

# COMMUNITY PSYCHIATRIC CENTERS

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## ADHD AND EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

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## **ADHD and Executive Functioning**

ADHD manifests in poor impulse control, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. However, ADHD also impedes "executive functioning". What is executive functioning? Good question.

**Executive Functioning** is overseen by the Pre-frontal Cortex; it's the "command and control" center of the brain and helps to manage life tasks. It involves mental control and self-regulation. These functions allow for managing time, paying attention, switching focus, planning and organizing, remembering details, and avoiding saying or doing the wrong thing.

Some specific executive functions include:

**Inhibition and Impulse Control:** Stop ones behavior at the appropriate time, and think before acting.

**Shifting, and Flexible Thinking:** Move freely from one situation to another both in thought and behavior.

**Emotional Control:** Modulate emotional responses by bringing rational thought to bear on feelings.

**Task Initiation:** Ability to begin a task and to independently generate ideas, responses, or problem-solving strategies.

**Working Memory:** Capacity to hold information in mind for the purposes of completing a task.

**Planning/Organization/Prioritizing:** Ability to manage current and future-oriented task demands, and order in terms of importance.

**Organization of Materials:** Impose order on work, play, and storage.

**Self-Monitoring:** Ability to monitor one's own performance and to measure it against some standard of what is needed or expected.

**Monitoring Time:** The ability to self-regulate based on time-constraints and have a sense of urgency. The capacity to plan for a task or goal, no matter short or long-term. The ability to accurately judge the passage of time.

### **General strategies to assist in improving executive functioning**

- Take step-by-step approaches to work; rely on visual organizational aids.
- Use tools like time organizers, computers or watches with alarms.
- Prepare visual schedules and review them several times a day.
- Ask for written directions with oral instructions whenever possible.
- Plan and structure transition times and shifts in activities.

### **Managing time**

- Create checklists and "to do" lists, estimating how long tasks will take.
- Break long assignments into chunks and assign time frames for completing each chunk.
- Use visual calendars to keep track of long term assignments, due dates, chores, and activities.
- Use management software such as the Franklin Day Planner, Palm Pilot, or Lotus Organizer.
- Be sure to write the due date on top of each assignment.

### **Managing space and materials**

- Organize work space.
- Minimize clutter.
- Consider having separate work areas with complete sets of supplies for different activities.
- Schedule a weekly time to clean and organize the work space.

## Managing work

- Make a checklist for getting through assignments. For example, a student's checklist could include such items as: get out pencil and paper; put name on paper; put due date on paper; read directions; etc.
- Meet with a teacher or supervisor on a regular basis to review work; troubleshoot problems.

### 14 Principles For Managing ADHD (*Taking Charge of ADHD*, 2013)

#### 1. **Immediate feedback and consequences**

Children with ADHD tend to be under control of the moment (they have trouble looking into the future, or focusing on the end-goal), so become part of the moment. When involved in a boring or challenging task, these kids feel an urge to do something else, so make the task more rewarding. Quick rewards and feedback are vital. Praise, affection, rewards, tokens... Make it immediate. Look for the 'good' behavior and praise it. Give immediate consequences as well.

#### 2. **More frequent feedback**

Kids with ADHD need more immediate and frequent feedback; best to give often especially in the beginning. Give feedback (praise, tokens...) periodically during the task, not just at the end. Use visuals to remind yourself to check on your child to give feedback.

#### 3. **Use larger and more powerful consequences**

Use more powerful consequences than with other kids, because they must overcome more to reach the goal or complete the task; they simply need more motivators.

#### 4. **Use incentives before punishment**

Praise before you punish, or you'll be punishing far too often. Too much punishment only interferes with your relationship with your child. "Positives before negatives" and Praise what you want to see. Find replacement behaviors to the negative behavior, and praise it. Punish consistently but selectively; only punish the one targeted misbehavior.

#### 5. **Externalize time and bridge time where necessary**

Children with ADHD have a disturbed sense of time; consequently, they struggle with time-lines. They subsequently live in the 'now' and are better when they have external reminders about time. Use a timer, or a visual timer, (large time-timer), watch with alarm, or a recorder with your voice... Longer time intervals: bridge time, i.e. break into small daily steps. See ***A.D.D Warehouse*** for helpful items and materials.

#### 6. **Externalize the important information at the time of the task**

Working memory is impaired, so place helpful information out in the open, where the work is being done. Use a list of rules and reminders (read directions, double-check work, pay attention...). Take aside before friend arrives: share toys, take turns, ask your friend about her interests...

#### 7. **Externalize the source of motivation during the task**

There can also be trouble with motivation. Consequently, increase the motivation and make it obvious by giving incentive or reward. Create a win-win situation; offer to get reward when work is done, or when segments of work is done.

#### 8. **Make thinking and problem-solving more manual or physical**

Keeping information organized in their thoughts is tough, so it's best if they can see or feel the problem or solutions. For example, type all the points on the computer screen to capture every idea. Child can then expand using the prompts. Use index cards, tangibles, symbols, and other types of cues to remember the specific points. Make the problem tangible so child can see or touch it, such as seeing the plans for a house, or how the furniture will be arranged in a room.

#### 9. **Strive for consistency**

Must use same strategies every time. Be consistent and persistent. Respond in same fashion even when setting changes. Both parents respond same way. Use for at least 1-2 weeks before deciding something does not work.

## **10. Act, don't yak**

Don't pester, rely on your actions and consequences. The issue is not a lack of information.

## **11. Plan ahead for Problem situations**

If you can predict the problem, plan for how to manage the problem. Clear expectations, share the plan with your child, follow-through. Five-step plan: stop before entering site or encountering the problem; review with child 2-3 rules (brief), ask to repeat; set-up reward or incentive; explain punishment; follow the plan.

## **12. Keep a disability perspective**

Parents sometimes lose perspective and become frustrated; they may stoop to level of the child. Must remember 'you are the adult'; you must keep wits about you. Keep a psychological distance from the problem (pretend you're a stranger...); react in reasonable, rationale fashion.

## **13. Don't personalize your child's problems or disorder**

Stay calm, don't take it personally, keep it in perspective, regain your wits, and accept the reality of the situation.

## **14. Practice forgiveness**

Each day after problems are settled, let it go. Forgive your child, and yourself. Kids with ADHD can bring out the best, and the worst, in parents.

## **Managing Life with ADHD (Behavioral Plan)**

-Develop and work on enhancing the relationship. Put aside 'special time' with your child during which you'll involve in free-play. Ask no questions, and give no directives. Do not control the play. Narrate the play with enthusiasm to reflect your attention and interest.

-Show approval immediately for any behavior of which you want to see more.

-Be specific in telling your child what you like about their behavior.

-Never give a back-handed compliment ("I like the way you clean-up your toys, I sure wish you'd do that every day...")

-Are you the best or worst supervisor that you've ever had, with your child? Think about past supervisors you've had, and how much do you behave, with your child, the way you were treated?

-Give immediate feedback about compliance, and praise your child. Be specific. Give repeated praise while they're completing the task.

-Reward big-time if task is done spontaneously.

-Use 'fetch-commands', i.e. ask your child to complete an easy task such as "please hand me that bowl..." Use these commands frequently over a brief 15 minute period of time. Give lots of specific praise. This builds momentum and gets your child accustomed to following directives and receiving praise.

-Give more effective commands. You can say 'please', but do not give a directive posed as a question or favor. Never give a command you don't plan on following-up with consequences. Give only one specific instruction at a time, and break-down into smaller steps if necessary. Get eye contact and reduce distractions.

-Make up *chore cards* for each job. List the chore on the card, the steps to complete the task, and amount of time needed for the chore, then start the timer ("see if you can beat the clock..."). Can give a warning that chore is forthcoming, then give the chore-card a few minutes later.

-Teach your child not to interrupt your activities. Prior to the event during which you may be interrupted, give clear directive of expectations, give a structured fun task for the child, and praise throughout. Fade praise over time. Special praise at the end of the event. Can include phone conversation, preparing a meal, having a conversation...

-Home token system. Provides opportunity to provide tangible reinforcement that can be cashed-in for privileges. It can then cost tokens to play video-games, watch TV, going to movie... (list the privileges and post). Make a list of chores and tasks and how much each will earn. Be mindful of the cost for privileges (if cost too much, then system loses appeal, but don't make it too easy). Make a token-bank to store the chips/tokens. One to three chips can be earned for most tasks. Use a point system for older kids.

-Punish misbehavior constructively. Do not use criticism or excessive punishment. Do not pester or become overly emotional. Children with ADHD have lack of understanding of time and they live in the 'now', not in the future. Consequently, they don't appreciate how their behavior can impact the future of any relationship. Using the token system, you can 'fine' child by taking away tokens. However, don't begin taking-away tokens until after using the token system for a few weeks. Do not fine too harshly, or system will lose effectiveness. Use 3/1 rule; fine once for every 3 allocations of tokens.

-Time-out. Remove to quiet area. Pick one or two behaviors. Do not give attention when in T.O. Give command, count to 3, if directive not completed, give one warning for time-out, count again then to T.O. if still not complying. Use gentle physical prompting. When quiet (one minute per age) can be released if agree to carry-out what was initially refused. Praise upon completion of task. Token is only given if task is done upon initial request. Fine child if child leaves time-out. Time-out to room can be used.

-Expand use of time-out. Use time-out for a broader array of behaviors when first 1-2 targeted behaviors have improved.

-Public places. Keep your child busy and occupied with fun activities. Use these same methods in stores, other's homes, and other public places. Establish a plan. Use positive attention, praise, clear expectations, clear instruction, use of tokens and other incentives, regular specific praise throughout the outing, use of time-out as needed. Punishment can be in public, or upon returning home. Find potential time-out area in the public place. Give tokens periodically throughout the trip with lavish praise.