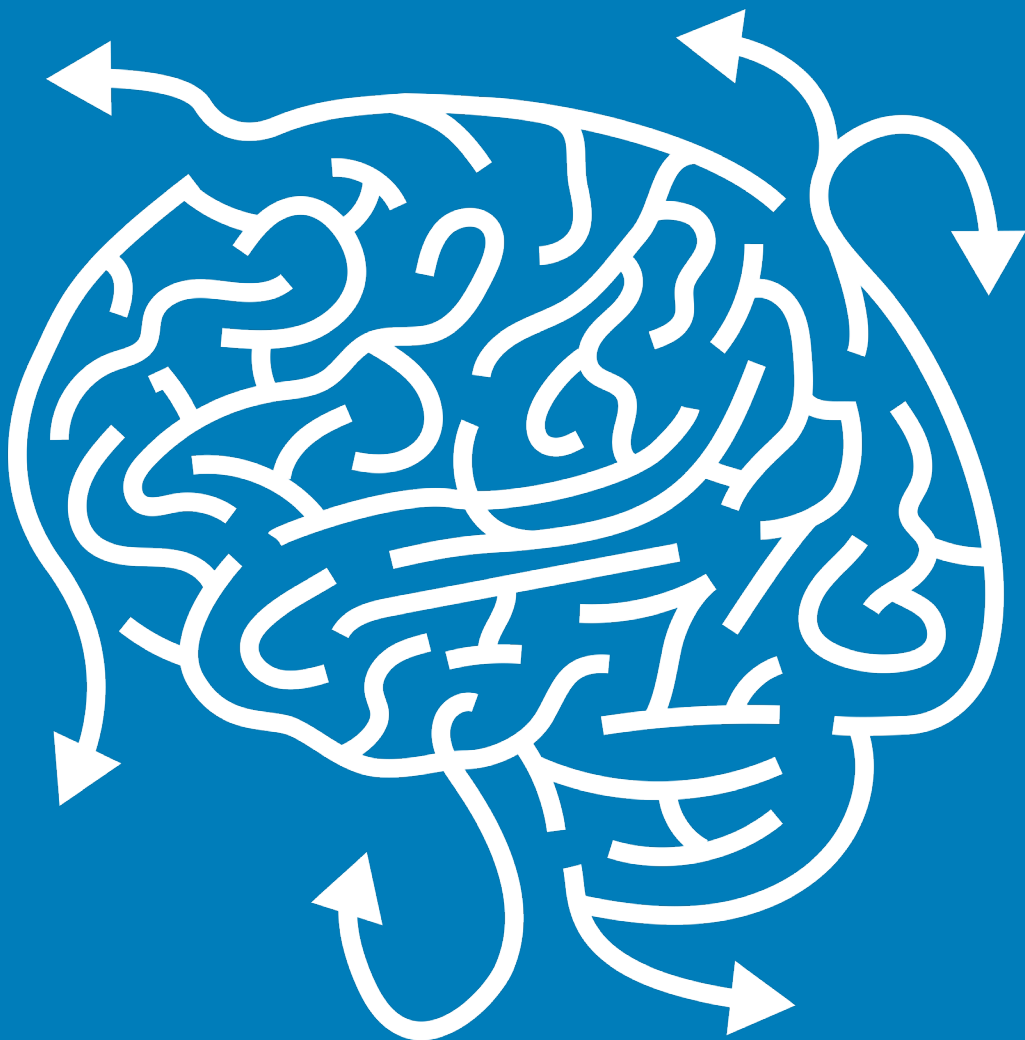


# ADHD

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**IN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS  
AND BEYOND**



**The Boston Children's Hospital Guide for  
ADHD in High School Students and Beyond**

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# ADHD and Teens: The Basics

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**For new readers, welcome! For readers of our earlier guides, welcome back!**

For some of you, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) may be a new diagnosis, and others of you may have had the diagnosis for some time.

The textbooks will tell you that adolescence is a time of dramatic physical, emotional and cognitive development. Teens with and without ADHD are coming into their own. They often have strong feelings and opinions and are prone to taking risks. Teens gradually achieve independence through trial-and-error learning.

Mistakes are a normal and caregivers can provide “guardrails” so that teens learn from their mistakes without getting into too much trouble. ADHD-related issues can complicate this normal developmental process, but as they say, knowledge is power. This guide is designed to help you and your teen navigate adolescence while taking care of your and your child’s health.

These sections are all about practicing “adulting” skills and building mastery while living with ADHD. We want teens and their caregivers to read this guide together, **but 1 section is written for teens specifically**. We strongly believe that caregivers stay in the picture but fade their support over time as teens become more independent and responsible. We call this “titrating responsibility” from caregivers to teens. To support this process, we encourage teens to review the teen section at the end of this guide, called “Picking Up the Baton: The Teen Guide for ADHD.”


To review, this guide promotes the “3 legs of a stool” approach to working with ADHD. Those legs are:

1. Behavioral and organizational strategies at home
2. Learning supports at school
3. Medication (often but not always)

No single “leg” is better than the other, and teens may need different combinations of these supports at different times in their lives.

# Let's get you re-oriented to what ADHD is all about.

ADHD can impact many areas of your teen's life, including 3 areas of behavior:



**1 Inattention:** having difficulties paying attention and following through with tasks or instructions, being disorganized and forgetful, and having poor attention to detail.

**2 Hyperactivity:** may include excessive energy levels, talkativeness, increased physical activity at inappropriate times and a lower ability to self-regulate and control behaviors like fidgeting and restlessness.

**3 Impulsivity:** acting before thinking, difficulty with self-control of emotions and behaviors, and difficulty with delayed gratification (wanting things now). Impulsivity can lead to making a bad choice on social media, an inappropriate comment in a school assembly or a fistfight on the playing field.

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that causes people to have trouble regulating their attention and behavior. ADHD is the most common neurodevelopmental disorder in childhood. It affects 6-12% of school-aged children.

## What are the presentations of ADHD?

Your child's ADHD symptoms may look different as your child changes and develops:



**Predominantly inattentive:** People with this kind of ADHD have at least 6/9\* inattentive symptoms and fewer hyperactive-impulsive ones. This can include difficulty starting tasks and trouble paying attention, especially when they're asked to focus on a less preferred activity for a longer time (like a history lecture or reading). Or, they may focus too much on rewarding activities, like video games, and have trouble transitioning away from these preferred activities.



**Predominantly hyperactive/impulsive:** People with this kind of ADHD have at least 6/9\* hyperactive/impulsive symptoms. They may be impulsive, very active, often fidget, talk a lot (or over people), grab things out of other people's hands and interrupt conversations. They are often impatient and have difficulty waiting. As they get older, teens might speak out of turn or say things without thinking of the consequences.



**Combined:** People with this kind of ADHD have both clinically significant inattentive and hyperactive/impulsive symptoms. This is the most common subtype of ADHD.

**Note:** ADHD symptoms commonly change across the lifespan. Specifically, many people report fewer hyperactive/impulsive symptoms and an increase in executive functioning (self-regulation and organizational) skills challenges as they become adults.

\* For ages 17+, it's 5 out of 9

## How is ADHD diagnosed?

- For a diagnosis of ADHD, symptoms exist before age 12, occur in 2 or more settings and these symptoms interfere with functioning. All people display hyperactive, impulsive and inattentive behaviors at times. But those with ADHD tend to show these symptoms to a higher degree, and it affects their day-to-day functioning.
- We often use rating scales and behavioral observations to assess ADHD symptoms as well as reports from parents and other adults working with your teen, teachers and counselors.
- ADHD is **not** diagnosed using blood tests, brain imaging or by tracking eye movements.

## What long-term impact can ADHD have on my teen?

People with ADHD often have many strengths that can shine in the right setting, including their creativity, resiliency and abundant energy. On the other hand, ADHD symptoms can significantly interfere with academic performance, friend and family relationships, extracurricular activities and independence. Functioning in these areas can be further affected by co-occurring conditions, such as learning disorders and anxiety. Though scary to think about, knowing these potential challenges and risk factors will help you identify, plan and minimize their impact (or even avoid problems altogether).

## The future... and a word on caregiver self-care

Although research shows that teens with ADHD are at higher risk for potentially serious consequences as they get older, it's **not** set in stone. Many go on to become happy and successful adults. There are many strengths to a neurodivergent mind. Also, recent research suggests that risk-taking can also be positive, such as a teen standing up for a person being bullied. One important protective factor in their wellbeing is you – the caregiver! Talk to your teen about risks and work together to problem-solve foreseeable challenges. As a caregiver, you play an influential role in your teen's life, and believe it or not, they still listen to you.

Raising teens can be challenging. Raising teens with ADHD can be even more challenging, as teens rely upon your executive functions to help plan, organize and manage their lives and behaviors. Taking time for yourself is essential. Giving yourself a break and pursuing your own interests and relationships will help you be an even better parent!

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# Behavior Management for Teens with ADHD

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Although teens want more independence, they still need parental supervision, scaffolding and guidance. They also benefit from continued support with navigating behavioral, social and emotional challenges. This is especially true for teens with ADHD who might struggle with feeling bored or overwhelmed by school or work, increased oppositional behaviors and rebelliousness, and/or lower self-esteem.

Below are suggestions to help your teen avoid or manage some of these challenges. The ultimate goal is to enhance your teenager's social and emotional well-being. You can use these strategies at home and/or with support from a therapist, teacher or physician.

## Labeled praise: Catch them being good

There's a good reason why we start this section highlighting the importance of positive attention. It's common for teens with ADHD to get frequent negative feedback and criticism for things like forgetting schoolwork or losing track of time. Yet this negative feedback does little to motivate a teen with ADHD. In fact, negative attention from adults can unintentionally reinforce problem behaviors. We also find that months or sometimes years of managing misbehavior can create a negative environment, in which the teen feels like they're constantly in trouble and the parent feels demoralized and heartbroken that they're constantly punishing their child.

Increasing the amount of positive attention you give to your teen helps in many ways.

1. Most of us enjoy getting attention for the good things we do. When a desirable behavior is acknowledged through labeled (specific) praise, it's more likely to happen again.
2. Giving teens praise and words of encouragement can be helpful reminders to start and follow through with tasks. Praise, in the form of encouragement, can boost their sense of accomplishment, especially on tasks that they don't like and/or are hard to do.
3. Last, and certainly not least, increasing positive strategies and positive attention can help to foster a positive caregiver-teen relationship.

Taking all of these benefits together, it's even more important for the adults in their life to pay attention to and acknowledge the things that they do well.

A parent's job is to correct misbehavior. Try to increase the amount of positive attention your child gets to strike a balance with the times when you must discipline your child.



## Tips for Labeled Praise

Praise your teen right after they do a desired/adaptive behavior (completing chores or working on academic tasks).

Be specific  
*("That's a great idea to write down your homework assignments").*

Provide praise in different ways. Teens may appreciate a nonverbal cue, such as a smile or written note.

Be enthusiastic and excited about their efforts.

Be consistent and unconditional.  
*("Nice job on your homework.")*  
Conditions, such as "Nice job, now if only you would..." neutralize the benefits of the praise by putting your teen on the defensive.

Keep your praise short  
*("Thanks for setting the table!").*

Be sincere and authentic with praise. Teens are keenly attuned to tone and are quick to react when they feel that they're being patronized.

After your teen gains new skills, begin to praise new challenges to encourage continued development.

Focus on your teen's effort, not just the outcome  
*("I'm impressed with your determination on this task!").*

## Positive phrasing

Try to use positive phrasing about what you *expect*, *want* or *appreciate* from your teen, rather than using corrections that draw attention to what you don't want them to do. For example, you can say something like, "I need you to finish clearing the table" instead of "Stop looking at your phone." Positive phrasing provides your teen with clear expectations, instead of simply the absence of a behavior, which can feel punitive and confusing.

## Rewards

Many people are motivated by rewards, whether they're social (like praise), tangible (items, money) or privileges (access to screens). What motivates your teen depends upon their preferences, so check with them about what they're interested in earning.

The **Premack principle** is another rewards-based strategy, in which a lesser preferred task is done before earning a more preferred one. For example, you might give your teen a few chores to do after school. When all the chores are done, they may earn their preferred activity, like screen time or time to be with friends.

People with ADHD often choose immediate rewards, and they struggle with delayed gratification, even if the later reward is bigger than the immediate one. A **token economy** or point system is a tool to help motivate your teen to wait for the larger reward associated with pursuing later goals.

A token economy gives someone a smaller reward sooner (often in the form of "points") that they "bank" towards a later, larger reward. Each "token" or "point" is a way for you to acknowledge, track and reward preferred behavior and helps teens feel a sense of accomplishment as they work towards their goal. For example, each time your teen completes chores or shows a desired behavior,

they can accrue points towards a preferred activity (like video game time). Or they can earn a small amount of money for each completed chore that they bank towards a larger purchase (like an outing with friends or a new video game).

Note: it's best to avoid taking away an earned reward, as it may increase frustration and reduce motivation to try next time.

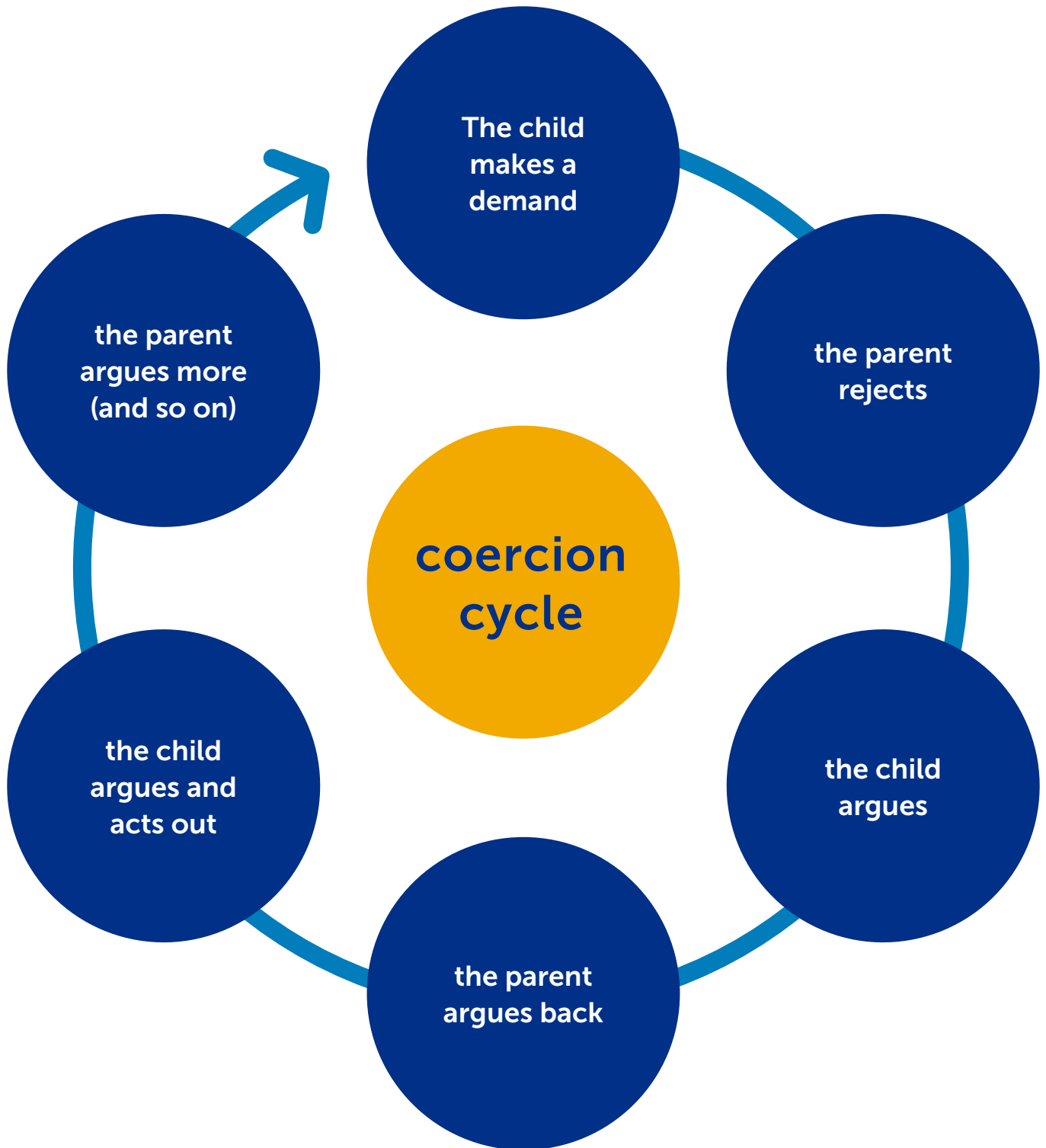
## Active ignoring or disengagement

Our brains have a negativity bias, which means that we attend to and remember negative things more often than positive ones. A sign that a behavior may be motivated by this negative attention is if the behavior increases when another person yells, scowls or sternly corrects. An example is the *coercion cycle* or *conflict cycle*, in which a child makes a demand - the parent rejects- the child argues - the parent argues back - the child argues and acts out - the parent argues more (and so on).

Ignoring conflict and coercion over time makes these behaviors happen less. The child makes a demand - the parent rejects - the child argues - the parent calmly reaffirms their decision and doesn't argue.

**If nobody is getting hurt**, mild misbehavior (like talking back) can be ignored. Realize, however, that the behavior may worsen when it's initially ignored before it gets better. This is called an **extinction burst**.

\*Note: Active ignoring is paired with selective attention (that is the "active part!"). Pay attention to and praise appropriate behaviors that follow. For example, after they calm down, say, "Thank you for doing your chores."



## What if these behaviors are unsafe?

Unsafe behaviors include physical aggression, verbal aggression, substance use, unsafe driving and risky sexual behaviors that put teens and others at risk. These behaviors **can't** be ignored and need you to respond.

Tips for managing challenging or defiant behaviors:

- Stay quiet, calm and neutral. If you need to talk, use a calm/neutral voice and keep statements short and to the point. Avoid yelling because this may escalate emotions and behaviors.
- If your teen is aggressive, wait to engage with them until they're calm. If you need to be near them, stand to their side. Standing face-to-face can be perceived as threatening and can increase aggressive behaviors.
- Be consistent. If you react some of the time and not others, your teen might escalate with the hope that they eventually achieve their desired outcome.
- When your teen is calm, compassionately talk to them about ways to problem-solve in the future. Let them know that you understand why they feel the way they do through validation. "I understand that you're angry that you're not allowed to drive for 2 weeks because you got a speeding ticket. I'm worried about your safety, which is why this is a house rule for driving. Let's brainstorm things that you can do differently the next time when you feel upset."
- Talk with a professional if you regularly have arguments that could escalate into an unsafe situation. This may be the sign of an underlying mental health issue, like depression.

### Tips

#### Redirect

Offer another activity for the teen to do instead.

*Example: Your teen is arguing with their father. Instead of asking the teen to stop, ask them to help you make dinner.*

#### Provide forced choice

Provide 2 or 3 options for them to choose from. This gives them some control in a decision.

*Example: Your teen is stalling about doing chores. Offer them a forced choice ("Do you want to clean your room or take out the trash first?").*

#### Replace the behavior

Replace the undesired behavior with something else.

*Example: Your teen is repeatedly tapping his fingers on his desk. Give him a fidget to keep his hands busy.*

## Natural and logical consequences

Research supports that positive behavior management strategies, including rewards and praise, are most helpful for motivating appropriate, desired behaviors. But discipline or **mild** punishment is sometimes necessary in response to challenging behaviors or if your teen is breaking a house rule. Note: Harsh discipline/punishment often negatively affects a teen's emotional wellbeing, can increase challenging behaviors and worsen the parent-teen relationship. Harsh discipline is **not** recommended.

Natural and logical consequences help teens be responsible for their actions and learn from their mistakes.

**Natural consequences** are the result of a teen's action or inaction. For example, if they forget to bring their favorite shirt to the laundry room, they can't wear their favorite shirt to school.

**Logical consequences** are when the parent provides a consequence in response to a teen's action/inaction. For example: if they break their phone, they do chores to make up for the cost of replacement.

### Tips for consequences/discipline:

- Meet with your teen and agree upon the consequence for repeated unwanted behaviors.
- At times, remind your teen of rules and rewards/consequence systems.
- If appropriate, offer a reminder and choice to change their behavior. For example, "If you don't clean your room, you won't be able to go out with your friends later today."
- Make consequences immediate, short and to the point. Even removing your child's phone for a few hours may be enough.
- The consequence should match the misbehavior. Having too many or extreme consequences for mild misbehavior may only have the opposite effect.
- It's important to link your teen's action with the consequence. Tell them why they're receiving the consequence in the moment.
- As parents, you have the choice whether to allow the natural consequence or not (don't allow unsafe natural consequences, such as forgetting coats in below freezing temperatures).
- Avoid getting into negotiations. These are usually a way to delay unwanted activities. You are in control of the rewards/consequence systems.
- A logical consequence can be considered in times when natural consequence is unsafe/unreasonable.
- Consider your teen's age, developmental level and skill level when deciding on an appropriate consequence.

## Problem-solving

Problem-solving is an effective tool to help teens:

- Make decisions
- Interrupt negative or problematic patterns
- Appropriately negotiate and come up with a compromise plan

### The steps to effective problem solving include:

1

#### Define the problem.



- › It's important to focus on 1 problem at a time.
- › You and your teen may disagree about the problem—that's OK! It's normal for everyone to have different perspectives. Give everyone time to share their perspective and their definition of the problem. Focus on "I" statements ("I want you to do your homework because I worry about you failing and repeating a grade").

2

#### Come up with solutions to the problem.



- › Be creative.
- › Be open and list any solutions you or your teen identify.
- › Ask your teen to think about how they'd advise a friend in the same situation.

3

#### Evaluate the solutions.



- › List of pros and cons for each solution.
- › You and your teen may find it helpful to consider hypothetical scenarios to think about the pros/cons and to evaluate possible effectiveness.

4

#### Select the best solution.



- › You both may need to negotiate if you can't agree. However, you will make the final decision.

5

#### Use the new solution and evaluate its effectiveness.

- › Give the plan some time, then see if the solution is working. You can always go back, revise the plan and/or consider other solutions if it's not working.

## Effective family communication

Parenting is hard, especially in the teen years. Teens want more independence but they can also make risky and impulsive decisions that can be unsafe. This is particularly the case for teens with ADHD. Keeping the lines of communication open may be helpful so that they know that you're a trusted person who they can reach out to if they need help.

### Here are some tips that you may find helpful:

#### Seize the moment.

- › It's normal for teens to not want to talk to their parents all the time (we all want privacy), so listen to them when they do!
- › Be present: When these opportunities occur, give your teen your undivided attention.

#### Actively listen.

- › Be attentive to what they say.
- › Paraphrasing what you hear, without adding anything to their comments, makes them feel heard and valued.
- › Bonus: Try to spend 10-15 minutes with your teen without asking them questions or giving commands. This unconditional "1-on-1" time is a powerful strategy for all ages to foster the parent-child relationship.

#### Use empathic and respectful language.

- › Use "I" statements to communicate what you think and feel, and encourage them to do the same.
- › Even if your teen's challenges seem trivial or unimportant to you, understand that these are real challenges for them. They may respond best with active listening and supportive problem-solving.

#### Stay calm during disagreements or conflict.

- › If needed, encourage time-outs in the middle of arguments, and regroup after everyone has calmed down.

#### Respect their privacy.

- › Be comfortable if your teen doesn't want to talk about certain topics. Unless you're concerned about their safety or serious consequences, don't force them to share or talk about things they want to keep private.

## Consistency

Everyone benefits from consistency, and this is especially true for individuals with ADHD. It's helpful to be consistent with behavior management strategies as much as possible. Inconsistency in rules and plans often makes it difficult for someone to know what to expect, what's rewarded and what they should do. So, pick your battles, meaning focus on a few behaviors you want to change. Targeting too many things at once will overwhelm you and overwhelm and confuse your teen.

It's helpful to be consistent with rules, routines and schedules. You can't control every situation, but there are ways to make the day more predictable. If you expect major changes in the schedules coming up, like a family vacation or a doctor's appointment, go over the changes ahead of time.

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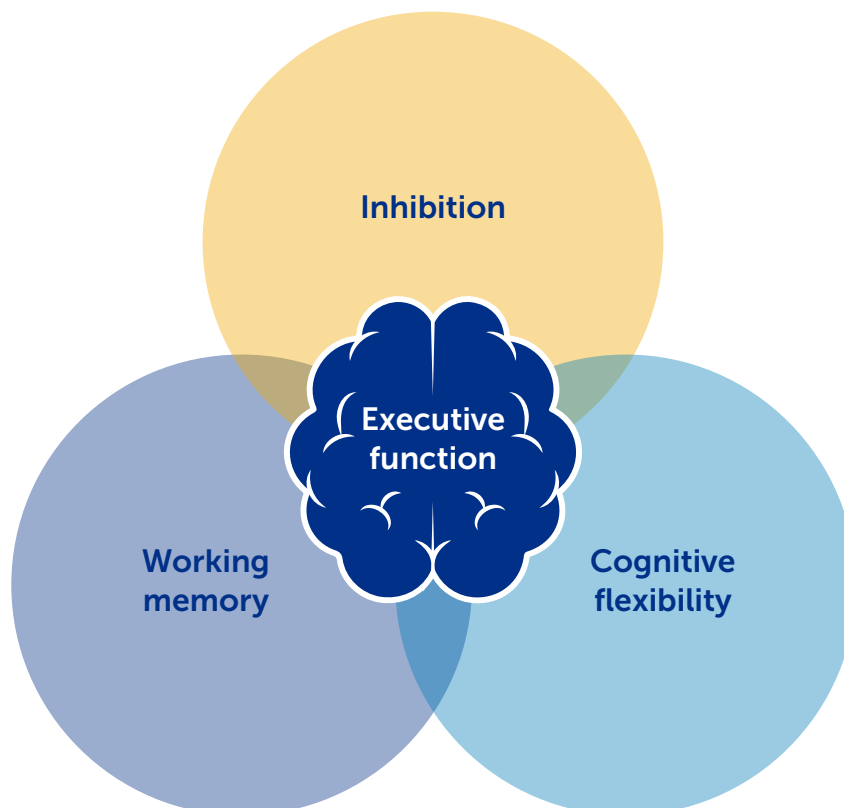


# Executive Functioning

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Executive functioning (EF) is the collection of skills that allows us to organize our thoughts, regulate our emotions, prioritize our goals, maintain our motivation and much more. EF is like the “boss” of the brain and helps to manage other brain (cognitive) functions. EF occurs primarily within the frontal lobe of the brain (specifically the prefrontal cortex) with connections to other brain regions to support goal-directed behavior. This brain region, along with corresponding structures, has its biggest “growth spurt” between adolescence and early adulthood. This promotes the development of EF skills that occurs in many teens. Most teens and young adults with ADHD experience challenges with at least 1 area of EF.

There are many models of EF. Though there are some differences between models, most include the following core functions: Inhibition, working memory and cognitive flexibility. Inhibition and working memory are among the first EFs to emerge, usually beginning around preschool. Cognitive flexibility skills mature later (school age to adolescence) and build upon the foundational skills of working memory and inhibition.



## Core Executive Functioning Skills

EF Skill	Definition	Associated Challenges
<b>Inhibition</b> (Cognitive/Mental and Behavioral Inhibition)	Ability to stop automatic or dominant responses and to control one's behaviors, emotions and thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overreacting to criticism and feedback</li> <li>Inappropriately blurting out comments or statement – may be perceived as disrespectful or “hot-headed,” especially when frustrated</li> <li>Susceptible to peer pressure without thinking of consequences</li> <li>Risky behavior, like reckless driving and substance use</li> <li>Easily distracted (difficulty blocking out distractions)</li> <li>Difficulty focusing on 1 project (often starts multiple projects, but does not complete them)</li> <li>Difficulty with re-learning or learning to complete tasks in a new way</li> </ul>
<b>Working Memory</b> (Visual and Verbal Working Memory)	Ability to remember/hold information in the mind to “work” with it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Easily forget multi-step directions</li> <li>Quickly forget what you just told them (verbal) or what they just read (visual)</li> <li>Difficulty taking class notes due to difficulties remembering what they said/saw to write it down on paper</li> <li>Difficulty keeping track of items</li> <li>Difficulty completing mental math (math calculations in their brain)</li> </ul>
<b>Cognitive Flexibility</b>	Ability to shift or alternate thinking between different concepts or ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficulty multitasking or switching between different tasks – may get frustrated or overwhelmed by “too many things at once”</li> <li>Difficulty adapting or changing their thinking to new situations</li> <li>Difficulty shifting between tasks (may get hyperfocused on something they like to do)</li> <li>Difficulty understanding and identifying multiple solutions to a problem (may think there is only “1 way”)</li> <li>Difficulty with perspective taking or understanding that another person may have different feelings and thoughts, which can lead to arguments or misunderstandings with peers and adults</li> </ul>

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## Skills Closely Associated with Executive Functioning

EF Skill	Definition	Associated Challenges
<b>Metacognition</b>	"Thinking about your thinking" or awareness of your thoughts	May lack insight into thoughts, feelings and behaviors (and how these are connected with one another)
<b>Self-Monitoring</b>	Awareness of your behaviors/actions, and whether your behaviors are effective for the current situation or activity ("reading the room" and adjusting behavior)	Not understanding the effect of your current behavior on other people (therefore unable to adjust behaviors to match the situation)
<b>Problem-Solving</b>	The ability to find solutions to new, difficult, or complex dilemmas or situations	Difficulties coming up with new solutions or strategies when old ones fail
<b>Organization</b>	Maintaining order, structure and neatness in one's surrounding and belongings	Messy bedroom/locker at school, often misplaces/loses belongings
<b>Initiation</b>	Starting tasks independently with enough time to get them done (not delay or procrastinate)	Often procrastinating on tasks, especially those that are non-preferred (school assignments, college essays); often needing reminders to start tasks
<b>Planning</b>	Preparing for future tasks and activities	Missing having necessary materials for a task (forgets to do laundry before a trip or forgets homework binder)
<b>Prioritization</b>	Focusing on important tasks first	Engaging in preferred activities (spending time with friends) at the expense of non-preferred (but important) tasks/responsibilities
<b>Time Management</b>	Accurately estimating the time needed to complete projects	Being late, losing track of time, handing assignments in late, staying up too late

## Other Related Skills

EF Skill	Definition	Associated Challenges
<b>Self-Regulation</b>	Ability to control your emotions and behaviors to achieve goals and to complete tasks	"Emotional impulsivity": quick to anger; "big reactions to small problems," saying hurtful things "in the heat of the moment" without meaning to
<b>Attention/Concentration</b>	Focusing and paying attention on the activity you need to complete  <i><b>Sustained attention:</b> Maintaining focus and ignoring distractions</i>	Easily distracted and has difficulties with focus

# Medication and Psychosocial Treatments for ADHD

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Treatment is a partnership between parents, teachers, clinicians... and your teen! It's a team approach to help your teen succeed. Professionals will make recommendations, but teens and their parents are the team captains.

## Medications:

- Medications used to treat ADHD fall into 2 groups: stimulants and non-stimulants. If medication is used, the decision is based on your teen's age and their symptoms.
- When deciding to begin a medication, your teen's clinician will talk to you and your teen about the goals of treatment, side effects and strategies for managing any side effects – including adjusting the medication plan if needed.
- You and your teen will be in regular communication about how medications are working.
- Some side effects can be mild, like a headache or low appetite. "Mild" implies that the side effects can be "worked around," for example, with high-calorie breakfasts and dinners to make up for not eating much at lunch.
- Other side effects may not be mild, like a change in mood. Side effects that negatively impact quality of life, like not being able to fall asleep or explosive mood swings when the medicine wears off, may need medication changes.



## Behavioral interventions:

**Study skills training** and **executive function coaching**: This includes direct instruction to learn and gain independence with organization, time management and planning.

Examples include: keeping a daily schedule, minimizing distractions, rewarding positive behavior, using charts and checklists and limiting choices. You may want to work with your teen's provider to identify ways that they can structure and scaffold supports at home. These strategies can be formalized through 504 plans or IEPs at your teen's school.

**Note:** Your teen may also be a good candidate for individual therapy, especially if they have co-existing symptoms, such as anxiety or depression. For more information on evidence-based individual therapy, please look at the below section, **Co-existing Conditions: Mood and Anxiety Symptoms**.

On the next page, we outline how treatment starts to shift from family-focused to individual-focused, and what you can expect at each developmental phase.

### For further reading:

AACAP Parents' Medication Guides. Available from: [https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Family\\_Resources/Parents\\_Medication\\_Guides.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Family_Resources/Parents_Medication_Guides.aspx). Accessed 10 August 2023.

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**Developmental Phase**

Preschool / Elementary

Upper Elementary / Middle School

**Behavioral Interventions**

- Mostly implemented by parents and teachers, with coach/professional support.
  - Strategies focus on attending to and rewarding desired behavior and selectively ignoring problem behaviors (so long as no one is getting hurt).
  - Two common evidence-based strategies for this age include token economies (“sticker charts”) and visual schedules.
  - Commonly referred to as: Parent/Caregiver Training in Behavior Management, Behavioral Parent Training or Parent Management Training
  - School-based supports are frequently called Positive Behavior Plans or Positive Behavioral Intervention Plans.
  - Regular exercise and staying active can help maintain focus and “burn off” extra energy at all ages.
- Behavior management and positive behavior plans continue, but target behaviors start to include executive functioning skills (organization, time management, planning)
  - Token economies, sticker charts and visual schedules can still be effective, with modifications based on developmental age and target behaviors.

**Medication**

The first line medication is frequently a stimulant medication, including methylphenidate (like Ritalin and Concerta) and amphetamines (like Adderall), that help children with ADHD to be more focused and less active. These medications typically last long enough to get through a school day, but “booster” doses and extended release options are available for homework and after-school activities. Common side effects include reduced appetite, trouble falling asleep, and sometimes headaches and GI upset. Talk to your child’s provider about these effects and how to best manage them.

Non-stimulant medications include alpha agonists, like guanfacine and clonidine, which are good for managing explosive behavior, and medicines like atomoxetine and Qelbree, which are in a similar class of medications to anti-depressants and can be helpful if stimulants aren’t effective.



High School



Young Adult

- At this age, responsibilities of treatment management shift from parents to teens.
- Parents continue to provide oversight and support.
- Executive function coaching can be particularly helpful at this age, often done using direct instruction at school or individual therapy.
- Motivational interviewing and cognitive-behavioral therapy may be beneficial to increase motivation and to address any co-occurring conditions that may be interfering with progress toward independence.
- At this age, interventions emphasize “fading support” to give teens the opportunity to practice new skills independently.

Teens should start to communicate directly with their providers about how the medications affect them. They should also start to take ownership over taking their medicine on a regular schedule.

- By this age, people become more independent.
- Start to allow your young adult to manage their time and schedules.
- Reward systems shift towards “self-reinforcement,” with the young adult rewarding themselves after completing demanding activities (like term papers) by scheduling preferred activities.
- Young adults are more responsible for their choices and actions, but some may need continued guidance to navigate new challenges, such as job skills.

We want young adults to be attuned to how the different medication classes affect their symptoms and which medications are the most effective for their needs.

# School Accommodations and Supports

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## High school

The high school years present opportunities for growth and maturity for your teen. Academic demands increase significantly. High school students are expected to tackle more challenging work and effectively manage their time while planning for life after graduation. These responsibilities can be particularly challenging for teens with ADHD.

Youth with ADHD benefit from getting help with organization and effective time management. It is important that parents and teachers help adolescents build these skills, then gradually provide less (or “fading”) support over time, allowing them to rely on their own skill set and initiative. By having open conversations with your teen about their goals and responsibilities, you can grow their independence and encourage them to be active participants in crafting their own future.

## High school accommodations

There is no “1 size fits all” education plan to help support students with ADHD. Supports needed vary across individuals and throughout school years, so don't be surprised if your child needs different services in high school compared to elementary school.

Federal laws exist to provide adequate assistance and to protect the rights of children with disabilities. These laws include the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. These laws are enacted in 504 plans and IEPs.

**Section 504** is a civil rights law that ensures that individuals with disabilities have equal access to an education. The child may receive “reasonable accommodations” and some modifications under the “Section 504 plan.”

[wrightsaw.com/law/ocr/sec504.guide.ocr.2016.pdf](https://www.wrightsaw.com/law/ocr/sec504.guide.ocr.2016.pdf)

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act** is a federal law that provides special education intervention to children whose disability impairs their educational performance. Schools are required to evaluate any child who may need special education and/or related services (such as speech therapy) at no cost to the family.

If the child is found eligible for special education services, then an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** is created. There are 13 disability categories for an IEP, and most children with ADHD fall into “(Other) Health Impairment.” However, some may also be found eligible under Emotional Disability or Learning Disability.

Every child with ADHD is different and may qualify for different educational supports, depending upon the degree of their impairment. The scope of service varies between 504 plans (in class, usually implying fairly minor scaffolding to access the same level and amount of work as one's peers) vs. IEPs (implying the need for services and support outside the classroom as well as substantial modification of the educational material/curriculum in quantity, degree of difficulty or both).



The goal of accommodations in the classroom should be to create an equal environment that encourages engagement and learning. The type, frequency and intensity of these supports can change over time. For adolescents, these accommodations can include, but are not limited to:



#### **Strategic seating to minimize distractions**

Seating them near the teacher, away from windows and the doorway.



#### **Clear directions**

Ensuring that all assignments are clear and that instructions are given verbally and visually (in diagrams or writing).



#### **Verbal check-ins and reminders**

Reviewing instructions with your teen before they complete an assignment to make sure that they understand what's being asked of them..



#### **Note-taking**

Teens may struggle to take comprehensive and accurate notes. Your teen may need support or specific instructions in note-taking strategies. They may also benefit from having note outlines, classroom notes or access to class recordings as they work toward the goal of independent note-taking.



#### **Organization tools**

Consider color-coded folders, a homework/assignment book and cultivating the habit of referring to assignments and important deadlines posted on the school's website.



#### **Reduce distractions**

It may be helpful for teens with ADHD to take tests in a room with minimal distractions.



#### **Structured study time**

Teens with ADHD often benefit from being assigned a structured study hall period, where they have access to organizational support for tracking and completing assignments.

Contact your teen's school if you're interested in finding out if they're eligible for a 504 plan or IEP. Whether or not they receive these formal supports, it's important for you to meet with your teen's school team to discuss the strategies to support your teen's academic well-being.

## Homework and study tips



### Tips

- Designate a space with minimal distractions where your teen can do homework and study. By using this area for work consistently, they will learn how to organize their space and their thoughts. The space should be comfortable and stocked with the supplies they need to finish their homework.
- A homework assignment book or planner may help.
- Set a regular time to review schoolwork with your teen every day. This may be done at home or at school with a parent or tutor.
- Break down large assignments into a series of smaller steps. Then systematically complete each step.
- People often learn best by repeatedly reviewing information across time. For this reason, divide the material to be covered into small chunks and review them over several days instead of hours.
- Schedule breaks into designated study time.
- Mnemonics, movement, writing or audiobooks may be helpful in reviewing and retaining assignments. Be flexible and find which approach works best.
- When creating schedules for homework and studying, make sure to create time for rest and exercise. Your teen should have at least 8–10 hours of sleep each night to help with growth and learning. Some teens need even more sleep. We also recommend regular physical activity.

## Planning for after high school

It's important to have an open discussion with your teen about their life goals after high school. Help your teen think about what jobs interest them, considering their strengths and aptitudes. There are also many different educational paths that support different careers. Some options are a 2 or 4-year college, vocational training, apprenticeships, an online school, taking a gap year or getting a job. You should work with your teen to make a decision about steps that will ultimately lead them to a fulfilling career. It's not unusual for non-traditional learners to take multiple steps toward their goal. An example is going from gap year to community college to a four-year college. What matters is success at every stage, not "doing what everyone else is doing" for its own sake. Planning well in advance is very important.

Some things to take into consideration are:

- **Testing accommodations.** It's important to document the accommodations that are currently being implemented in your teen's classroom. This will be needed to request accommodations for taking the SAT and ACT exams, and for college.  
[accommodations.collegeboard.org](https://accommodations.collegeboard.org)
- **Visit prospective postsecondary schools.** Explore whether certain institutions are able to fully support your teen's needs.
- **College accommodations:** Accommodations at college fall under the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment Acts (ADA or ADA AAA). Compared to IEPs where the school had to evaluate all students suspected of a disability, colleges don't need to do this. To get accommodations, your teen must disclose they have a disability and provide documentation of the disability. The college determines eligibility based on whether the disability substantially impairs functioning.

Parents can certainly help advocate and help their child, but your teen will also be more responsible for self-advocating in college (they will be over 18, after all).

[chadd.org/for-parents/college](https://chadd.org/for-parents/college)

- **Research job and internship options.** Finding out more about job opportunities, salaries and expectations is helpful in finding a good fit for your teen's short- and long-term goals.  
[careeronestop.org](https://careeronestop.org)
- **Vocational rehabilitation.**  
Your teen may qualify for job-related services and transition planning (career exploration, college planning, job training) through the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission. Speak with your teen's transition team or visit [mass.gov/vocational-rehabilitation](https://mass.gov/vocational-rehabilitation) to learn more information and how to apply for services.

### Additional Resources:

- CHADD: [chadd.org](https://chadd.org) including CHADD School Toolkit:  
[chadd.org/for-parents/adhd-and-school-a-toolkit-for-parents](https://chadd.org/for-parents/adhd-and-school-a-toolkit-for-parents)
- ADDITUDE: [additudemag.com](https://additudemag.com)
- Know your Rights: Students with ADHD:  
[ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-know-rights-201607-504.pdf](https://ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-know-rights-201607-504.pdf)

# Safety

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As teens gain independence, they may also engage in increased risk-taking behaviors. Although risky behaviors are a typical part of adolescent development, teens with ADHD are, on average, more prone to impulsive and sensation-seeking behaviors.

Keeping open lines of communication with your teen can be helpful to balance allowing them the increased independence they want, while also maintaining their safety and wellbeing. Below are specific aspects of teen safety: driving, substance use, co-existing conditions, self-harm, and suicide.

## Driving

Getting a permit to drive can be an exciting milestone for teens as it gives them a sense of freedom, independence and responsibility. For parents, having a new driver in the family can be exciting and worrisome at the same time. Teens with ADHD, in particular, are at an increased risk for unsafe driving behaviors due to challenges with attention, impulse control and planning. As such, they are more likely to have motor vehicle accidents and are more likely to have their driving licenses suspended or revoked. Research supports that stimulant medication can improve performance and reduce the risk for accidents in teen drivers with ADHD.

### Tools to help:

- Talk openly with your teen about the responsibilities and dangers of driving.
- Troubleshoot situations ahead of time. For example, talk to your teen about what they should do when they need to check for directions while driving.
- Set clear and concrete driving rules, such as use of a seatbelt, observing the speed limit, and minimizing distractions (no texting!). Set a zero-tolerance rule for substance use while driving.
- Encourage your teen to leave and arrive early to ensure that they don't feel rushed while driving.
- Set reasonable expectations, consequences and incentives. For example, your teen may get permission to drive in the evening if they go 6 months without a ticket. Or they lose driving privileges for breaking 1 of their driving rules.

## Substance use

People with ADHD are also at increased risk for substance use disorders. This increased risk seems to be related to ADHD symptoms, and not to stimulant medication. In fact, some research suggests that early stimulant medication treatment may reduce the risk of substance use. Similarly, early treatment of other co-occurring mental health concerns with behavioral or cognitive behavioral therapies has been shown to reduce the risk of substance use behaviors in individuals diagnosed with ADHD. Of the available medication options, short-acting stimulants are more likely to be misused by people with and without ADHD compared to extended-release formulas.

### Tools to help:

- Talk openly with your teen about substance use behaviors.
- Help your teen anticipate situations in which they may be confronted with substance use by peers and/or peer pressure.
- Set clear expectations about substance use expectations and potential consequences for substance use (loss of privileges).
- Stay in close contact with your teen to make sure they're safe, especially in situations when substance use by peers is possible (after school social gatherings).

## Co-existing conditions: Mood and anxiety symptoms

The teenage years are often associated with an increase in mood and anxiety symptoms, and this is particularly true for individuals diagnosed with ADHD, who experience higher rates of emotional difficulties and dysregulation. Co-existing mood and anxiety symptoms are often the result of untreated ADHD symptoms. For example, a teen who is struggling to complete school assignments due to inattention might start experiencing worry about academic performance. We encourage you as a caregiver to monitor your teen's emotional well-being closely and to consult with your child's pediatrician, school guidance counselor and/or a child psychologist if you have any concerns about your teen's mood or anxiety symptoms.

If your teen is diagnosed with a coexisting condition, such as depression or anxiety, they may benefit from **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)**. CBT methods have the most empirical support for helping children improve coping skills and reduce mood and anxiety symptoms. CBT approaches typically include home-based practice of skills learned in session and involve caregivers as partners in developing therapeutic goals and in assisting their children with home practice. Other evidence-based treatments include **Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)**, **Motivational Interviewing (MI)** and **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)**. Parent/caregiver training can also be beneficial to learn how to manage emotional/behavioral difficulties.

### Tools to help:

- Communicate your love and support to your teen.
- Talk openly with your teen about how they are feeling. Don't be afraid to ask them about their mood and worry.
- Potential signs of depression include sadness, withdrawal, irritability and a loss of interest in activities your teen used to enjoy.
- Potential signs of anxiety include frequent worry, somatic symptoms (headaches or stomach aches), avoiding new situations or experiences and irritability.
- Talk to a professional if you are unsure about your teen's well-being.

## Self-harm and suicide

Self-harm and suicide are serious mental health concerns that affect teens diagnosed with ADHD. Impulsivity, co-existing mental health conditions (depression and anxiety) and challenges in emotion regulation are associated with youth self-harm and suicidal behaviors. It's important that parents are aware of risk factors for self-harming and suicidal behaviors and take proactive steps to ensure the well-being and safety of their teen. We recommended that parents talk openly about their teen's well-being and provide a supportive environment in which teens feel heard and understood.



### Warning signs include:

- Thoughts about death and dying
- Substance use/abuse
- Anxiety
- Feeling hopeless
- Withdrawal

### Tools to help:

- Parents can seek help from mental health providers if there are concerns about a teen's self-harming or suicidal behaviors.
- Contact local or national hotlines (National Suicide Prevention Hotline: Call 988 ([988lifeline.org/current-events/the-lifeline-and-988](https://988lifeline.org/current-events/the-lifeline-and-988)) to consult with a trained mental health provider.
- If you have **immediate** safety concerns, bring your teen to your nearest emergency room.
- The Massachusetts Behavioral Helpline is also a resource for families who live within the state and are in need of crisis support:  
[masshelpline.com](https://masshelpline.com)  
833-772-2445

### Safety Strategies:

- Keep medication in a consistent spot at home, out of reach of younger siblings.
- Teach your teen to take ownership of medication by encouraging them to speak directly with the doctor during appointments, knowing the medication dose, being aware of side effects, etc.
- Educate your teen about medication diversion, including its serious health and legal consequences (“sharing with a friend is considered drug diversion in the eyes of the law, and someone can be seriously hurt”).
- Practice what to say to peers/friends who request your teen’s medications.
- Consider a behavioral “contract” with your teen about taking medications as prescribed, not sharing/selling them, etc.
- Create safe space to discuss medication use and misuse.

### Medication use and misuse

As teens get older, they should take increasing responsibility for their medication. Parents and caregivers can help support this transition into more independence using these tools and safety strategies.

A small number of people with ADHD may feel pressured to sell (or divert) their prescription medicines to their friends. Reasons often include to stay awake longer to study, weight loss or partying. Misusing this medication is often done in the context of a substance use disorder. We recommend that teens be educated on responsible management of their medication and the risks of selling it to their nonprescribed peers.

### Tools to help:

- Educate your teen about ADHD medication with the help of their prescribing physician. For example, they should learn the name(s) of their medications and when and who to call to get refills.
- Have a discussion with your teen about responsible use of medication, including the risks associated with misuse of medication and the serious consequences associated with giving/selling their medications to peers.
- Encourage your teen to ask questions or raise concerns about (a) potential changes in symptoms, (b) symptoms that need to be managed and (c) side effects.
- Create a reminder system. Place a pill box with days of the week in a common area. Set an alarm on their phone. Use medication reminder apps (MediSafe Free Pill Reminder, Rx and Medication Tracker (medisafe.com). Have them wear watch with alarms (Watchminder)\*

*\*Maitland, 2018: ADDitude Magazine*



# Healthy Habits: Sleep, Nutrition and Exercise

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Having a regular bedtime routine, eating a healthy diet and exercising regularly are good for executive functioning, brain development and overall health.

## Sleep hygiene:

Sleep hygiene includes routines and behaviors that help promote good sleep.

- Have a set bedtime for your adolescent. Your teen should go to bed and wake up at the same time on school nights and on weekends. Try to encourage them not to sleep in on the weekends, as maintaining a consistent bedtime will help them fall asleep each night and feel rested each day.
- Encourage your adolescent to use their bed only for sleeping or quiet activities before bed, like reading.
- Avoid using electronic devices (TVs, laptops, smartphones) for at least 1 hour before bedtime. Keep these devices out of the bedroom. Children can easily develop the bad habit of using social media after bedtime or “needing” the TV to fall asleep. The blue light from these devices affects the body’s natural ability to wind down and fall asleep. It’s also *much* harder to control your teen’s media use if the devices are in the bedroom!
- Limit caffeine during the day and avoid it close to bedtime. This includes caffeinated sodas, energy drinks, coffee and tea. Caffeine has a 12-hour half-life, and it’s generally recommended that people don’t have it after 12 pm to promote healthy sleep.
- Encourage physical activity and regular exercise, especially outdoor activities, but not right before bedtime.

Talk with your teen’s clinician if they continue to have problems sleeping, particularly if you suspect it is related to their prescription stimulant. Other conditions like periodic limb movement disorder can be associated with ADHD and can affect your teen’s sleep. Treating both conditions can improve their overall sleep quality – and their ability to focus and self-regulate.

## Sleep Tips:

- Sleep plays an important role in your teen’s development, behavior and health.
- Recommended sleep time for adolescents (ages 13–18) is 8–10 hours a night. But many adolescents do not get enough sleep, and about 11% of teens have difficulty falling asleep.
- Children with ADHD are at increased risk of having a variety of sleep problems compared to typical peers. Use of stimulants to treat ADHD can also affect your teen’s ability to fall asleep.
- Poor sleep can negatively affect focus, concentration and memory consolidation, which can lead to poor school performance and emotional/behavioral control difficulties.

## Appetite and ADHD medications

- A common side effect of stimulant medications to treat ADHD is a decrease in appetite. Some children may also have some stomach pains. These side effects happen when the medication is active. For these reasons, your teen may not be as hungry when their medication is at its peak effectiveness, which is generally midday around lunchtime. Their appetite will probably return as the medication wears off in the afternoon/evening.
- We recommend having your teen eat a calorie-dense breakfast in the morning before they take their medication. Even if they are less hungry or perhaps rushed to get out the door in the morning, they may enjoy something fast, like trail mix, a breakfast burrito or a smoothie with yogurt.
- If your teen isn't hungry at lunch, you can give nutritious, calorie-dense foods, like nut butters, avocados, hard boiled eggs, dried fruit or cheese. Eating even a small amount of these foods can give them healthy energy to move through their day.
- If your teen eats less at lunch but then gets hungry in the evening, consider giving an extra serving of dinner or a healthy evening snack.
- Most children and teens will continue to take in the same number of calories even if they're at different times during the day. Your teen's doctor will monitor their growth and you can talk about it together at follow up visits.

## Elimination diets

- While some children may have true allergies or sensitivities to foods and food dyes, most children (with or without ADHD) do not.
- Elimination diets are designed to address food intolerances and sensitivities and include gluten-free, casein-free, dye-free and other restrictive dietary plans. Elimination diets are unlikely to improve ADHD symptoms in the majority of children. Clinical guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics don't routinely advise elimination diets for ADHD treatment, because there's not clear evidence showing that they're effective.
- If the decision to try an elimination diet is being considered, your teen's doctor would collect detailed information about their symptoms. The diet should be supervised by your teen's health care provider and a dietician.
- All children, with or without ADHD, benefit from a healthful diet focused on whole grains, fruits and vegetables, with few processed foods. Lowering the amount of food additives, like food colorings and preservatives, is a good idea for all children because of health concerns about these products.





## Dietary supplements

- Omega-3 fatty acid or fish oil pills are commonly used supplements in the United States that may reduce inflammation and improve health outcomes for certain conditions. While they seem to be helpful for overall health and wellness, there's currently no clear evidence that shows *clinical benefits* from omega-3 supplements in improving outcomes for children and adolescents with ADHD. So, we don't generally recommend omega-3 or essential fatty acid supplements to treat ADHD.
- There's no evidence that megavitamins are beneficial in treating core symptoms of ADHD, and these can actually increase risk of serious adverse side effects.

## Exercise

There's emerging research suggesting that sustained aerobic exercise (20 minutes or more each day) helps manage ADHD symptoms in teens. Finding ways to increase opportunities for your teen to be active can help with inattention and hyperactivity.

### For further reading:

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# PICKING UP THE BATON



## THE TEEN GUIDE FOR ADHD IN HIGH SCHOOL AND BEYOND



# ADHD and me

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## Welcome teens!

For some of you, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) may be a new diagnosis, while others of you may have had the diagnosis for quite some time.

We wrote this section specifically for you – because this is your life, and you probably want to be involved in making your own decisions. Now that you're older, you probably want more independence. It's also expected that older kids start to learn skills necessary for being adults. However, sometimes ADHD symptoms can make "adulthood" really hard, such as focusing on schoolwork or remembering to do important things. There are ways to help make these tasks easier. This guide is here to help you "pick up the baton" from your parents and do more stuff on your own.

ADHD is one of the most common disorders in childhood, so you have probably heard a lot about ADHD already. Symptoms include inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity. It's also pretty common to have difficulties with "executive functioning," such as organization, time management and planning. Everyone with ADHD is different, so it can be helpful to get to know what ADHD means to you, including your symptoms, your strengths and those areas you need help or support.



# Treatment

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To help you become independent with your ADHD treatment, you should participate *as much as possible* in meetings and treatment discussions with your team. These meetings may or may not include IEP/504 plan meetings and medication appointments.

Going to these meetings will help you learn to manage your treatment. You may also want to meet privately with your clinician for at least part of your visit. Knowing about your medications will help you collaborate with your provider(s) and find a plan that works for you. Going to your school meetings will help you advocate for the support and services you might need. **Ask questions** during these meetings to make sure that your concerns are being addressed and that you understand your plan.

# Medication

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Medications can play an important role in your physical and mental health, and you should feel empowered to own this part of your life. The tools below can help you gain independence with your ADHD medications.

## Tools to help:

- Ask questions and learn about your ADHD medication when you're meeting with the physician who prescribes your medication. They're a great resource in helping you understand how your medications work, how to take them safely and how to recognize any side effects.
- Your clinician should help you find out whether your ADHD medication(s) are effectively reducing your ADHD symptoms. You might need to fill out a questionnaire to find out about your medication's effectiveness.
- Learn how and where to get your medication(s) refilled. Understand the potential risks of your medication(s).
- Your medications were prescribed for you, and you should be the only one taking them. Keep them safe. Sharing/giving out medications is not OK. Someone could get seriously hurt and you could get into serious trouble.
- Tell your parents or your provider if you're having changes in symptoms or new side effects.
- It can be hard to take medications consistently! Create a reminder system that works for you!
  - › Examples include: setting an alarm on your phone and using a medication reminder app, such as MediSafe Free Pill Reminder, Rx and Medication Tracker ([medisafe.com](https://www.medisafe.com)). Make sure to keep your medications in the same safe place where you can find them and where other people can't take them.

# Mental and behavioral health

Mental/behavioral health is an important part of your overall health. Here are some tools that could help keep you feeling better:

- **Pleasant activities:** Find activities or hobbies that make you feel happy and try to do them on a regular basis.
- **Mindfulness:** Mindfulness is about focusing your attention on the present moment and nonjudgmentally noticing your thoughts, feelings, sensations and surroundings. Practicing mindfulness can avoid impulsively reacting. Instead, it helps you take control and thoughtfully respond. Mindfulness can be used while walking, coloring/doodling or eating.
- **Self-rewards:** Consider ways that you can reward yourself for the hard things you do. Or think of ways to motivate yourself to do less preferred but necessary tasks. For example, meet up with a friend to study and get ice cream or play video games after doing homework.
- **Problem-solve with IDEAL:** It can be helpful to:
  - › Identify and **D**efine the problem, **E**valuate solutions (pros/cons), **A**ct on the best solution, then **L**ookback to see whether it helped.
- **Social support:** You aren't alone. Talk to a friend, parent, counselor or another trusted person to help you problem-solve. We often feel better when others listen to us.
- **Get help:** We all have bad days. But if you aren't feeling better after a few days or if you aren't reaching your goals, then therapy may help. Talk to your parent or doctor for help finding qualified therapists near you.



If you are noticing suicidal or self-harm thoughts, you can use these anonymous resources. You are worthy and deserve to get help.

- **Urgent/Emergency Help:** Call 911, go to the nearest emergency room, or call local crisis line
- **Tools:** [nowmattersnow.org](https://nowmattersnow.org)
- **National Suicide Prevention Hotline:** Call 988 ([988lifeline.org/current-events/the-lifeline-and-988](https://988lifeline.org/current-events/the-lifeline-and-988))
- **The Trevor Project:** [thetrevorproject.org](https://thetrevorproject.org)
- **Mass Behavioral Health:** 833-773-2445; [masshelpline.com](https://masshelpline.com)



# Effective communication

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Here are some tips that may help you be an effective communicator

## Actively listen.

- › Try your best to stay focused on what people say.
- › Paraphrasing (summarizing) what you hear, without adding anything to their comments, makes a person feel heard.
- › Ask people to repeat themselves if you need to. It's better to ask than to pretend!

## Use empathic and respectful language.

- › Use "I" statements to communicate what you think and feel, and encourage others to do the same.

## Stay calm during disagreements or conflict.

- › Encourage "time-outs" in the middle of arguments and regroup after people have calmed down.

# Homework and study strategies

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## Tips:

- Set a **regular time** to do homework. It's best to "get it out of the way" after school, so that you can rest and relax afterward instead of worrying about doing work before bedtime.
- Cramming can be stressful. Most people actually learn better when they review new information in smaller pieces across time. **Divide the material** you need to learn into small chunks (like each chapter or section) and review these chunks a few times (or more if needed) over several days.
- **Schedule breaks** into your designated study time.
- **Mnemonics** (memory aids), taking notes and/or using audiobooks may be helpful in reviewing and retaining school work. Be flexible and find which approach works best.
- Try **online flashcards** (such as Quizlet) to help with studying.
- When creating schedules for homework and studying, make sure to **create time for rest and exercise**. Sleep is so important for you to learn and remember all the material you are studying for that test, so get some zzz's!

# Organization, time management and planning

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- Create an **organizational system**. Decide where you want to keep things, such as designated folders for each class and/or pens all in the same cubby in your desk. If each thing has a “spot,” you are more likely to find it when you need it.
- Create a **daily visual schedule** that includes both work time and short “brain breaks” to help with attention. Timers can provide clear cues about how long you are working and taking breaks.
- Use a **calendar** that also includes whole-family events. Calendars can be a great way to see and keep track of schedules and activities.
- Keep a **to-do list** on a centrally placed whiteboard or an electronic to-do list (like GoogleTasks) to help you remember tasks. Check items off the list once you have completed them!
- **Apps** can be super helpful. For specific app recommendations, explore *ADDitude* magazine’s top organizational apps of the year.
- **Planners** (electronic or paper/pencil) are great systems to manage work and keep track of appointments.
- **Break down larger tasks** into smaller goals (step-by-step written checklists). Then, **backward plan** by linking those smaller steps into your planner in reverse order, starting with the due date. This gives you a good sense of when to start.
- **Create a homework space** that is free of distractions (no electronics or clutter).



# Education and career planning

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College accommodations fall under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which is different than high school. Each college is different, so before you start, learn about the supports. Don't wait until graduation! You've probably heard of the traditional 4-year college, but there are many other options, including vocational training, apprenticeships, an online school, taking a gap year or getting a job. It's important that you find and follow the path that helps you build a happy and successful life.



## Research your options

Finding out more about job opportunities, salaries and expectations is helpful in finding a good fit that meets your short- and long-term goals. Talk to people in different careers. Think about unpaid jobs, volunteer opportunities or even job shadowing to get more "hands-on" experience. Career counselors and vocational rehabilitation counselors (see below) can also be helpful. You can also take online interest inventories and discover other careers at: [careeronestop.org](https://www.careeronestop.org)



## Vocational rehabilitation

You may qualify for job-related services and transition planning (career exploration, college planning, job training) through the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission. Speak with your school transition team or visit [mass.gov/vocational-rehabilitation](https://www.mass.gov/vocational-rehabilitation) to learn more information and how to apply for services.



## Testing accommodations

If you're thinking about taking the SATs or other standardized tests, you need to apply for accommodations. Start early! Find out more about steps to take at: [accommodations.collegeboard.org](https://www.collegeboard.org/accommodations)



## College accommodation

To get accommodations, you need to apply for them through the college's disability services office. Each school is different, so before you start college, learn about the supports available to students with ADHD. To apply, provide your 504 or IEP plan and recent psychological/neuropsychological testing to the college disability services office. They'll decide whether you are eligible for accommodations. Start early!

# “Adulting”

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There’s probably a lot more that you’ll be responsible for after you turn 18.

## Here are a few top tips to help you prepare:

- Think about the skills you need to live independently, such as doing laundry, paying bills, driving, using public transportation and buying groceries. It can help to learn these important life skills while you’re still living at home.
- Talk to your prescribing physician to find out who’ll be managing your medication while you’re at college or if you move away from home.
- Your caregiver(s) can certainly help you advocate when you are an adult, but you’ll need to sign a Release of Information for them to do this. You’ll also be more responsible for advocating for yourself at college (you’ll be over age 18!).
- The Boston Children’s “Adulting with ADHD” Guide has additional information, so check it out if you’re interested!

# Self-advocacy

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A key part of self-advocacy is learning to communicate your needs effectively. Educate yourself about ADHD and be aware of your strengths and challenges.

## These strategies may be useful:

- Feel empowered to ask for help when you need it. Nobody is perfect!
- Figure out whom you can talk to at school (and outside of school) to help you.
- Brainstorm questions that you can ask a specific provider (like a guidance counselor).
- Role-play with friends or parents for how you’ll advocate for yourself.
- Set up meetings with school providers (such as teachers, coaches, counselors).
- Learn about your 504 or IEP plan if you have one.
- Participate in your 504 plan or IEP meetings. You could go to the entire meeting or join for part of it. Let your team know what’s going well for you and what other kinds of support you might need.



# Healthy habits

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Adopting a healthy lifestyle can positively affect your mood, energy, and attention.



## Restorative sleep

Getting good quality sleep helps with so much – like having energy, mood and attention/focus throughout the day.



## Exercise and physical activity

Exercise can help with attention and mental health. When you are having a hard time focusing on a task, consider taking a movement break. Exercise is also a great mood booster that can help take your mind off stress and release “happy” chemicals in your brain.



## Follow natural rhythms

Most of us have set times in the day or night when we function best and are most productive. Find out when your peak energy and low points are. Try to schedule your work and rest around those times.



## Nutrition

Stay fueled and hydrated with water and wholesome snacks. If stimulant medications make you less hungry during the day, try to make up for it with larger breakfasts and dinners.

# Internet safety

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Now that you have greater freedom, it's important that you consider the following ways to stay safe:

- Try to remain anonymous when online. Be very careful about who you send your private information to, including your full name, social security number, passwords, family member's names, credit card information, current location and addresses.
  - › Always check if you aren't sure!
- Remember that anything sent electronically can be saved – and leaked. If you wouldn't want this information public, then reconsider whether it's worth sending.
- Be careful about meeting up with virtual friends in real life. It's easy for a person to pretend to be anyone, so check with a parent before planning to talk/meet with someone.
- Check your mood before buying anything. Sometimes it's better to wait before impulse-buying something you really don't want.



**Additional resources:**

- CHADD: [chadd.org](https://chadd.org)
- ADDITUDE: [additudemag.com](https://additudemag.com)
- Department of Education: Know your Rights: [ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-know-rights-201607-504.pdf](https://ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-know-rights-201607-504.pdf)
- Go Ask Alice: ([goaskalice.columbia.edu](https://goaskalice.columbia.edu)), a website run by specialists at Columbia University

**Picking up the Baton  
The Teen Guide for ADHD in High School  
and Beyond**

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# ADHD in High School Students and Beyond

## *Family Education Guide*