

Hints and tips – managing behaviour

The following techniques can prove very helpful in managing behaviour and emotions associated with ADHD/ADD. Most of our children have difficulty with listening, don't think before they act, find organisational skills challenging, and have poor memory. In order for techniques to be effective, instructions therefore need to be simple and clearly communicated, without too many rules.

All children want attention, and they will gain this attention any way they can! It is important then to ensure that attention is given for the behaviour you want to see more of.

Praise

Children with ADHD/ADD receive negatives each day and by praising them, their confidence and self esteem will increase, and they will feel valued. You cannot praise too much! However, They need to know what they are being praised for.

Descriptive praise gives a clear message.

“Well done for doing your homework”, “Thank you for taking your dishes out” etc.

Praise for **being** as well as doing: “You are such fun to be with”, “You are very kind, sharing your toys with your brother” for example.

Be careful of the little **'but'**! “Well done for tidying your room, but you haven't emptied your bin” It is like giving the praise with one hand and taking it away with the other. Focus on the positive and end the statement before the 'but'. Similarly, “Thanks you for making your bed, now why can't you do it every morning?” Just give the praise for making the bed.

Special time

Time spent with our children is the most important investment we can make. It allows us to get to know them better, what their like and dislikes are, and makes them feel valued as a person. 10 minutes a day enjoying each others company can be invaluable.

Structure and Routine

Our children need to feel safe and secure. They need to know what is expected of them and what is coming next. This will prevent their day becoming confused and chaotic.

Rules

Rules help everyone feel safe and secure. Too many rules, however, will overwhelm those with ADHD/ADD. A few simple, very clear rules will support everyone. It is important to discuss and draw up the rules when everything is calm and if there is a challenge to the rules, clearly state the rule again and do not give in!

Choose your battles

Some things are better left....the mumbling under the breath or sitting on every seat on the bus, for example. Do these really matter in the big scheme of things? Our children have far more energy than us, and there will be bigger battles ahead – save the energy!

This is also important in terms of reducing escalation. Staying calm and gently repeating the command (over and over again if required) will help your child stay calm and avoid adding more tension.

Active Ignoring

This strategy can be used for those annoying, irritating behaviours – giving cheek, moaning, arguing, pestering, silly noises etc. The more attention given to a behaviour, the more likely that behaviour will be repeated. Some behaviours can therefore be reduced, if they are actively ignored.

However, If there is a risk of damage to the child or property, then this strategy is not appropriate.

How to use active ignoring:

- Explain once in a short sentence that you will listen when s/he speaks nicely.
- Don't make eye contact
- Say nothing.
- Do something else

Eventually the child/young person will learn that the behaviour you do not want to see does not get any attention.

Time to calm down

If escalation does occur, the need to calm down is paramount. Our children will not be able to calm down if we are continuing to engage with them, and it is impossible to reason with someone if they are in a heightened state of anxiety. It is important therefore that time and space is given to allow this calmness to occur. A space should be agreed with the child/young person in advance so that younger children are aware that when they are put in this space it is to calm down. Older children/teenagers may be able to take themselves off there to calm down themselves. This could be a certain room, a chair, a step etc. No attention should be given to the child/young person whilst they are in this space, so do not respond to calling out. Once they are calm, they can leave the designated space.

Rewards

There are many reward systems, all with their own merits that can be used for managing children and young people's behaviour. The important things to remember are that these rewards

- Do not set the child/young person up to not achieve
- Are consistent with the behaviour
- Should not include money
- Must never be taken away – they have been earned!
- Include short term and long term rewards

Punishments/Sanctions

If we physically punish children/young people, we lose the opportunity to teach. Sanctions must be separate from rewards, but as with rewards

- Should be consistent with behaviour
- Should be clearly stated
- Be an appropriate length of time – grounding for months is ineffective!

- Be consistent

Triggers

You might not think it – but no child or young person misbehaves 24 hours a day! There may be trigger points that influence what will happen. When you get to know and anticipate them, it makes it easier to avoid them.

Possible triggers:

- Time of day – getting ready for school/coming home from school/mealtimes/ expected time to come home at night.
- Place – restaurant/doctor's surgery/during phone calls.
- People – siblings/grandparents/neighbours/teacher.