

Parenting Teens with ADHD Made Simple

By: Mary Fowler (2002)

Despite what they may say, adolescents want parents in their lives and care about what you think. Input and boundaries provide security and fewer freedoms to master at one time. As teens mature, they must take on added responsibilities. Parents need to know when to let go and when to pull in the reins – a tall order made even more challenging by AD/HD.

Teens with AD/HD don't necessarily require different parenting, just more of it from skilled parents. Most parents can slip by with occasional sloppiness, but not with AD/HD in the picture.

Parenting by drowning

University of Massachusetts researchers identified four strategies parents fall into which may fuel ADHD behavior problems. Rather than using thoughtful, planned responses, the parents seem to drown in emotion. They take action based on their feelings at the moment, which may have nothing to do with the teen.

"All talk, no action" means parents yell, scream, argue, threaten, and use voice escalation as discipline, but do not follow through with consequences.

"Tit for tat" means the teen determines the parent's behavior. If the teen is civilized, then so is the parent. If the teen is bitchy, the parent gets ugly.

"Be nice and forget" grows out of tit for tat. Tired of getting into snarls, the parent disengages. This "whatever" attitude is a poor way to deal with important issues and conflicts.

"Russian roulette" means parents inconsistently use harsh or extreme discipline, mainly when they've had enough. Then, kaboom!

Mindful parenting

Nothing fancy, just 10 simple, time-honored, effective principles that get emotions out of the picture and the thinking, reasonable brain into it.

1. **The peace pilgrim:** Not too strict or too lenient. Use problem solving and negotiation to give everyone input and responsibility. Identify the problem, brainstorm solutions, write down who agrees to do what, try, evaluate, redesign as needed.
2. **A time to speak:** Let emotional over-ages soothe down before communicating. Listen more than you speak. Be brief and be gone.
3. **United we stand:** Both parents are on the same page and support other. (Stops manipulation and pitting parents against each other so the teen does what he or she pleases.)
4. **Plan ahead:** Know which issues matter, don't matter, and are non-negotiable. Discuss them and your expectations – and have preset consequences.
5. **I'll think about it:** four little words to tone down the "have to have an answer right away" mode.
6. **Eyes wide shut:** Homes become combat zones when parents get on the teen for everything. Ignore minor misbehaviors.
7. **Don't beat a dead horse:** If the teen has already paid handsomely by a natural consequence or by someone else's input (police, teacher, coach), ask yourself, "Is another consequence needed or am I just ticked and out for vengeance?"
8. **Roving eye:** Ignore "you don't trust me" protests. Monitoring is a parent's job. Expect flak. Don't take it to heart.
9. **Network:** To know what's going on in your teen's world, step into it. Go to events. Talk to other parents.
10. **Eyes light up:** When your teen walks through the door, do your bark or smile? Let your eyes fill with light and your words be loving and courteous. Let issues wait a moment.

About the author

Writer, educator and advocate Mary Fowler is author of *Maybe You Know My Kid*, and *Maybe You Know My Teen*. Visit ADDitude on the web at additudemag.com for more parenting principles.

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