

Is ADHD Coaching Right for My Teen?

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YOU WERE TALKING TO A FRIEND about ADHD coaching last week and she told you how much her son benefited from the coaching process. 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. Your friend says that she is less stressed and likes having someone else work directly with her son. Wow, this sounds amazing—just what you have been looking for! You rush home, find the names of ADHD coaches on the internet and email each one for their availability and fees. Your goal is to find a coach who will take charge and get your son to “get his act together.”


Hold on. That’s not quite how it works. First, let’s consider your son. Is he ready, willing, and able to be coached? Have you talked with him about coaching? What is working for him now and what areas need improvement? Is coaching the best next step? Do either of you actually know what ADHD coaching provides and how the process will unfold?

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 clients (students) to make sure they are focused and working steadily toward their goals.

How does coaching benefit teens with ADHD?

By providing coaching to teens, 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 teen. Oftentimes, parents have a difficult time accepting that many teens with ADHD are still in their preteens emotionally. Parents and others often expect these young people to be mature enough to manage their lives. Yet, there is no one-size-fits-all timetable for maturity. Coaches guide and support young people in getting ready for the future at their own pace. Through coaching, the teen receives support in creating plans and setting goals in an environment of structure, support, and encouragement.

When coaching teens and college students, the focus is on academics, just as work is the focus 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?

How do you know if your teen is ready for coaching?

To determine coachability, it is highly recommended that your teen talk to the coach directly before setting up an initial meeting. The coach will help you, and your teen, determine if coaching is the right choice and if your teen is ready to be a partner in the coaching process.

Is your teen:

- interested in making changes?
- willing to work with a coach as a partner in the path toward success?
- capable, at this stage of life, of understanding what coaching is, and is not?
- struggling with mental health or medical issues that might impede the coaching process?
- in need of coaching, or might tutoring or therapy be a better option?

Are you:

- ready to “do the dance,” taking two steps back while the coach takes two steps forward?
- willing to be patient with the coaching process?
- comfortable with your teenager working independently with a coach?
- able to afford the coaching sessions?
- clear that your teen needs to want to be coached, regardless of what you may want?

Finding the right coach

A well-trained coach will help the prospective client take time to consider all the aspects of coaching before making a commitment. 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 client to seek out a coach who has both life coach training (non-ADHD specific) and ADHD coach training, plus experience in coaching youth clients. Having a teenager is not a qualification for being able to coach teenagers. Check out adhdcoaches.org or edgefoundation.org for ADHD coaches who specialize in youth coaching.

The initial coaching meeting

You and your teen meet with the coach for an initial meeting, often called an intake or discovery session. The intake for teens is usually done in person, but can be completed via Skype or phone with both parent(s) and teen. This is an opportunity for parents to be directly involved in the development of the coaching plan. During this one or two-hour meeting, the coach will ask questions of both you and your teen, providing equal time for each to share points of concern, strengths and desired outcomes. The key is to allow your teenager to speak freely



about his/her strengths and struggles without prompting. Your goals for your child are heard and noted, while the final decision on the coaching focus (goals, action steps, accountability) is up to your teen. The coach will reflect back on your areas of concern when meeting privately with your teen to help facilitate reasonable, attainable goals which can improve skills in all life areas.

Hopefully, the coaching process will allow you to take a deep breath and step back from the day-to-day details, while the coach steps in to hold your child accountable and on track with his goals. It is important for you to understand and accept that issues discussed in coaching are confidential and except for situations deemed to be harmful to your teen or others, the coach will not be sharing any information on the coaching sessions without permission from your teen.

The coaching process

By the end of the initial session, your teen and the coach will have chosen a day and time for weekly coaching. It is recommended that you choose the same appointment time each week for consistency and accountability. If the coaching is going to be in-person, and you are driving your teen to coaching, be sure to confirm your availability to avoid any last minute changes in the plan.

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 your teen’s availability and

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learning style. For example, if your daughter 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 teen 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 as-

signments, 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 teen chooses to focus on in their coaching sessions.

In addition to the weekly session, teens are requested 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 teens are encouraged to share their goals and progress with their parents.

You are probably wondering what happens if your teen 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 teen. When problems arise, parents are encouraged to talk directly to their teen and if that does not work, reach out to the coach. A good rule to follow is to send an email to the coach and copy your teen on the email. The coach will do the same. This keeps everyone in the loop when a problem arises and lets the teen know that you and the coach are not communicating privately.

Once you and your teen decide 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 6 months or longer to allow all the strategies to “gel.” Be patient and allow your teen 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, your teen will have a wonderful opportunity to pursue his goals and dreams with greater confidence and success. 🎯

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