifying and taking action steps, and checking in to maintain accountability. In addition, as with life coaching, ADHD coaching provides structure, support, and encouragement. Where ADHD coaching tends to be different from life coaching is in terms of the degree of support and structure offered, with ADHD coaching involving an increased amount of support and structure and a higher level of accountability between coach and client to facilitate results. This becomes evident in the kind of questions that a coach poses.

Let's imagine that a young client comes in with the question of "How do I approach my professor with the problems I'm having in class?" If that client doesn't have ADHD, the coach might ask, "How would you like to approach your professor with this problem?" and "What would you like to see as the outcome of your conversation with the professor?" In this case, the coach volleys fairly general questions to the client because the client has the capacity to discover what he or she wants with minimal prompting from the coach and mainly needs a sounding board.

In contrast, if the client has ADHD, the coach will still ask the client some general, open-ended questions, but the coach will also ask more specific or in-depth questions that prompt the client to consider each and every action step needed to accomplish a goal, taking into consideration that the client struggles with initiation and follow-through. So when the client says, "I will talk to my professor sometime this week," the coach might ask, "When will you do this?" "What do you need to do to make this conversation a

## Resources on ADHD Coaching

### Professional Coaching Organizations

**ADHD Coaches Organization**  
[adhdcoaches.org](http://adhdcoaches.org)

**Institute for the Advancement of ADHD Coaching**  
[adhdcoachinstitute.org](http://adhdcoachinstitute.org)

**ADD Consults**  
[addconsults.com](http://addconsults.com)

### See also

**CHADD's National Resource Center on ADHD**  
updated introduction to coaching, available at  
[help4adhd.org/en/living/coaching](http://help4adhd.org/en/living/coaching)

**CHADD's NRC What We Know #18,**  
"Coaching for Adults with AD/HD," available at  
[help4adhd.org/en/living/coaching/WWK18](http://help4adhd.org/en/living/coaching/WWK18)

**Edge Foundation**  
[edgefoundation.org](http://edgefoundation.org)

reality?” and “How will I know when you have talked to your professor?”

Of course, the line between providing ADHD clients the structure they need and not becoming overly directive is an important one. For example, the coach doesn't want to say to the client, “You can't go in to talk to your professor without an appointment!” even if the coach suspects that this is the case. Instead, the coach might ask open-ended questions to help the client think through relevant issues for success, but it is not the job of the ADHD coach to tell the client exactly how to accomplish something. Doing so would do a disservice to the client, who needs opportunities to practice generating solutions and testing out action plans in the real world.

In addition to asking smaller, more specific questions that help a client break action plans into small, achievable steps, ADHD coaches also hold their clients more accountable, which involves a tighter check-in plan between coaching sessions and more frequent contact than in general life coaching. For clients with ADHD, coaching sessions typically occur at least once a week, which is more often than in many life coaching or executive coaching programs.

Check-ins occur between client and coach to provide more structure and serve as a brief connection to confirm action taken or not taken or to update the coach on progress toward stated goals. In ADHD coaching for adolescents and young adults, the check-ins may be set up as often as daily. It is the consistency and frequency of contact that helps make ADHD coaching so effective. Typical means of contact for this regular accountability include e-mails, text messaging, check-in calls, and some form of follow-up if the client doesn't call in at the designated time. The specific details of the check-in plan are best established in the intake and revisited throughout the coaching relationship.

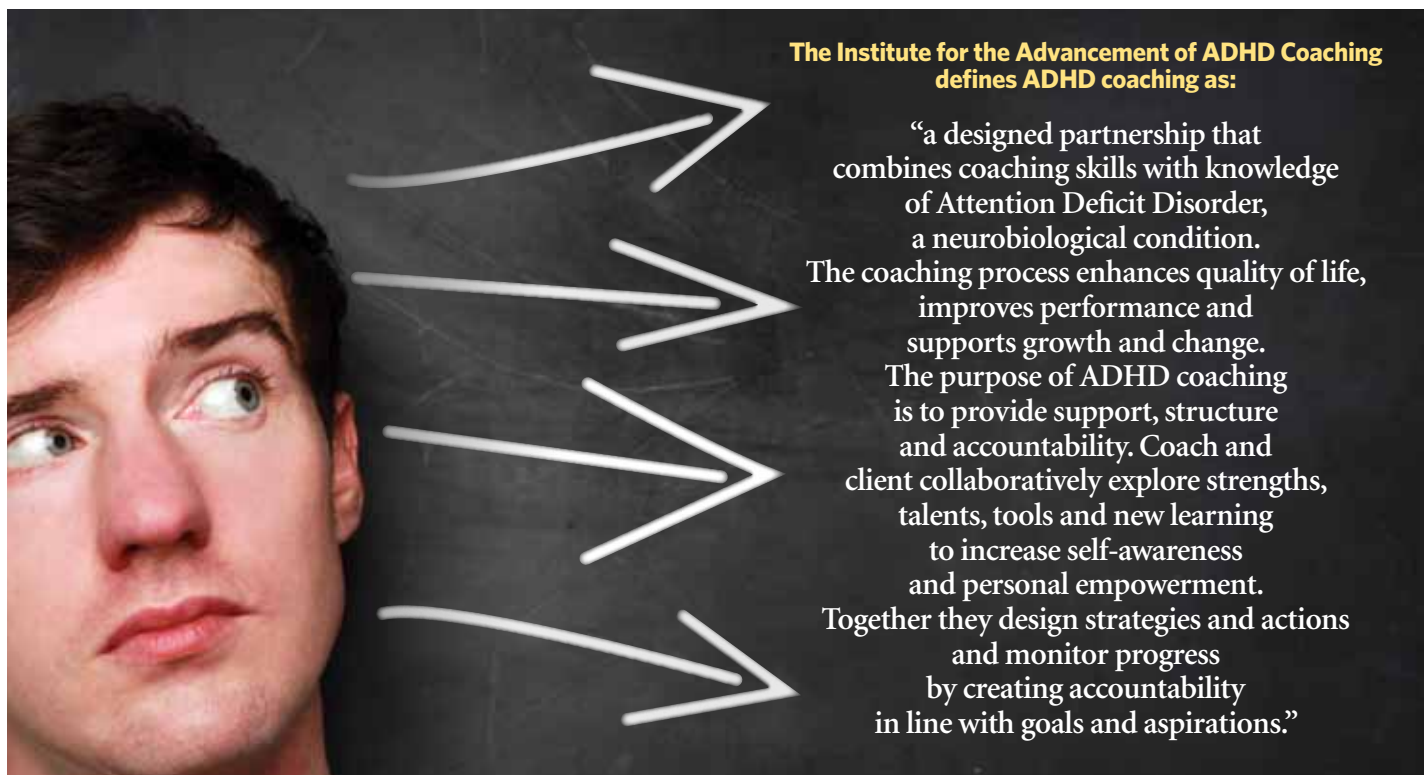
Although ADHD coaching involves greater structure and support than more general life coaching, the structure and support serve as stepping stones for the client, not crutches. Because individuals with ADHD tend to have a track record of falling down a lot, they often

have a self-belief of “I can't do anything.” By providing these individuals with sufficient structure and support, coaches help them experience success in their lives, often for the first time, so that they start to build a track record of accomplishment rather than failure. Over the course of their work with coaches, individuals with ADHD develop self-confidence that motivates them to pursue goals rather than give up. They build a toolbox of strategies that they can use now and in the future and begin to internalize the voice of the coach into their own thought processes. The coaching work thus often becomes part of the way the client thinks and operates, leading to lasting change.

### Parents and coaches need to work together

Truth be told, young people don't always want to listen to adults, especially their parents. They may listen to their friends, use the Internet as their main information resource, and sometimes make unwise choices out of inexperience or perhaps just to ruffle the feathers of the adults in their lives. Coaches can help young clients find ways to grow, explore, and express themselves in a manner that supports independence after first taking stock of the pros and cons of their choices. Coaches and caring adults have the opportunity to champion these young people and applaud the steps they take in moving forward with greater awareness of the world, their responsibilities, and their abilities.

Parents and coaches need to work together and be a part of the adolescent or young adult's learning process. It may take longer for young people with ADHD to learn new skills, increase self-awareness, and communicate effectively with others than it does for other young people, and it typically requires a greater commitment on everyone's part. It can help to remember that the journey is a steady marathon and not a sprint. Sometimes parents think that the challenges are never going to end, but with coaching, there can be a light at the end of the tunnel. With possible therapy and/or medication, guidance, and support, parents, coaches, and other caregivers can make a difference in the life of a young person with ADHD. **A**



**The Institute for the Advancement of ADHD Coaching defines ADHD coaching as:**

“a designed partnership that combines coaching skills with knowledge of Attention Deficit Disorder, a neurobiological condition. The coaching process enhances quality of life, improves performance and supports growth and change. The purpose of ADHD coaching is to provide support, structure and accountability. Coach and client collaboratively explore strengths, talents, tools and new learning to increase self-awareness and personal empowerment. Together they design strategies and actions and monitor progress by creating accountability in line with goals and aspirations.”