

The following can prove very useful:

- Positive parenting – teaching children in the family to help each other, be independent, to take responsibility, share, protect and understand each other.
- Play
- Rules and sanctions
- Setting boundaries, positive discipline
- Praise and encouragement
- Talk about emotions, particularly anger and frustration, but also about love and happiness
- Be a good listener and allow children to have a voice
- Give affection freely
- Give unconditional love

Parenting courses for parents of children with additional needs are very helpful. The Parents-Plus programme has been devised by psychologist John Sharry (see his book, Parent Power) and is run in Kerry from time to time. Mixing with other parents of children with behaviour difficulties can be reassuring and informative.

Parents are best placed to influence their child's behaviour, by teaching new but equally satisfying ways, through rewards and encouragement, and through explanation of the right way

Believe in your child, support with love, nurturing and kindness, even when you have to be firm. Most importantly look after yourself as a parent. Treat yourself and be kind to yourself. David Pentecost (see book list) suggests that parents observe four golden rules:

1. Don't be hard on yourself – children with ADHD can make all parents feel that they are bad parents
2. Stick with it – improvement is slow, and sometimes you will think you are going backwards! Have patience and look for even the smallest of improvements
3. Be prepared to change your approach and attitude (avoid using blanket terms such as 'bold' for example)
4. Be consistent

1. Getting Started:

Don't try to change everything at once!

Choose one behaviour that is used regularly and really impacts on family life. An example might be throwing a tantrum at bedtime. Change your own and other members of the family's response – don't take the bait.

Instead teach your child what you expect of him or her, rather than try to stop the behaviour. You want to teach an alternative. Small changes may have to be made to the way the household is run to help the child.

Look for improvement and catch him/her being good.

Build on improvement.

Show approval of improvement. Make the child feel proud.

Offer realistic rewards that the child will want to earn, for example, staying up an extra half hour on Friday night if he/she goes to bed at the correct time during the rest of the week.

2. Additional information:

Leaflets, booklets, advice, suggested reading lists and articles to help parents and carers of children with ADHD, and other conditions that require behaviour management, are available from: SKDP Website www.southkerry.ie, from your local Family Resource Centre, and Public Health Nurse.

3. Recommended books:

- The ADHD Handbook -A Guide for Parents and Professionals www.jkp.com/catalogue/book.php/isbn/9781853027567
Alison Munden & Jon Arcelus, Paperback, ISBN: 978-1-85302-756-7
- ADHD - Living without Brakes www.jkp.com/catalogue/book.php/isbn/9781843108733
Martin L. Kutscher MD, Illustrated by Douglas Puder, M.D.
Hardback, ISBN: 978-1-84310-873-3
- Parenting the ADD Child - Can't Do? Won't Do? Practical Strategies for Managing Behaviour Problems in Children with ADD and ADHD www.jkp.com/catalogue/book.php/isbn/9781853028113
David Pentecost. Paperback, ISBN: 978-1-85302-811-3
- Parent Power, John Sharry, Paperback ISBN:0-470-85023-X

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Support for
**Parents of Children
with ADD and ADHD**





Child Wellbeing

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If you suspect your child may have Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, **take the first steps towards an assessment at an early stage.** Early intervention, particularly for social skills, is crucial.

Ensure that the assessment of the condition is carried out by an approved professional with experience of the condition. He or she should identify four basic steps to diagnosis:

1. Look for alarm signals
2. Exclude ADHD look-alikes (difficulties with hearing, sight for example)
3. Using objective pointers
4. Taking a detailed history of the child concerned into account.

The professional conducting the assessment should:

- Pay attention to what parents are saying – you know the child best
- Be able to realistically suggest resources available to the family

Practical support may involve the support and services of:

- Psychologists – educational, clinical
- Speech and language therapist
- Counsellor
- Paediatrician (medication)
- Occupational Therapist
- Family Social Worker

You will meet an educational psychologist in the school setting. It is his or her job to make an educational assessment, to recommend teaching methods and in-school supports, such as Resource teaching and the appointment of a Special Needs Assistant (SNA). The report from the educational psychologist is then used by the school to obtain resources.

Your child may have access to a clinical psychologist whose job it is to assist with managing behaviour and/or recommend a medication regime if that should be necessary. Medication should be considered only if educational and behavioural programmes have failed. For many families however, medication has been an important part of the treatment. Medication should not be used to control behaviour but to improve the symptoms of the ADHD. A paediatrician may be involved with a medication programme.

Counsellors and social workers often work with the whole family, sometimes in the home, to help them understand the child with ADHD in the family, and to give support towards family resilience and well-being. It is beneficial to have the same person involved with the family over a long period of time. It is important for parents to be honest and to trust. It is difficult to get these scarce resources and these professionals have the skills and experience to help and advise.

Your child may need a speech and language therapist to help him or her communicate effectively. Sometimes children with ADHD have difficulty putting together words in a meaningful way, or have problems understanding the jumble of words they hear.

Occupational therapists can train the child with ADHD to organise movements and become better co-ordinated. Occupational therapy can help with self-control and self-regulation, an important skill, particularly where children engage in dangerous activities.

What can parents do?

Read all you can about the condition. Individuals vary, but the one consistency is that children with ADHD are very hard work. Work together as a family, have a plan and stick to it. Raising a child with ADHD is very tiring and stressful. Share the workload, but be careful not to undermine each other by straying from the plan. Trust others to care for your children while you have a night out or a weekend away. Be sure to be specific about how difficulties must be handled.

Be positive and look for good behaviour. If you don't get it stay calm and describe what you want the child to do. Always use a soft voice which is also firm. Never yell. Praise and congratulate when they get it right.

Have confidence in yourself as a parent – be a 'good enough' parent. Perfect parents don't exist. Have confidence in your child. He will learn what you teach him to do if it is realistic and is done with kindness.

You don't have to do it all yourself – get respite care if you need it and qualify. The wider family will help, send him/her to summer camp, with an older sibling for security, enrol him/her in a crèche or nursery to learn to play with other children. Some families qualify for home help. If not, it might be possible to employ someone to help to take care of the basics in the home, to take off some of the pressure. Everyone should have 'jobs' around the house, including the child with ADHD.

Play with your child and teach him or her to play. Adult engagement in children's games gives you control, and allows you to teach the child with ADHD simple rules of turn-taking and sharing, as well as game play. Simple board games are very good for all ages. Older children can be taught to manage games for younger ones.

Ration television and computer games. Children with ADHD can become obsessive about some programmes and may try to emulate characters, sometimes putting themselves in danger. Children with ADHD can be over-stimulated and aggressive as a result of too much exposure to TV or video games. Active pastimes, games and sports are preferable.

Set household rules and routines. Children with ADHD do better in ordered households. Create and maintain routines for bedtimes, getting up and out, lunchboxes, mealtimes, homework and get everyone to stick to them. They will save your sanity and help you keep calm. Picture reminders of what to do when are useful and effective.

Don't worry if the child behaves better for some people. This is common among children with ADHD. It doesn't make you an ineffective person at all.

Controlling behaviour, tantrums, aggression are often used by children with ADHD to get what they want or avoid something. Such behaviour should not be seen as boldness, but a need to overcome anxiety. It is a tough process, but try to build up the child's self esteem and get him to see that he or she is loved, but you don't necessarily like the behaviour. Your job is to teach the acceptable way of doing things.