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ADHD: LEARNING TO ACCEPT AND COMMUNICATE ACCEPTANCE TO YOUR CHILD WITH ADHD

“My daughter has ADHD. She is driving me crazy, arguing constantly and never listening.”

“My teenaged son has ADHD. He reminds me of his father and I am furious with him most of the time. He is late for everything, makes a mess, doesn't do his homework thoroughly and blows everything off.”

Parents begin our work feeling frustrated, irritated, angry and helpless. Here is what I advise:

SKILLS RELATED TO ACCEPTANCE AND COMMUNICATION

1. If you wish to eventually help your child change, start by accepting him and providing positivity.

Parents are mightily tempted to desperately try to “control” their children’s “bad,” irresponsible and dysregulated behavior. I notice that parents typically fail miserably when their goal is to control a child. When control is the parent’s aim, they and their child almost certainly end up in a self-perpetuating negative cycle with each other in which voices are raised, irritation is high, and each party feels the other is mad at or unhappy with the other. There is a better way. Repair your relationship with your child through a commitment to a positive set of approaches.

2. Learn to accept yourself and to accept your child as he or she is, including with their ADHD characteristics.

It's really, really difficult to accept one's child when that child is frustrating the hell out of you. It can be equally difficult to accept oneself, with all of the parts and aspects that you have learned to feel guilty about or ashamed of. You may wish to access my articles about "Learning How to Accept Yourself," and "Learning How to Accept Your Child," available through my website: www.drrichardformica.com.

3. Connect acceptance with communicating that acceptance effectively:

Wanting to accept your child is the first step. Accepting yourself is the second step. Noticing how hurtful communication does not convey acceptance is the third step. The fourth step is learning how to communicate lovingly and effectively. There are very specific ways to accomplish becoming an effective communicator. You may wish to access my article about "Effective Use of Communication Skills," available through my website: www.drrichardformica.com.

4. Learn the basic skills which comprise effective communication:

Basic communication skills must be integrated into your daily communications with your child. These skills are: active listening, paraphrasing, reflection of feeling, use of clarifying questions, use of "I-messages," and paying attention to body language, tone and timing. Accepting your child and communicating that acceptance skillfully and reliably is a wonderful way of re-introducing love and positivity in a very concrete manner. I have written extensively about how parents can apply these communication skills to foster empathy and to promote parent-child relationships in articles which are available on my website: www.drrichardformica.com.

5. Introduce Positive Behavioral Incentives as another method of creating positivity:

For a few weeks, make a concerted effort to provide positive incentives as part of a reward conditioning program. You are trying to reprogram your child in a positive way by becoming more positive yourself. Your positive incentives, delivered in response to positive

actions on your child's part, will increase your chances of success at getting more positive behavior from your child.

6. To introduce positive incentives, start with these two steps:

First, parents should make a point of giving verbal and non-verbal expression to any positive feeling they notice in themselves whenever their child does something which they like. *For example: "I notice you're being very helpful to your younger sister. Thanks."*

Second, they should discontinue yelling at or criticizing their ADHD child for their failures and misbehaviors, and instead begin asking their child to "do the positive opposite." Instead of saying: "*What are you thinking? It's 8 pm and you haven't even started your homework,*" I ask parents to convert their child's objectionable behavior into the positive action they want and request the child do this positive behavior. *For example: "I see it's getting quite late. Would you please go to your room and start your homework?"*

If the child complies, greet their turnaround with a personal, positive remark. *For example: "Thanks for going along with me. When you get your homework done early, bedtime becomes much more pleasant."*

7. Train yourself to "catch your child being good" and recognize your child when he/she turns from misbehavior to cooperation.

Use positive feedback, positive incentives, rewards and reinforcements whenever your child behaves well and whenever your child pivots away from their negative pattern and instead cooperatively engages in the positive behavior you requested. In place of angry blaming, convert the negative behavior of the child into the positive opposite you would like your child to engage in. Once you request the positive and the child complies, use any positive incentive you are comfortable giving: showing pleasure, showing appreciation, saying thanks, giving a hug.

8. Freely use external incentives.

Parents are often afraid that they are bribing their child with external things and incentives, but bribery involves an incentive for engaging in dishonorable behavior, whereas we are using positive incentives to help your child develop positive healthy habits, virtues, psychological capacities and character. In addition to using positive emotions and positive expressions as incentives, use external incentives. External incentives fall into three categories: first, items that are valued by your child, like a toy or game; second, privileges that are desired, like the privilege of watching a show on TV; and third, special experiences, like a trip to a ball game or museum.

9. What does the research on ADHD say about punishment and reward with ADHD kids?

Findings from research studies repeatedly show that punishments work poorly and often create negative, excessively disrupted emotional outbursts in children with ADHD. This is largely due to the fact that the dopamine systems of most children with ADHD do not work properly. Conversely, positive incentives, chosen wisely, usually work quite well.

10. Help your ADHD child succeed all day long in small ways:

Since ADHD children and teens are so often demoralized, I ask parents to help their child succeed in small ways all day long. I include and emphasize helping your child succeed in pleasing you. Whenever the child does so, follow their action up with demonstrating your pleasure, giving praise, and extending recognition.

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