

Dads with ADHD- Building Loving Relationships with Your Children

Terry M. Dickson, M.D., FAAP
The Behavioral Medicine Clinic of NW Michigan
Traverse City, Michigan

Introduction

My personal story as an ADHD adult parenting my own
children....

Taking Care of Yourself

- Getting the right diagnosis
- Stages of acceptance- denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance
- Medication?
- Finding a coach
- Recognizing your strengths and weaknesses
- Sources of support- ADDA, CHADD, men's groups, family
- Finding a therapist- Are there other issues such as mood disorders, poor self-esteem, substance abuse, or compulsive behaviors?
- Exercise regularly and take time to recharge

Taking Care of Yourself

- Poor self-esteem usually develops early on in childhood- negative feedback from parents, teachers, and friends
- You may be your own worst critic
- You may have a difficult time handling criticism from others

Taking Care of Yourself

- You may have developed automatic thoughts which distort your emotions and experiences (filtering, controlling, etc.)
- You may have poorly developed social skills
- You may have problems with:
 - a. Time management
 - b. Organization skills
 - c. Procrastination
 - d. Blaming others when you fail to meet expectations
 - e. Impatience and/or impulsive behavior
 - f. Anger and frustration management

A Fathering Model

- What is the paradigm from which you base your understanding of relationships?
- What has your relationship with your own dad been like? (Good? Bad? Indifferent?)
- Do the images you carry of your father leave you feeling numb or do you have positive memories of your relationship with him?

A Fathering Model

- Your relationship with your own dad can greatly effect how you react to your children, particularly during those ADHD charged moments
- Unhealthy ways of relating often are genetically related and tend to be repeated generation after generation

Resolving a Poor Childhood Relationship with Your Father

- * Recognize that there is a problem
- Remember that your own father may have had a poor relationship with his father- try to see him in a new light
- Empathize and try to understand what may have influenced your father's behavior
- Assume that your dad once craved the love and respect of his children, even if he didn't know how to show it himself
- The one thing you can give your father that he may not be able to ask for is FORGIVENESS

Developing a New Fathering Style

- Know that you are significant and make a difference in your children's lives
- Be committed to replace old bad habits with better new ones- learn alternative behavioral skills
- Know the power of your presence in your children's lives (or the void in their lives by your absence)
- Your child needs your love, approval, encouragement, and acceptance
- It is NEVER too late to change and you can change from the inside out
Children need consistency and problems can occur in your relationship with them because of inconsistency related to ADHD traits.

This can affect:

1. Ongoing stability in intimacy and relationships within the family
2. Your being able to consistently accept and fulfill full responsibility of your fathering role
3. Building of trusting relationships with your children
4. Your ability to discipline effectively

Problems Related to ADHD which Interfere with Effective Fathering

Task activation and completion

- a. Procrastination- poor attention to detail, restlessness, and difficulty with planning and following through
- b. Inability to meet deadlines (time management)
- c. lack of goal setting- you need to set clear measurable goals for fathering (such as to always be there when they need me, be a good listener, be a positive role model)
- d. Misplaced priorities

Task-directed thinking is more difficult if you are distracted

- e. Lack of ability to keep promises- don't ever make a promise which you might not keep
- f. Lack of daily planning and organization (schedules) - get a day planner or palm pilot

Your Goals

- Set and achieve family goals
- Be goal-directed and help kids set goals
- Set goals, establish a plan, and monitor your progress
- Work as though all things depended on these goals
- Be goal-oriented

Setting Goals for Your Children

- Good self-esteem
- Contribute in positive ways to society
- Good citizens
- Hard workers
- Having a sense of spiritual leadership

Children Need to Know

- You love them unconditionally
- We can talk about everything
- We can trust each other

Connecting- Building a Network of Support

- Cultivate a network of support -relationships to help you in fathering-friends, coworkers, spouse, child's teachers, counselors, clergy
- Develop a sense of your personality style and your child's style and talents
- Along with the above, know your personal strengths
- Study your child's developmental stages as well as unique learning styles
- Use outside resources such as parenting classes, books and pamphlets

Communicating Life Skills and Principles

- These are areas which you probably have had difficulties with all through your life with ADHD
- Teach kids self-help skills you needed to learn
- Teach kids to think independently (asking questions, brainstorming solutions)
- Let your children chose between good options
- Help your children find their own answers

Building Bridges Through Communication

- Recognize that anger management and frustration control may be significant issues for you. Learn to manage your mood shifts
- Know what "pushes your button" and take steps to ward off reacting intensely
- Always communicate with a spirit of love
- Never try to talk something out if you feel "emotionally charged" or out of control
- Talk directly to your child
- Learn to be a good, effective listener
- Model working toward resolution to conflicts-model and demonstrate the skills you want to teach your kids.
- * Provide meaningful touch (hug, kiss, or pat on the back)

- Your spoken words must convey instruction, praise, and affirmation
- Express the high value you place on your child
- Be actively committed to help your child succeed
- Let your children learn from your experiences- both successes and failures- model not only your virtues also be frank about your faults

Building Bridges Through Communication

- Kids need to know the rules- appropriate and inappropriate behavior
- Kids need consistency in discipline
- Kids know what is fair
- Kids can also learn from experiencing the consequences of their behavior
- Teach appropriate social skills
- Always keep lines of communication open

Perceptions Kids Need

There are a number of perceptions you as a father with ADHD may have struggled with yourself. Kids need to know that they are:

- Significant
- Capable
- Have control over their environment
- * Capable of understanding themselves and others
- Able to be flexible and adapt
- Able to make effective judgments

Maximize The Moment

- Children spell love T-I-M-E
- The amount of time you need to spend with your children is difficult to answer but the time you spend will pay off as long as it is good quality time
- Kids can sense just how interested you are in what they are telling you when you interact with them
- Do one on one with each of your children weekly
- Make sure you also spend quality time as a couple and that your marriage is continually in a positive growth phase

Play with your kids-

- Helps to build their self-esteem
- Builds bridges

- Builds mutual respect
Make certain that when you play with your kids, your mind is NOT distracted with other thoughts and feelings which may interfere. Choose the right time and place

Maximize the Moment

- Use every opportunity to give praise, a thank you, or something inspirational
- You can place a post it note where child will find it- thank you or words of encouragement
- When you're on the road, drop a postcard or leave behind a hidden surprise which you can reveal while you're on the phone with your child. Plan a special moment to share together when you return

Specific Problems of Dads with ADHD Parenting ADHD Children

Sources of conflict-

- Increased difficulty with discipline
- Homework issues and disorganization
- Clash in communication because of mutual social skills and anger management deficits
- Inconsistent behavior in child and the adult with ADHD
- Tendency to get discouraged too easily
- Child's hyperactivity may be distracting to the parent with ADHD
- Dads with ADHD are not always getting the help they need- medication, coaching, etc.
- Marital problems secondary to Dad's ADHD symptoms can exacerbate the child's symptoms
- * Inability to set appropriate boundaries