

STRATEGIES

for **DADS**

with **ADHD**

CAREY A. HELLER, PSYD

“**T**IM, STOP FIDDLING WITH THAT,” SCOLDED TIFFANY. “You are making too much noise and I can’t focus on the article I am reading.”

Someone hearing this kind of statement might automatically assume Tim was a child with ADHD who was exhibiting symptoms of hyperactivity. However, the same scenario can easily occur for many men in adulthood—except instead of a parent being bothered by something, a spouse or even a child may be the one who is getting upset.

The path from childhood with ADHD to adulthood with ADHD—and then parenthood—can be a lot for fathers who have ADHD. For men under normal circumstances, growing up, adjusting to life as an adult, developing and maintaining a relationship with a significant other, and having a kid or multiple kids comes with its own challenges. Add in the common symptoms of ADHD—difficulties with paying and sustaining attention, issues with time management, planning, and getting things done—and fatherhood can become substantially more difficult.

Fathers with ADHD, like any population with ADHD, do not all look alike or have exactly the same experiences. Some dads with ADHD may be doing well professionally,



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have good relationships with their kids, are viewed as fun to be with, and mostly get along with a significant other (beyond typical partner conflicts that can arise from time to time). Others may be floundering in a career, going from one job to the next, trying to avoid getting fired, or bouncing back from being terminated. Others have issues with being reliable or kids who feel their dad is not paying attention to them. And some feel that their partner treats them like another child in the household—the list goes on. Some fathers may be doing reasonably well in some domains (work, for example, or doing things with kids) and struggling greatly in other areas (such as in their relationship with their significant other).

At least some ADHD-related issues will pop up from time to time for most fathers with ADHD, even if they are functioning well overall and their symptoms are well managed through behavioral treatment, medication, and good organizational systems. The issues may be present all the time but go unnoticed, except when they cause a problem in some way.

Even if they don't have ADHD, fathers may struggle with several issues that are common among men. Compared to women, men experience a greater likelihood of loneliness and tend to have fewer social connections. Stereotypically, fathers tend to focus more on careers and family, so they often do not have as many friends as mothers or participate in regular social get-togethers. While this is not always the case with all men, it is noteworthy since ADHD symptoms can exacerbate all of these issues. If men find it challenging to keep in touch with people, make social plans, and seek out emotional support through friendships, for men with ADHD, it is even more challenging. Their difficulties with staying organized, initiating plans, and being reliable in following through with plans interfere with and affect social connection.

These challenges do not have to be an impediment to your overall life satisfaction, whether or not you are a father who has ADHD. You can thrive in a career, have a good relationship with your children, maintain a great bond with your significant other, and stay connected socially to friends. Some practical strategies can help you navigate fatherhood in general, and especially when you are managing symptoms of ADHD.

Take care of yourself

If you aren't getting enough sleep, regular physical activity, eating well, and so forth, you are not functioning optimally, and trying to make any of the other issues in your life better will be even more challenging. Of course, this is easier said than done, and if you have small children or



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ones with many challenges, accomplishing this goal can be tough. Do the best that you can.

Sleep. View sleep as an appointment with a set start and end time that you have to attend on time and regularly. Pick a time by which to get into bed. To accomplish this, you'll need to identify what things you need to do each evening before you can get into bed. Consider writing these down and estimate how long each task takes. Start your evening wind-down with enough time to fit in all of these items before your set bedtime.

To help you stay on task and stick to your sleep routine, you could use a feature on an app (such as the bedtime one on Apple devices) where you set how far in advance of bedtime you want a reminder. Use that prompt to begin your nightly routine. You can also set an alarm for beginning your wind-down time.

Regular physical activity. This can be challenging to fit in if you have a busy work schedule, need to be with your kids during certain hours, or feel bad about not being with them when you aren't at work. In an ideal world, you'd be able to get enough sleep and have a set workout time that doesn't affect anything else. If you have a flexible schedule, you can block out a set time for this. It may make follow through easier if you plan ahead what you will do for your workout.

If you have trouble getting motivated, you could consider using cardio equipment while you watch a specific television series on your phone. The trick here is to only

watch the series when you are working out. Alternatively, you can find workouts that you genuinely enjoy.

If carving out a specific time to work out is not feasible, think about how you could incorporate physical activity into things that you already do. For example, you could use a desk bike or an elliptical under your desk while working. You could block out time when you are with your kids to run around with them and engage in energetic activities.

Eating well. Like many things in life, planning is key. Consider sitting down weekly to plan out your own meals that don't involve the family. Knowing what you will eat ahead of time may reduce temptations to grab items that are quick and less healthy.

Navigate completion of tasks

Being organized and getting things done can be immensely helpful professionally, reduce conflicts at home, and demonstrate being reliable to your kids. Everyone is different in terms of what kind of system works for them. However, the key is to have some sort of systematic way of keeping track of tasks and *not* relying on your memory.

Consider using a basic task list program such as Reminders, Todoist, or Google Tasks to track all main tasks. Seeing everything in one place is a good starting point for planning.

Next, it is great to have tasks in a list, but they don't magically get done because they are written down. To

help facilitate completion of things, consider estimating completion times for each item. Then, allot specific time to complete each task. A few ways to track this include: an electronic calendar where you allot time for the task; a time block within an electronic task list program; a program such as Sun-sama, which prompts you how to plan out tasks using your available free time and can to some degree auto-schedule you to complete tasks when needed.

For tasks that involve your kids or spouse, it could be helpful to have a weekly meeting to review the upcoming week, discuss transportation and other logistics, and so forth. Document what was discussed and agreed to with a shared task list, Google Doc table, or something else could work well to help increase your accountability to follow through on things.

Improve social connections

Take advantage of friendships you already have. Even if you haven't talked to someone in a long time, give them a call, text them, and try to make plans to do something.

People often develop social connections by interacting with people they naturally are around and facilitating opportunities to do things outside of the organized activity where they initially meet. For example, if your kids have activities and the parents wait around, try to start conversations with the other fathers. Perhaps you could organize a guy's night for the dads from that activity. Or, if you find similar interests—examples include golf, fishing, running, and cycling, among other activities—try to make plans to do something together with the other fathers.

To make planning easier, you could look at your schedule ahead of time, check with your spouse to verify availability, and then write down specific times you are available in the notes

app on your phone. Then, when you try to make plans with someone, you'll be able to offer them those times (rather than trying to remember your schedule).

Do you have a hard time remembering things about others to use during conversations? Consider discreetly exiting a social situation to write a few notes on the person, such as their interests, kids names, and other information that you could refer back to before seeing them again. This could help to make socializing easier.

If you struggle with small talk, you can keep a list of possible topics in a note in your phone. Review it right before you enter a social situation so it's fresh in your mind.

Consider connecting with other fathers at meetings you already attend: the parent-teacher association at your kids' school, a religious institution, or an alumni association with a local chapter or events. Consider meeting up with other fathers who are part of these groups.

For more formal peer support, consider joining a local or online group specifically for parents, fathers, or fathers with ADHD. See the sidebar, "Support for Fathers with ADHD," for some options.

Improve your relationship

Do you want to have a better relationship with your spouse or significant other? Taking good care of yourself, getting things done efficiently and when you say you will, and being happy socially can contribute to improving this important area of your life.

Being more mindful of the things you do that annoy your spouse can also be helpful. Think about what works well for you to minimize the impact of your ADHD symptoms in different kinds of situations, and try to have a conversation about ways you can work together to limit the impact these things have on the relationship. For example, one good strategy for dividing up household tasks may be limiting your assignment to tasks that are detail-oriented or have dire consequences if not done on time. If you do better with things in writing, ask your spouse to write down, text, or add tasks to a shared task list.

THESE STRATEGIES ARE NOT EXHAUSTIVE of all the possible things you could do to better manage the challenges you face. My hope is that they can get you started on changes that improve your daily life as a dad with ADHD. 🧠



Carey A. Heller, PsyD, is a licensed psychologist based in Maryland. He specializes in the evaluation and treatment of ADHD and executive function issues. Learn more at hellerpsychologygroup.com. The coordinator for the Montgomery County chapter of CHADD, Dr. Heller also serves as chair of the editorial advisory board for Attention magazine.

Support for Fathers with ADHD

CHADD offers two free online communities:

- **ADHD Parents Together** | healthunlocked.com/adhd-parents
- **Adult ADHD Support** | healthunlocked.com/adult-ADHD

Attention ADHD Dads is a free group for fathers who have ADHD (even if not formally diagnosed), those with executive function limitations, or any father wishing to improve their parenting, time management, work/life balance, self-care, and life satisfaction. The group meets regularly on Zoom; to learn more, go to hellerpsychologygroup.com/group-support.

The Men's ADHD Support Group helps men with ADHD find community and acceptance by facilitating virtual and in-person gatherings, raising awareness via informative social media content, and providing members with access to experts, tools, and strategies to learn how to thrive with ADHD. To learn more about the group, read "Empowering Men to Thrive with ADHD" in the August 2023 issue of Attention magazine, or go to mensadhdsupportgroup.com.