



How to support children with Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder

Behavioural Management

What can parents do for children with Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder?

Parents should understand and accept their children's special traits, see that their inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity symptoms are not their own fault but physiological deficits. This perspective can help parents to stay calm and teach their children effectively. Seeking professional diagnosis and treatment early will help to reduce their symptoms and other related comorbidities. Parents should adjust their attitudes, demands and expectations towards their children. They should also take good care of themselves, find chance to take a break and recharge. It is also important for parents and other family members to understand and support each other. Seeking assistance, such as joining parent self-help groups, to establish effective support networks are good ways to relieve stress.

What is behavioural therapy?

Behavioural therapy is a carefully planned and systematic way to improve children's behaviours. Procedures of the therapy include:

- **Defining the behavioural problem of the children:** Parents should observe and record the behaviour of their children, including the time, place and frequency of occurrence and the common parental reaction.
- **Changing behaviour:** By changing the antecedent and consequence of the behaviour.



- **Reinforce appropriate behaviour:** Through giving attention, praise, rewards and use of reward scheme/ behaviour contract, etc.
- **Reduce inappropriate behaviour:** By planned ignoring, withdrawal of privilege etc.
- **Alliance among family members:** Consistent attitude and behaviour among family members can enhance the treatment effect.
- **Review and adjust:** Review and adjust the strategies regularly as children have different need and problem at different stage.

How can parents help their children adapt to their daily lives?

- **Set a daily routine:** Let children get use to a regular daily routine. Establish clear rules and steps to help children to follow. Tidy up unnecessary items to minimize distraction and use auxiliary tools (such as lists, visual cues) to remind them.
- **Enhance time management by dividing task:** Break up boring and lengthy tasks into small blocks, give children appropriate short breaks in between to improve their efficiency. Use alarm clock for timing and showing the time used.
- **Give tangible reward for motivation:** Children often fail to complete cumbersome, repetitive and boring tasks. It is useless for parents to lecture or yell at them all the time. Parents may consider giving tangible reward on completion of task and post a behavioural contract to remind them.
- **Prepare contingency plan:** Parents should have contingency plan in advance for problematic situation. For example, when dining out, parents may bring children's favourite toys or books to engage them to reduce their inappropriate behaviour.



How can parents discipline their children and enhance their compliance?

- **Set achievable goals and clear behavioural rules:** Parents should set reasonable goals and rules based on their children's ability, explain to them in advance and manage them consistently across situations.
- **Give effective instruction:** Give instruction with clear, concise, specific and positive wordings; avoid giving multiple instructions at the same time. Make sure the children listen carefully. Give instruction in a calm and firm manner; avoid asking question or using ambiguous wordings. Ask them to paraphrase the instruction to make sure they understand.
- **Give appropriate response:** After giving instruction, parents should allow five seconds for children to react. Give appropriate response that fits their behaviour to let them know the consequences of their action.
- **Reward good behaviours:** Praise them by describing their good behaviours (e.g. "You can do this homework by yourself, awesome!"). Set up a reward scheme with them beforehand. Make sure it is feasible and give the reward in a timely manner.
- **Handle inappropriate behaviours:** Parents may ignore the behaviours, withhold children's privileges, and make them bear the consequence (e.g. they have to tidy up their own mess).

Children often talk back, throw tantrum and lie. What should parents do?

This is a very sad situation for both parents and children. Children may feel that their parents often criticise them, hence, they talk back or throw tantrum to express their anger and frustration. Gradually, children become oppositional and rebellious. Parents should stay calm and avoid making personal attack to them. To improve the situation, parents can consider the following strategies:



- **Improve parent-child relationship:** Parents should find time to have fun with their children every day, can play games or do exercise together. Listen to their feeling, chat with them, be empathic and avoid judgement can help them to open up, promote communication and mutual understanding.
- **Help children to solve their problem:** When children encounter difficulties, encourage them to come up with several possible solutions, help them to analyse the pros and cons and choose the most feasible one. This helps children to learn problem solving, reduces their frustration and stress.
- **Encourage children to replace their bad habits with good ones:** Parents should explain to their children the consequence of their bad habits and model good ones for them to follow. Guide and encourage them to follow, praise them when they do so.
- **Use reward and punishment:** Parents should pay more attention to children's good behaviour, praise and reward them. Praise them overtly for any good deeds in order to strengthen their good behaviour. If their behaviour is bad, parents should give punishment that fit their behaviour, avoid scolding or nagging them repeatedly. If they improve, parents should appreciate and praise them.
- **Start with easy one:** Begin with behavioural problem that is easy to handle. Avoid handling too many problems at the same time.

How can parents manage their own emotion when teaching their children?

Parents may give harsh punishment to their children when they are agitated or angry. Try to stay calm and set a good example for them.

- **Stay calm:** Stop and think, assess severity and think of effective ways to handle the problem, and then manage the situation and your children according to the above principles. Be empathetic to the children's limitation and think about possible external factors that aggravate the problem. If parents are too angry and confused, they should leave the scene for a while, take deep breaths and calm down before dealing with the problem again.



- **Stand firm on your belief and principle:** Focus on major behavioural problems and temporarily ignore the minor ones, help children to make step-by-step improvement. Be humorous, think big, focus on your long-term goals rather than blinding by the current situation (e.g. create a happy childhood and have good relationship with the children). Take care of your physical and mental health; have time to relax to ease your stress.

Children often get into trouble in school and receive complaint. What should parents do?

- **Find the cause of problem, not make judgement:** Parents and teachers should focus on solving the problem by finding out the cause through careful observation.
- **Partner with teachers:** Teachers play an important role in children's school coping. It is of great benefit if they have a good understanding of the children's personality traits and difficulties, and master the skills to enhance their compliance. Parents should build a good partnership with them based on trust and cooperation, which aims to help the children. Parents should also understand their difficulties and the needs of other students. Through mutual cooperation, solutions can be found.
- **Communicate effectively:** Parents should listen to the teachers' opinion and see their perspectives. Both should try to understand the children's problem and avoid making unnecessary accusations against each other. Enhance mutual understanding through sharing and discussion on children's problem with different means (e.g. use student handbook and telephone for communication) in order to find feasible ways to help the children.
- **Align strategies with teachers, work together:** Parents may consider inviting teachers to use behaviour contract or reward scheme to improve children's behaviour in school.



Children often spend long time in doing homework. What should parents do?

- **Plan ahead:** Review the homework with children; agree on the starting time and rules in doing it. If the assignment is not due yet, mark on the calendar or student handbook to remind them to finish it on time.
- **Arrange conducive environment:** A quiet and tidy environment helps children to focus on their work. They should avoid distractions, such as sitting next to the window or door; avoid placing toys near their desks or in their sight; and avoid turning on the TV when they are working. Place necessary items nearby (such as stationeries, reference books, etc.). When they finish their homework, parents can invite them to tidy up their desk.
- **Arrange homework time:** Make arrangement so that they can do their homework when they are energetic but not when they are exhausted.
- **Give breaks:** After doing homework for 10-20 minutes, let them have a short break of 3-5 minutes where they can drink water, go to toilet or rest for a while.
- **Arrange homework order:** Let children begin with their favourite assignment so that they can have a sense of achievement, which motivate them to continue to do the difficult ones. Intersperse difficult assignments (e.g. copying) with easier ones; avoid leaving them at the end.
- **Set up reward scheme:** Parents can review the homework with their children, set a reasonable time limit to finish them. Children can obtain scores if they finish their homework on time. When they obtain certain scores, they can redeem a reward (e.g. Going to the park or playing ball games if they get 5 points). If the children can choose their own reward, which is feasible and agreed by the parents, it can motivate them to complete their homework better.
- **Seek assistance:** If children have persistent difficulties in completing their homework, parents should seek help from teachers or professionals to find out the reasons and possible solutions. When necessary, parents may discuss with teachers to consider reducing the amount of homework or giving accommodation.



Children often fail to hand in their homework. What should parents do?

- Teach children to write down all the homework assignments in their student handbook. Motivate them by using a reward scheme.
- Ask their classmates for help or ask the teacher to arrange a class buddy.
- Remind them to check their drawer before leaving school and bring all necessary items home.
- Prepare two homework folders, one for hand-in, and one for take-home.
- Train them to put the finished assignments into their hand-in-folder. Parents can help to check the folder in the morning when necessary.
- Ask teacher to help to check their hand-in-folder and collect all the finished assignments when necessary.

Children throw temper when their parents assist them in doing homework. What should parents do?

- **Monitor children's emotions:** Parents should pay attention to their children's emotions. If they are too tired or frustrated, they will easily lost their temper. Parents should let them take a break so that they can wind down and refresh before continuing to work. Parents should not let them rest only when they lost their temper, or scold and spank them during the tantrum.
- **Guide and help:** When children feel frustrated, parents should empathize and support them by asking, "How can I help you?" If they do not know how to do their homework, parents can give appropriate guidance by asking questions such as "How did you do the last question? What is the difference in this one?" If they still do not understand, give guidance and explanation on what needs to be done and how.



- **Reset achievable goals:** If there is too much homework, parents can help to redefine their goal and calm them down, e.g. they can rest for few minutes after completing one homework assignment.
- **Avoid demotivation:** Avoid giving negative comments that demotivate children and undermine their self-esteem, such as giving excessive criticisms in an agitated manner, using judgmental words or calling them names (e.g. stupid; math idiot; stupid you who fail to learn despite all the teaching etc.).
- **Give calm instruction:** Be calm and patient, use gestural cues or brief instructions to remind the children to stay focus on their assignments. Avoid hurrying them all the time.
- **Role of parents:** In the long run, parents should understand and accept their children's limitation, encourage and reward them to do their homework independently. Punishment often dampens their interest and confidence, which only gives short-term deterrent effect. Parents' role is to supervise them to finish their homework, make sure they check and hand in all assignments, teach and guide them when necessary. They can leave the work of marking and correction to the teachers; avoid confronting the children because of their work. Let the children be responsible to complete their own assignment and bear the consequence of failing to do so.
- **Set a good example:** Through parents' practice and encouragement, children can learn how to manage their own emotion and organize their time schedule.

Children are often untidy, their school bags and desks are always messy. What should parents do?

Parents can teach the children to sort, arrange and store their belongings so that they can find them easily when needed.

- **Fix places for storing items:** Frequently use items should be stored in easily accessible drawers or shelves, e.g. stationeries should be stored in place where children do their homework.



- **Pack items for going out:** Set up a “To go station” by putting a basket on a cabinet near the front door. Every night after finish doing homework, children should check and put the things that they need on the next day into the basket (e.g. keys, purse, water bottle, etc.) so that they will not leave them behind when they go out in a hurry. When they return home from school, they should put all the things back in the basket.
- **Put homework assignments and school notice in the right place:** Teach the children to take the schoolbag from the basket, take out the assignments from the homework folder and school notices from the notice folder for parents to sign. After finish, put the homework and signed reply slips back into their respective folders, put the two folders back to the school bag and finally put the school bag back in the basket.
- **Hang their clothes properly:** After returning home from school, children should change their clothes and hang them properly on the hook in their rooms.
- **Tidy up after use:** Teach children to tidy up things immediately after usage. This good habit is more efficient and easy for them as they tidy up their belongings bit by bit.

How can parents help children to develop their organizational skills?

- **Learn to tidy up:** Parents may begin with supervising their children to tidy up. Teach them to break up the task into small steps. Ask and guide them to think about possible solutions so that they can complete the tasks systematically. Give them minimal assistance to booster their sense of achievement. Praise and encourage them as they complete each step.
- **Make the task enjoyable:** Parents can play music while the children is tidying up and reward them when they complete the task. Try to make the work interesting.
- **Avoid blaming:** Avoid raking over the past or blaming children for their misbehaviour repeatedly as it often annoys them.



- **Use tools for organization:** Photocopy a calendar for children and place it in a prominent place. Prepare folders, checklists and boxes of different colours for them.
- **Set up reward scheme:** To begin with, parents should remind children to follow the new steps until they establish the new habit and able to do it by themselves. Help them to see the benefit of their new habit.
- **Allow children to bear consequence:** If children leave their belongings behind or forget to do their homework, let them bear the consequence, for instance, their teacher may punish them or the inconvenience due to lack of necessary items. Avoid over-protection, let them learn from their mistakes and understand the importance of planning and bearing consequence.
- **Allow children to see the benefit:** Children need to learn the skill bit by bit. Let them see the benefit of their new habit, such as reducing the time spend on looking for things and the anxiety caused by that.
- **Start early:** Organizational skills are good habits that bring lifelong benefit. Start training your children early so that they can organize their daily schedule and work properly.
- **Set a good example:** Parents should set a good example for their children by showing them how to behave and manage their own affairs properly.



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