

# 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Michael Golds Memorial AD/HD Conference

## PARENTING THE ADOLESCENT WITH AD/HD

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### I. Principles for Parenting the Adolescent with AD/HD/ ODD

- A. **Facilitate appropriate independence seeking.** Since becoming independent from the family is the primary developmental task of adolescence, and since AD/HD individuals need extra guidance and learning trials to acquire new behaviors, parents need to look for opportunities to gradually give their adolescent's more freedom in return for demonstrating responsibility. A parent might break the terminal independence response into small units, and shape each behavior, moving on to the next step after the teenager has demonstrated responsibility on the last step.
- B. **Maintain adequate structure and supervision.** Parents often ask when they can relax the increased structure which they have created to monitor their adolescent's academic performance and home behavior. The answer is that they need to *maintain structure and supervision for longer than they typically think they should*. AD/HD individuals need to be more closely monitored for all of their lives, but we expect them to learn to do some of their own monitoring and/or enlist the help of spouses and significant others in monitoring their actions by adulthood. Ideally, parents need to facilitate the transfer of monitoring to the adolescent throughout adolescence, but the reality is that most parents will continue the extra structure until the adolescent graduates high school, and in some cases, beyond that. Part of the structure involves *actively monitoring the adolescent's behavior* outside the home. Parents should always know the answer to four basic questions: (1) Who are your adolescents with? (2) Where are they? (3) What are they doing? (4) When will they be home. Parents should also develop clear up "street rules" or rules for how they expect their adolescents to conduct themselves in the community outside of the home.
- C. **Establish "the bottom line" rules for living in your home and enforce them consistently.** Regarding discipline, parents need to divide the world of issues into those which can be negotiated and those which cannot. There is an important distinction between issues which can be handled democratically and those which cannot. Each parent has a small set of bottom-line issues that relate to basic rules for living in civilized society, values, morality, and legality, which are not subject to negotiation. Such issues usually include drugs, alcohol, aspects of sexuality, religion, and perhaps several others. Each parent needs to clearly list and present to the teenager those issues that are non-negotiable. Then, they need to enforce the rules around these issues consistently and fairly, through the wise use of consequences.
- D. **Negotiate all of the other issues which are not bottom lines with your adolescent.** Parents need to involve their teenagers in decision making regarding the issues which can be negotiated. This is the single most important principle of parenting an adolescent, and is one of the primary methods of shaping responsible independence behaviors. Teenagers are more likely to comply with rules and regulations which they helped to create. Furthermore, they may have novel and creative perspectives on issues because of their youth and unique position in the family. Often, their perspectives lead them to suggest novel solutions. Problem solving training is the primary technique for involving adolescents in decision making. Parents need to remember, however, that involvement in decision making doesn't necessarily mean always being an equal partner with parents, and certainly does not mean dictating to parents. In some cases, parents may retain the ultimate veto over decisions. In other cases, adolescents may be equal partners with parents. Parents need to gradually increase the degree of involvement they give teenagers in decision making, through a shaping process.

- E. Use consequences wisely.** Parents need to become experts at behavior management in order to enforce their bottom-lines rules, monitor and structure effectively, and discipline consistently. Barkley has outlined several aspects of the effective use of consequences with children who have AD/HD:
1. Give the adolescent more immediate feedback and consequences.
  2. Give the adolescent more frequent feedback. AD/HD adolescents Use incentives before punishments
  3. Strive for consistency.
  4. Act, don't yak.
- F. Maintain good communication.** Parents need to make themselves available to listen when their adolescents wish to talk, but not to expect their adolescent to confide regularly in them. Parents and adolescents need to learn effective skills for listening to each other and expressing their ideas and feelings assertively but without putting down or hurting each other.
- G. Keep a disability perspective, and practice forgiveness.** This principle has to do with expectations and beliefs. Briefly, therapists need to help parents remember that their adolescents with AD/HD have a neurobiologically-based disability, and that there is a “can't do” as well as a “won't do” component to their unthinking actions. Thus, parents can keep from over-reacting with anger when their adolescents inevitably make mistakes. Part of keeping a disability perspective involves refraining from *personalizing the adolescent's problems or disorder*. Parents need to refrain blaming themselves or losing their personal sense of self-worth over their adolescent's problems. They also need to *practice forgiveness*. Parents need to forgive themselves for the mistakes they will inevitably make raising an AD/HD adolescent, and to forgive their adolescent for his/her mistakes. Adolescents should, however, be held accountable for their actions, and consequences should be administered as planned, but afterwards, parents should not “hold a grudge.”
- H. Focus on the positive.** When in the throes of conflict dealing with very oppositional adolescents, it is very difficult for parents to seriously think about being positive. However, it is important to remind parents to *be their adolescent's cheerleading squad*. AD/HD adolescents need unconditional positive regard from their parents and focused positive time with their parents. Follow-up studies have found that successful AD/HD adults say that the single most important thing during their adolescence was having at least one parent, or in some cases, an adult outside the family, who truly believed in their ability to succeed. AD/HD adolescents need their parents to believe in them, to applaud their every positive achievement, and to generally be their cheerleading squad. They also need their parents to spend focused time with them; busy parents may not have a great deal of focused time to give, but it is the quality rather than the quantity of focused time which really matters.

A second important aspect of focusing on the positive is for parents to *encourage their adolescent to build on his/her strengths*. Many AD/HD adolescents receive so much criticism that they actually begin to believe that they are lazy and unmotivated. They may be failing at school and in peer relationships, but most usually have at least one thing at which they excel. We need to teach parents to help the teenager identify those interests, hobbies, artistic pursuits, sports, and activities which are pockets of strength, and help them pursue and succeed at these pursuits.

## II. Acceptance of Medication

- A. Never force medication on an adolescent
- B. Provide accurate information
- C. Help adolescent evaluate advantages vs. disadvantages of medication- make a list of pros and cons; treat adolescent's objections seriously; and help adolescent decide whether advantages outweigh disadvantages.

- D. Point out potential advantages in driving, sports
- E. Find a doctor who knows how to talk to teenagers
- F. Eliminate noon dose with long-acting stimulants
- G. Make a “non-medication” contract for performance if teen totally refuses medication

**III. Non-Negotiable Rules-** short list of bottom line rules that have to be for living in a civilized world.

- A. House Rules- no drugs, no smoking, no alcohol, no violence, no destruction of property, treat people with respect, etc.
- B. Street Rules- no drugs, no alcohol, violence only for self defense, tell parents where you are going and check in with them.
- C. Monitoring and enforcing rules
  - 1. Very difficult. No simple approaches.
  - 2. In 2 parent families, work as a team.
  - 3. In 1 parent families, enlist others as supports
  - 4. Be consistent and highly structured.
  - 5. Post rules and review them often.
  - 6. Write specific behavioral contracts- privileges for responsibilities
  - 7. Establish consequences for compliance- telephone, car, allowance, groundings, work details, video games, etc.
  - 8. Project your authority.

**IV. The Negotiable Issues: Problem Solve Mutually**

- A. Rationale for problem solving- give and take. Each person gives his/her ideas, and together, you try to work at a compromise that everyone can live with.
- B. Steps of Problem-Solving- you hold a family meeting to practice these steps. You may be able to do this on you own, but in many cases, you will need a professional therapist to help get the process started.
  - 1. Problem definition-Each family member makes a clear, short, nonaccusatory statement of what is bothering him/her and why.
  - 2. Solution-Listing (brainstorming)- List as many ideas as possible; take turns listing ideas; anything goes- be creative; just because you say it, you don't have to do it; don't evaluate the ideas.
  - 3. Evaluation/ Decision Making
    - a. Family member take turns evaluating each idea
    - b. Will the idea solve my problem?
    - c. Will the idea solve the others' problems?
    - d. Is the idea practical?
    - e. Considering b-d, do I vote "+" or "-"?
    - f. Record your ratings in columns on paper next to your ideas
    - g. Evaluate all of the ideas on the list
    - h. Then, were there any rated "+" by everyone?
    - I. If yes, go ahead to implementation planning using these ideas.
    - j. If no, follow suggestions below:
  - 4. Resolving an Impasse by Splitting Down The Middle
    - a. Pick idea on which family came closest to consensus
    - b. Brainstorm alternatives which "bridge" the differences on this solution
    - c. Evaluate the compromises and try to reach a consensus
  - 5. Implementation Planning
    - a. Work out the implementation details
    - b. Who will do what, when, where, etc.
    - c. What will be the consequences for compliance vs. noncompliance?

- d. Who will monitor compliance?
- e. Write out a behavioral contract if needed
- f. Consequences may involve reinforcement/punishment
6. Put the solution into action and see how it goes
7. Re-negotiation (if needed): If solution failed, renegotiate after analyzing reasons for failure.

### V. Communicate assertively but respectfully

Review the following list of negative communication habits

Negatives	Positives
1. ___ Call each other names	Express anger without hurt
2. ___ Put each other down	"I am angry that you did ___"
3. ___ Interrupt each other	Take turns; keep it short.
4. ___ Criticize too much	Point out the good and bad.
5. ___ Get defensive	Listen, then calmly disagree
6. ___ Lecture	Tell it straight and short
7. ___ Look away from speaker	Make eye contact
8. ___ Slouch	Sit up, look attentive
9. ___ Talk in sarcastic tone	Talk in normal tone
10 ___ Get off the topic	Finish one topic, then go on
11 ___ Think the worse	Don't jump to conclusions
12 ___ Dredge up the past	Stick to the present
13 ___ Read others' mind	Ask others' opinions
14 ___ Command, Order	Request nicely
15 ___ Give the silent treatment	Say what's bothering you
16 ___ Make light of something	Take it seriously
17 ___ Deny you did it.	Admit you did it, or nicely explain you didn't
18 ___ Nag about small mistakes	Admit no one is perfect; Overlook small thing

1. Which bad habits does the family exhibit?
  2. What is the impact upon family relations?
  3. Which good habits do they exhibit?
- A. Pinpoint communication change goals
  - B. Rehearse positive alternative behaviors
  - C. Monitor several communication habits at a time, and give each other feedback throughout the week.
  - D. Repeat these steps as often as necessary to change patterns of communication.

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