

# The ADHD Babysitter's Guide



Hiring—and Keeping—  
Childcare You Can Trust



By Ellen Kingsley

A Publication of

**ADDITUDE**

LIVING WELL WITH **ATTENTION DEFICIT**

\$4.99

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A national nonprofit organization that serves individuals and their families who have been diagnosed with ADHD, CHADD provides all the resources you will need, including support groups, to make the right parenting and treatment decisions for your child.

[chadd.org](http://chadd.org)

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**Ellen Kingsley**, an award-winning journalist, founded *ADDitude* magazine in 1998, after her then five-year-old son was diagnosed with ADHD. She created a magazine that provides the ADD community with information, advice, and news that affects their daily lives. *ADDitude* maintains those high standards to this day.

# ADDITUDE

LIVING WELL WITH ATTENTION DEFICIT

A trusted source of advice and information for families touched by attention-deficit disorder—and a voice of inspiration to help people with ADHD find success at home, at school, and on the job.

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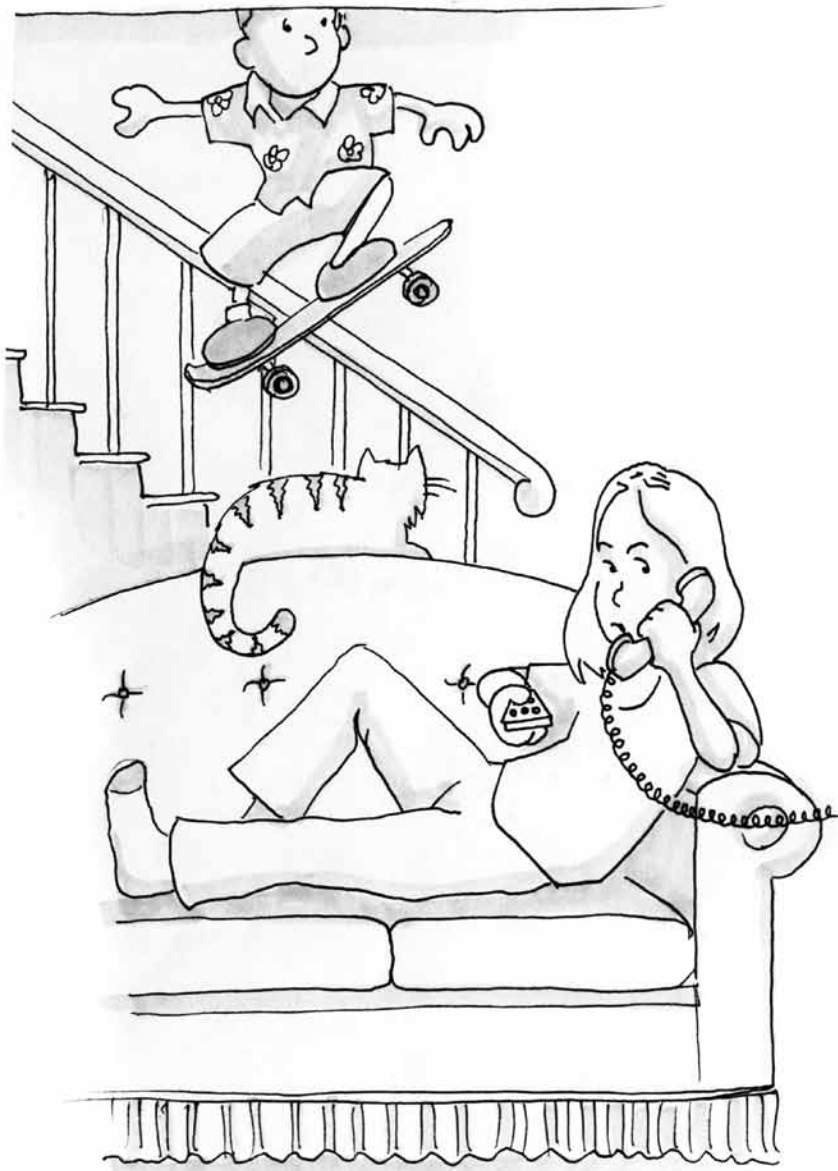
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# INTRODUCTION

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**W**hen our ADHD son was around five, my husband and I developed a unique intuition. If we came home on Saturday night and the babysitter was not standing in the driveway looking down the street for our car, we knew the evening had gone well. When you have a child with ADHD, you develop a sense about these things.

These are kids who aren't willfully bad or temperamental, but somehow seem to end up with more serious bruises, more frequent meltdowns, more damaging messes, and more exasperated babysitters than all the other neighborhood kids combined.

Even parents have trouble getting it right. Not long ago, my ADHD son, then 13, dove exuberantly onto my bed where his younger brother had made the sheets into a “tent.” We were soon on the way to the emergency room to stem the bleeding from his scalp caused by his collision with the wooden headboard.

While such occurrences are infrequent—thank goodness—bad things are more likely to happen when caretakers lack the skills to put out small fires before they burn out of control. This guide provides babysitters, nannies, grandparents, and other caretakers with the knowledge and tools they’ll need during their extended stay with your ADHD child.

## **CHECK REFERENCES...AND ATTITUDES**

It takes a mature, reasonable, and responsible person to do the job well. Older teenagers are fine if they are experienced, able to grasp the issues, and come with impeccable references. Interview candidates and their previous clients to make sure prospective babysitters:

- Will not be distracted from the job by personal phone calls, visitors, or entertainment
- Will respond rationally and competently in an emergency
- Are interested in spending time with and paying close attention to your child
- Are capable of handling and dispensing medication, and have no history of substance abuse
- Understand or are willing to learn about managing ADHD behaviors
- Have a calm disposition and will not be verbally or physically aggressive with your child
- Can respond to misbehavior in an evenhanded, dispassionate manner.

Avoid babysitters, including grandparents, who:

- Don’t “believe in” ADHD
- Think your child’s behavior is caused by lack of discipline or poor parenting
- Cannot or might not be continually vigilant
- Do not have basic first-aid skills
- Have short tempers or are easily irritated
- Have poor problem-solving skills
- Are closed-minded about new approaches to dealing with difficult behaviors
- Are uninterested in learning more about the disorder.

Once you’ve found a sitter who fits the bill, have him or her arrive early to study this guide, meet with your child before your leave, and review household rules and procedures.

## **BEFORE YOU LEAVE**

Plan ahead if your child takes medication. If possible, time the medication dosage so it won’t wear off at 8pm, leaving the sitter with a child who will become more impulsive, inattentive, and active. If you cannot avoid having the medication wear off, make sure your sitter understands the need for increased structure and supervision.

While there are no guarantees, we’re confident you’ll be better able to focus on your time away rather than on what might be going wrong at home.

# ADHD: A WORKING DEFINITION

**Y**ou've just signed on for a job that requires intelligence, skill, and training: babysitting for a child who has Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). It's about as different from babysitting kids without ADHD as cat fishing is from fly-fishing. To be successful, you have to know what you're doing.

For starters, let's talk about ADHD.

## ADHD SYMPTOMS

Brain disorders like ADHD, depression, and Tourette syndrome are frequently expressed as behavior. In general, kids who have ADHD have trouble paying attention, controlling their impulses, and sitting still. Sounds like all kids, right? But in kids with ADHD, these symptoms are so ever present and difficult to control that they interfere with their ability to function normally.

**ADHD kids can't control what they pay attention to.** Any stimulation can distract them from what they're doing. They may try hard to listen to the teacher, but the sound of someone turning pages diverts their attention. Often, they don't follow through on tasks because their minds wander to something else that's more stimulating. Other times, they miss part of the instructions for assignments and turn in the wrong work. You might ask an ADHD child to set the table, and find him, 10 minutes later, by the dish cabinet, eating a peanut butter sandwich.



**ADHD kids usually move around a lot.** They often behave as if “driven by a motor.” If they're not racing around the house, they're squirming in their dinner chairs or fidgeting at their desks. It's difficult for them to play quietly, and they sometimes talk too much.

**ADHD kids are impulsive.** They do and say a lot of things without considering the consequences. They don't have the “brakes” the rest of us have that prevent us from saying and doing the wrong things at the wrong times. They'll blurt out answers before you've had a chance to finish your question. They have trouble taking turns. They'll often butt in on conversations or games. Many are impatient, easily frustrated, and have a very short fuse. They may push others out of the way to get to something they want.

## WHAT IS ADHD?

**ADHD is** a brain-based disorder whose symptoms were described by doctors a century ago.

**ADHD is not** a “made up” disorder or a product of modern culture.

**ADHD is** an explanation for behavioral symptoms such as inattention and impulsivity.

**ADHD is not** an excuse for bad behavior.

**ADHD is** the cause of unintended negative behaviors and consequences.

**ADHD is not** a reflection of a child’s character.

**ADHD is** an obstacle to a child’s ability to understand and follow directions.

**ADHD is not** an indicator of a child’s intelligence and potential.

**ADHD is** usually life-long, but specific behavior management tools help people cope.

**ADHD is not** a condition that goes away if we show kids “who’s the boss.”

## WHY?

**ADHD kids don’t intentionally act this way.** Their brain biology influences their behavior. Researchers believe the culprits are three brain chemicals (neurotransmitters): dopamine, dopa, and norepinephrine. These neurotransmitters help regulate movement and behavior.

Self-control is a key behavior affected by ADHD. Over time, most of us learn to delay reward: do your homework, and you can watch TV; eat your vegetables, and you’ll get dessert; take turns, and you’ll have friends. As we grow older, these experiences build the capacity to inhibit inappropriate or impulsive behavior—hitting people, talking out of turn, crossing the street without looking both ways.

ADHD kids don’t develop these skills easily. They have trouble using past experiences to problem-solve; they may not foresee the consequences of their actions; they often “live in the now,” as one leading researcher describes it. Many can’t put on the brakes: They see it, they want it, they do it.

## WHAT HELPS

Combining medication with “behavioral intervention” is the best treatment for ADHD.

Medications can temporarily improve—but don’t permanently change—the imbalance of neurotransmitters that’s driving the ADHD behavior.

As helpful as medication is, it’s not 100 percent effective. That’s why adults need to teach ADHD children behaviors and social skills that come naturally to other kids.

But first, parents and caretakers need to learn the strategies and skills that work. While the standard “punishment” model is effective for most children, it doesn’t work for behaviors caused by ADHD. “Positive discipline,” which provides rewards for good behavior, is what works for ADHD kids.

The rest of this book describes several situations in which you may encounter ADHD behaviors. It also provides positive discipline tips and other advice for dealing with each one. You’ll also learn to distinguish which are ADHD behaviors, and which are willful misbehaviors, and how to respond effectively to both.

# QUICK TIPS EASY TRICKS

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**W**e've described some of the symptoms of ADHD, but what, exactly, do they mean? Just like children without ADHD, each child with the condition is different. Some may have problems following directions, while others do just fine. Some are very active, and others are quiet and compliant. However, since you're likely to encounter some of the behaviors described in this section, here are basic tips and tricks for your babysitting ADDventure.

**TIP!** Many children with ADHD are young for their age. Some may act three or four years younger than they actually are.

**TRICK** **Adjust your expectations.** The average eight-year-old boy may be capable of clearing the dinner dishes, but if you wouldn't give that responsibility to a five year old, don't give it to an eight-year-old with ADHD.

**TIP!** Many children with ADHD have trouble following multi-step directions. It's fine to tell most kids to go upstairs, change into their pajamas, brush their teeth, and get into bed with a book. If you gave those instructions to an ADHD child, she might go upstairs, get distracted, and forget to do the rest.

**TRICK** Give ADHD kids directions one step at a time.



**TIP!** Children with ADHD often have difficulty completing tasks. They may quit something in the middle because they're distracted by something more stimulating that "kidnaps" their attention.

**TRICK** If you've asked an ADHD child to rake the yard and you find him, 10 minutes later, playing with the dog, **don't yell of blame. Instead, gently remind** him to get back to the yard work. You may have to repeat this exercise several times. Remember, the child isn't forgetting the yard work on purpose.

**TIP!** Children with ADHD tend to lose things. If you've rented a video and let the child walk off with the box, don't expect him to be able to tell you where he put it when you're ready to leave.

**TRICK** Remember that it's your job to keep track of things.



- TIP!** Children with ADHD may say things they don't mean. Many are not able to hold their tongues when they're supposed to. An ADHD child may tell you to "get lost" or worse.
- TRICK** Don't overreact and don't let things escalate into a war of words. Imagine the things you'd say if you didn't have the capacity to keep yourself from saying them! Gently and without emotion, tell the child that his words are hurtful to you. Then, move on.
- TIP!** Some children with ADHD take a lot of risks. Since they don't foresee consequences very well, there may be little stopping him (except you) from jumping down a flight of stairs, climbing out the window onto the roof, or using a sharp knife to trim his hair.
- TRICK** Keep accidents from happening by restricting access to dangerous objects and areas, and by keeping the child involved in safe activities. Supervision is key.
- TIP!** Many children with ADHD seem rude because they interrupt, lose track of conversations, and fail to pay attention to others. This behavior is not intentional.
- TRICK** Let this and other minor misbehaviors slide. Pick your battles.
- TIP!** Children with ADHD can get unruly. They may think and act at warp speed and can't put the brakes on their behavior just because you tell them to. Reprimands and punishment will not likely produce the behavior you desire.
- TRICK** If "hyper" behavior starts to get out of hand, redirect the child to a more appropriate activity. For example, if Johnny is jumping wildly on the bed, redirect: "Let's put on some cool rap music and dance here on the carpet!"
- TIP!** Children with ADHD often need extra help understanding that behaviors have consequences. While it's important not to sweat the small stuff, don't let big things slide.
- TRICK** If a child's behavior becomes destructive or aggressive, impose a logical consequence immediately and don't wait until the parents come home. If they hit a sibling, no computer time for the rest of the night. If they throw a vase, no TV.

**Be proactive.** Children with ADHD respond best to "positive discipline," which keeps them motivated to do their best. *Use positive discipline to reduce the odds of a child misbehaving.* Page 14 provides a simple positive discipline plan, whether you're caring for an ADHD child for one hour, one day, or one week.

# STARTING OUT: SEPARATION ANXIETY

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**A**s a young child, my son had no fear of strangers. Everyone was his friend. In retrospect we realize that ADHD is what made him so bold; he was unable to think through the potential risks of being without Mom and Dad. Perhaps the ADHD child in your care fits this description.

More often, though, children with ADHD experience greater than average anxiety—including separation anxiety, the fear of being abandoned by parents and loved ones. Like my son, these children also have difficulty thinking things through; they can't apply their past experience to current situations. Even though they know that Mom and Dad always come home after going out on Saturday night, they may not be able to use this information to calm themselves.

While childhood separation anxiety is common, **children with ADHD have more difficulty regulating their emotions and reactions.**

While the average anxious child may have a five-minute tantrum after their parents leave, **the ADHD child may rant and rave all night.**

While average kids may cry and fuss when Mom and Dad go out, distracting them with a favorite video or book may take their blues away. An ADHD child, however, **may get “stuck” in a crying jag and become increasingly overwrought.**

**It takes planning, care, and compassion to help ADHD kids move beyond their separation anxiety.**

**Acknowledge and accept the child’s feelings.** Never scold, humiliate, or threaten a child who is overwhelmed by separation anxiety. Tell the child you know how it must feel to be apart from Mom and Dad, but provide reassurance that you are in charge and that nothing bad will happen. Children with ADHD have more difficulty controlling their world, and may not trust that babysitters know what to do. Hold the child, if necessary, to underscore your gentle but firm authority.

**Know when to call the parents.** If the child is crying and miserable all night, provide support but don’t panic. *The child needs to learn that he or she can live through the absence and that crying will not bring Mom and Dad home.* However, if the child becomes aggressive or destructive (biting, kicking, breaking objects), it’s time to call the parents. These behaviors can result in accidents and injuries. Let’s hope you’ll have avoided this scenario by taking steps to prevent it.

## SEPARATION ANXIETY TRICKS

- 1 If this is a first-time job, find out in advance what the child enjoys doing most: watching videos, playing Barbies, coloring, playing catch. Ask the parents to provide a “spending allowance” for an inexpensive toy or game. Rent a movie and bring some microwave popcorn. Bring a new Barbie outfit or some crayons. This is not bribery. Novelty is the best way to keep ADHD kids engaged in positive activities. Arriving with one of these items focuses the child’s attention away from the parents’ departure and can serve as the bridge you’ll need to build rapport.
- 2 Arrive early—at least half an hour before the parents are due to leave. (Even better if possible: Meet and play with the child the day before the job.) Get a proper introduction, ask the child for a house tour and to show you his or her favorite toys and games. Engage the child in play while the parents are still home. Children with ADHD can become fixated on activities they enjoy, and may be less likely to overreact when it’s time to say good-bye.
- 3 Keep good-byes simple. If you and the child are playing, the parental departure may go nearly unnoticed. However, if the child becomes upset, parents should never linger. Children worry more when they think their parents are worried. Parents need to say their good-byes and exit quickly and confidently.
- 4 Use a timer. Children with ADHD are frequently described as “time blind.” They have difficulty orienting themselves in time, and many can’t grasp exactly what a time frame means. It won’t help to tell an ADHD child that “Mom and Dad will return in just a few hours.” However you can use a timer to show how much time is left before the parents get home. Children with ADHD need concrete, visual input to understand abstract concepts such as time. The timer technique works better than a clock because it visually establishes an end point and makes a time frame tangible.



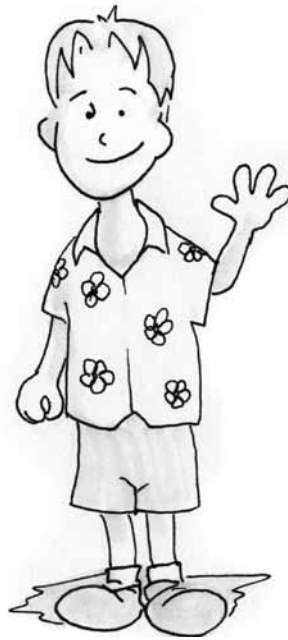
## ENCOURAGING POSITIVE BEHAVIOR

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**C**hildren with ADHD don't want to be bad. They don't enjoy alienating their peers and parents, and they don't want teachers to dislike them. They don't like getting yelled at, being left out, or punished. Yet that's how things often end up for them. Pretty soon, they begin to think of themselves as bad and plunge into a downward spiral.

Here are a few situations you might encounter:

- Ask an ADHD child to do something simple—like clean the mess in his room—and it never happens.
- Tell the child you expect him to sit quietly for dinner, and you watch the food fly across the table.
- Ask the child to finish his homework, and you find him playing computer games instead.
- Make an angry face to express your displeasure when he yells at his sister, and the ADHD child may not understand what you're trying to "say."
- Punish the child with a time-out, and he may stop the behavior temporarily, but it's not going to stop it in the future—even if the future is, say, 10 minutes from now.



**TIP!** These "bad" behaviors are not willful; they're an expression of ADHD.

ADHD is a disorder of self-control. Many ADHD children do not have the ability to internally motivate themselves if they don't get immediate, positive feedback. They may lack the foresight to control their behavior with future consequences in mind. They live in the moment.

As a result, some ADHD children cannot easily stick with tasks that don't have an immediate reward built in. That's why they can play video games for hours (instant feedback holds their attention by keeping them motivated) but have difficulty reading more than one page of a history book.

Tasks such as cleaning one's room, completing a routine history assignment, or displaying perfect table manners do not provide the intrinsic rewards ADHD kids need to remain on task.

**TRICK** It's important to be consistent with the parents' method of dealing with ADHD behavior.

**Ask what the parent wants you to do to encourage good behavior.** Many families rely on a discipline system that provides frequent, immediate external rewards for completing boring tasks or for behaving appropriately throughout the day or evening. This system is called "positive discipline." It stops bad behavior before it happens. Try to remember that this system isn't bribery. It's a way to motivate a child who lacks the internal ability to motivate himself. Here's how it works (see next page):

## 4 STEPS TO POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

### **STEP 1: Make a list of things you want the child to do, always trying to use positive language.**

Here is a sample list for babysitters, depending on the child's age. You can use both general and specific behaviors.

- Play nicely with your sister. (Not "Don't hit your sister.")
- Help keep the family room clean. (Not "Don't make a mess.")
- Put your toys away. (Not "Don't leave your toys around.")
- Eat nicely at the dinner table. (Not "No fighting over food.")
- Speak gently. (Not "Don't raise your voice.")
- Take turns. (Not "Don't interrupt or butt in.")
- Go to bed quietly. (Not "Don't jump on the bed.")

### **STEP 2: Provide rewards.**

Keep the child motivated to behave well by providing frequent, immediate rewards for good behavior. Families employing this system often use pennies (deposited in a jar), gold stars on a chart or index card, smiley face stickers, M&M's and other bits of candy, or check marks. Inform the child every time he wins a point and praise him for doing a good job. At the end of the night, the child can redeem stickers, check marks, and other points for an inexpensive "prize," such as a deck of cards, a candy bar, extra TV or video game time, or a favorite treat before bed.

### **STEP 3: Explain the system to the child.**

"Every time you do the things on this piece of paper, you're going to earn a point." That's the child's job. Your job is to continually catch the child doing something good, and to heap on the praise and rewards that will keep the child motivated.

### **STEP 4: Set the system in motion.**

Be generous with points at first so the child "gets it" quickly and buys into the system.

Tell the child that if he earns, say, 10 points by the end of the night, he can exchange the points for a prize. Ignore minor misbehaviors (such as whining, dawdling, bossiness) but remind him frequently about the point system and how many points he still needs. Warn him, too, that certain behaviors, such as hitting, can result in an automatic loss of points and even a time-out.



## STRESS POINTS

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**A**DHD kids go ballistic over things you'd never expect. They can be hypersensitive, physically and emotionally, and they may easily overreact.

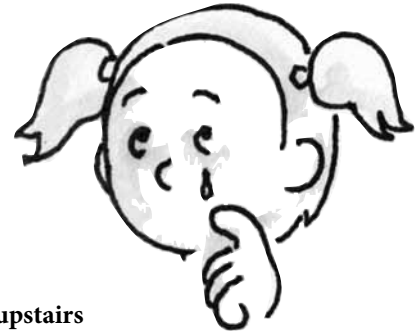
One term for this problem is “neurological inflexibility,” which means they get stuck in certain situations or emotions and can't readily move on. Awareness of inflexibility issues will help your babysitting experience go smoothly.

Here are tips and tricks for some of the most critical stress points for children with ADHD:



## TRANSITIONS

Being unable to focus is one symptom of ADHD. Another symptom is hyperfocusing. Children may become so mentally “locked in” to an activity, event, feeling, or thought that they cannot readily shift their attention to something else. This is particularly true when the activity is stimulating or provides built-in rewards, such as a video game or television show.



**TIP!** **Never tell an ADHD child to shut off the TV and get upstairs right now.** Because he has trouble shifting focus, he either won't hear you or will seem stubbornly oppositional and angry. Demanding immediate transitions is the stuff that meltdowns are made of. This behavior is part of the disorder and is not intentional.

**TRICK** **You can help ADHD kids shift activities by preparing them to switch gears.** If 8 P.M. is the time for brushing teeth, at 7:45 say: “In 15 minutes it's time to brush your teeth.” Three minutes later say, “In five minutes, I need you to turn off the TV,” and so on. Helping children shift focus gently and gradually will make for smoother transitions.

## SIBLING SQUABBLES

Sibling rivalry has been documented since biblical times and seems to exist across species. Human siblings often know exactly how to push each other's buttons, and many delight in doing so. The instigator blames the other when he or she reacts. Add ADHD to the picture, and a war of words can quickly morph into a babysitter's worst nightmare.

**TIP!** **Garden-variety sibling rivalry is just one cause of fights between ADHD kids and their brothers or sisters.** Another is that children with ADHD often misread social cues and think they're being teased when they're not. They may have more difficulty shrugging off mild provocation, often have a lower tolerance for frustration, and tend to overreact. These ADHD behaviors and characteristics, while not purposeful, frequently add fuel to the fire.

**TRICK** **Nip it in the bud.** Start out by addressing an underlying cause of many sibling fights: Children with and without ADHD frequently misbehave to get attention. This behavior can set off a dynamic in which the other sibling competes for attention by misbehaving too. Therefore, let all the children know the rules up front: Misbehavior will result in a time-out or loss of privilege (whatever the parents' chosen method), not in getting your attention.

**Spread the blame.** Prevent sibling squabbles by keeping a sharp eye not just on the child who explodes with emotion, but also on the instigator who sets off the explosion. Let the children know what you expect: that they will treat each other nicely while you're there. Tell them what steps you'll take if they fight; it may help to say they'll both face consequences, regardless of who started it. Children are less likely to provoke each other—and more likely to control themselves if provoked—when they know they can't blame the other. It doesn't matter if the ADHD child “can't help it.” Your job is to prevent children from getting hurt.

**Keep the peace.** Continually heap on the praise for getting along, but if fights do occur, follow through with whatever consequences you and the parents have discussed. If that doesn't work, have the kids play in separate rooms and do your best to keep an eye on each one.



## NOISE AND CROWDS

I'll never forget the first and last time we took our ADHD son to a football game. Within 15 minutes, he was covering his ears and shouting "shut up!" at no one in particular. His behavior quickly escalated to running down the aisle, trying to escape. We caught him before anything terrible happened.

Since ADHD kids have difficulty filtering out distractions, they tend to pay equal attention to everything. When there's a lot of everything in the air, the child may become overwhelmed. Ditto for large family gatherings, crowded playgrounds, and birthday parties.

**TIP!** If you take an ADHD child to a crowded arena, restaurant, or an airport, he may become so over-stimulated that he shuts down—or melts down. At noisy birthday parties or crowded playgrounds, he may lash out aggressively at peers.

**TRICK** Avoid noisy, crowded situations, but if you can't, make sure you have an escape plan. If you're visiting an amusement park, for example, find out where there's a quiet space you can take the child to regroup before, or after, he falls apart. Never plan long visits to highly stimulating environments. If you're taking the child to the local amusement park, limit the visit to one or two hours at a time, and include low-key activities and rest periods. If your assignment is to take the child to a birthday party, tell the host you can only stay 30-60 minutes and monitor closely the child's interactions with peers.

## PHYSICAL SENSITIVITY

Some ADHD children are hypersensitive to touch as well as sound. Tags on their clothing may drive them nuts. Getting "in their space" can set them off. Before my son was diagnosed with ADHD, he'd push or yell "go away!" at anyone who got too close to him, including his preschool teachers.

**TIP!** Physically hypersensitive kids may not even be aware that something is bothering them. They may become irritable or inexplicably angry with someone sitting close to them.

**TRICK** Listen. If the child seems irritable, ask if something specific is bothering him physically. Is the tag on his t-shirt tickling or scratching his neck? Are her shoes uncomfortable? Is he hungry? And be aware of getting too close to him. If the child tries to push you away, it's not because he's being mean or rude. Respect his wishes and see if it helps.

## CRITICISM

Children with ADHD hear more than their share of criticism, and are more sensitive to it than most. They also have trouble reading social cues and may misinterpret a neutral remark as an insult.

**TIP!** Since many ADHD kids lack the self-control, verbal ability, and social skills to react appropriately, you may find your self on the receiving end of an angry verbal barrage punctuated by door slamming and crying.

**TRICK** Keep your focus on what the child does well, not on what the child does wrong, to avoid stressful confrontations and motivate good behavior. If the child needs correction, try these strategies:

- **De-personalize remarks.** Say, "It might be better to try it this way" instead of "You're doing it all wrong!"
- **Tell them what you want them to do.** Say, "Let me help you put those clothes where they belong" instead of "Don't throw your clothes on the floor."
- **Encourage rather than criticize.** Say, "The dog really likes it when you feed her on time"

instead of “You always forget to feed the dog.”

- **Catch them being good.** Say, “I really liked the way you helped your sister.”
- **Shape behavior.** Praise a child for small accomplishments. Saying, “Wow! Look at that handwriting!” inspires children to achieve even more.

## HYPERACTIVITY

Some children with ADHD move around a lot. The house is their jungle gym, and the world is their trampoline. Once, my son and an ADHD friend decided to swing baseball bats in the bathroom. Stitches were required.

Even when sitting still, some children with ADHD are constantly fidgeting. This fidgeting may extend to other people; they’ll poke, push, and tickle the person in the next seat. This behavior should not be characterized as bad or uncooperative. It’s just how ADHD kids are.

**TIP!** **Hyperactivity is at the root of many ADHD related accidents.** It can also precipitate fights between the child and his family and friends.

**TRICK** **Prevention works best.** Make sure the child is engaged in quiet, calm activities that aren’t overly stimulating. While parents may object, television and computer games are safe bets for a sedate evening. So are some of the activities and games recommended on page 20.

**If the child goes “over the top,”** he’s unlikely to stop what he’s doing just because you say so. Instead, experts recommend a technique called “redirecting,” which is a way of kidnapping their attention. If Johnny is splashing the bathtub water all over the bathroom, redirect him: “Let’s try making silly hats out of bubbles!” If Susie is whirling in dizzying circles around the living room, say, “Let’s make up a funny song.” Be creative, and think fast.

## MEALS

**ADHD can affect appetite in several ways.** Without medication, a child may be an impulsive overeater who devours everything in site. The most common problem, though, is that some ADHD medications reduce appetite. When the medication wears off later in the evening, the child may feel “starved” and become voraciously hungry.

**Don’t make meals a battleground.** Children with ADHD need to eat when they are hungry. It will not help to force the child to sit down and eat a proper meal. Instead, have nutritious food ready for when the child’s appetite returns.



## FOUR NUTRITION TRICKS

- 1 Provide the protein.** Foods rich in protein—lean beef, pork, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, nuts, soy, and low-fat dairy products—may have beneficial effects on ADD symptoms. The brain uses protein to make neurotransmitters, chemicals released by the brain to communicate with each other. Protein can also prevent blood sugar surges, which increase hyperactivity.
- 2 Go fish.** Omega-3 fatty acids improve several aspects of ADHD behavior—hyperactivity, impulsivity, and concentration. Omega-3s are essential fats important for normal brain function. Research suggests that some kids with ADHD have lower blood levels of omega-3s than kids without ADHD.
- 3 Begin with a good breakfast.** Providing a calorie- and protein-rich morning meal can help your child focus and do better at school. Three good balanced breakfasts include a veggie omelet, bran muffin, and fresh fruit with yogurt; low-fat cheese melted on whole-grain toast and a pear; granola, yogurt, and sliced apple.
- 4 Cut back on chemicals.** Several studies suggest that artificial additives in foods make non-ADD children more hyperactive, and make hyperactive children worse. To avoid additives, read food ingredient labels until you've found a wide range of foods that are additive free. In most cases, fresh, unprocessed foods are your best bet.

## BEDTIME

Bedtime is a bad time for ADHD kids. They have more difficulty “winding down” and may take medications that interfere with sleep. They may also take medicine that lowers appetite but wears off at bedtime, which causes an attack of the munchies.

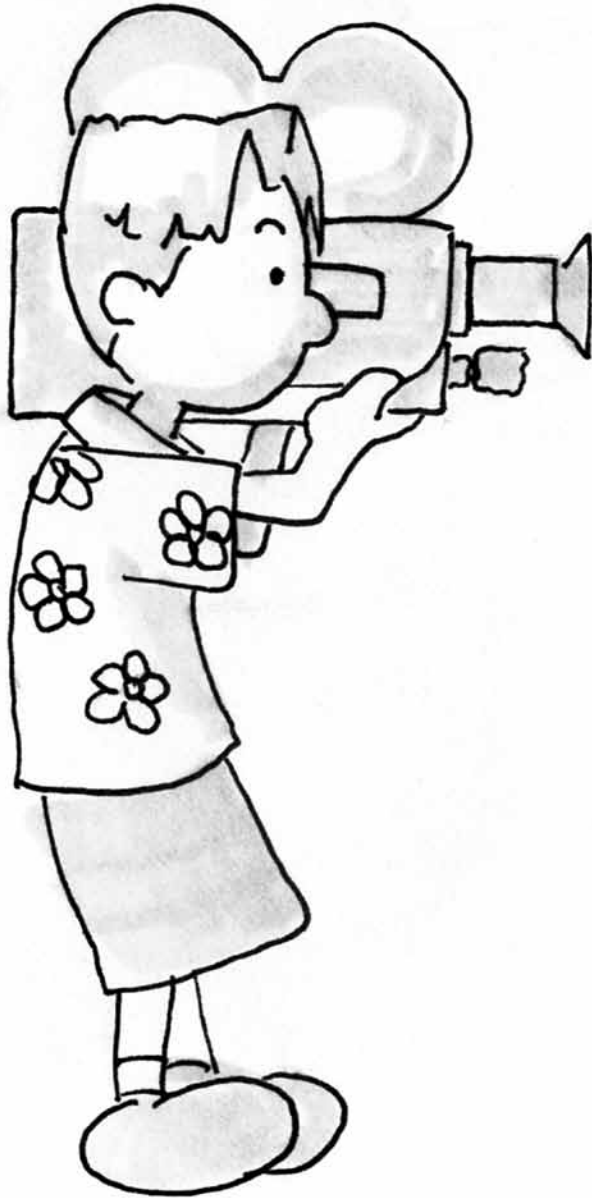
**TIP!** **Power struggles, getting up and down, asking for water, then crackers, crying and whining are par for the course.** ADHD children also are more prone to separation anxiety at bedtime.

**TRICK** **Bedtime is one of those “transitions” for which you must plan and prepare.** Give the child a half-hour warning: 15 minutes to stop what he's doing, lights out 15 minutes after that. Provide reminders every five minutes.

**Once the child stops the current activity, inquire about food and water.** Make sure the child has everything he or she needs before going upstairs or down the hall to bed.

**Ask the parents if there is a particular bedtime routine that works best.** If not, use the final 15-minute period to help the child unwind. Since baths can get ADHD children overstimulated, try reading a favorite story or administering a backrub. Make bedtime as relaxing and pleasant as possible. If the child says he's “scared” when you turn off the lights, tell him you'll sit in a chair right outside his room and read a book.

**Do what it takes, but don't overdo it.** Even with all the preparation you can muster, some ADHD children can't get to sleep. Don't go overboard forcing the issue. A struggle will only re-stimulate the child. If the child cannot sleep, permit her to play or read quietly in bed. She will fall asleep eventually.



## HAVING FUN

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**H**ave I forgotten to mention the best thing about children with ADHD? They're fun! I never laugh so much as when I'm with my ADHD son. He can be goofy, creative, huggable and hilarious, all at the same time. Bringing out the best in ADHD kids isn't difficult. Here are some of my favorite ways to do it:

### MAKE A MOVIE

Is there a video camera in the house? Children with ADHD love to ham it up. Have him pretend to be a character in a movie, dress up for the role, and improvise skits. Afterward, sit down and watch your creation on TV with a bowl of popcorn.



## CREATE A SCRAPBOOK

If you don't have a video camera, use a digital camera, family photos (get parental permission!), or cut-outs from discarded magazines and newspapers. Have the child paste his own photos, magazine pictures of favorite celebrities, and other images onto loose-leaf paper or plain paper that can be hole-punched and stored in a binder. Have her write funny captions and draw cartoons based on her own life.

## PLAY CHARADES

Charades is a fast, fun game that enables ADHD kids to move around, work off some energy, and think on their feet. Praise lavishly for a charade well done. They'll love the positive attention.

## GET CRAFTY

Come to the house with clay, crayons, crafts supplies, and other projects kids can work on. Sometimes my sons and I make impromptu picture frames out of cardboard that are decorated with drawings, glued-on stray puzzle pieces, scraps of tissue paper, pieces of cloth, ribbon, and cut-out objects from magazines and cardboard tissue boxes. Bring wrapping paper and help kids gift-wrap their creations to present to Mom and Dad at the end of the evening.

## TRASH TO TREASURES

Teach kids about recycling by helping them make treasures out of ordinary trash. A simple kite can be made from a couple of straws and some white plastic garbage bags. An empty Pringles potato chip cylinder can become a desktop pencil holder when decorated with glued-on construction paper, the Sunday comics, glitter, old buttons, or dried pasta.

## TEACH PET TRICKS

If the child has a pet, bring a pet training "how to" book with some treats to use as rewards. Work together to teach the family dog one new trick. The pet's cute responses keep the ADHD child engaged enough to stick with it, even if it takes all night. My sons also enjoy the books *How to Talk to Your Cat* and *How to Talk to Your Dog*, both by Jean Craighead George. These wonderfully illustrated guides are silly and fun, but on the serious side, they provide important lessons about nonverbal communication—a difficult concept for kids with ADHD.

## DO MAGIC TRICKS

Children are fascinated by magic. Learn a few magic tricks, or bring a magic trick kit with you to the job. Spend some time mastering a few simple tricks that kids can show off later to Mom and Dad. Magic helps ADHD kids develop a sense of mastery, which enhances self-esteem.



## SERIOUS STUFF

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**O**f all the tips and tools I've provided in this book, the ADHD-specific checklist **on page 24** is the most important. The issues and concerns related to sitting for ADHD kids go beyond those related to everyday childcare

Perhaps most important, ADHD is a brain-based disorder, and many ADHD children take medications to help control its symptoms. These medications include stimulants (such as Ritalin), antidepressants (such as Wellbutrin), and antihypertensives (such as Tenex). Some of these medicines have side effects such as appetite loss or sleepiness. Others may make it difficult for children to sleep.

If the child takes medicine, make sure you follow the parents' instructions carefully. Skipping medications—or giving too much medication—can be dangerous. *When* you give the medicine is also important. Always give the right dose at the right time.

This section includes a chart on which parents can enter the medication the child takes, when it is given, and what the expected side effects are. There is also a box called “Call for help if” in which parents can enter unexpected, and possible harmful, medication reactions.

Finally, being “hyper” is no joke. Children with ADHD are more likely to end up in emergency rooms, and have more serious injuries, than other kids their age. They’re more likely to experience accidental poisoning and to sustain head injuries. Find out exactly what to do and whom to call should a child get hurt. Acting quickly and competently saves lives.



# The End

# BABYSITTING CHECKLIST\*

Parent's Names \_\_\_\_\_

Children's Names \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Children's Ages and Weights \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Cell Phones or Pagers \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency Services Numbers \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor's Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Veterinarian Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Where the Parents Will Be \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Where Parents Can Be Reached \_\_\_\_\_

When Parents Are Expected Home \_\_\_\_\_

Name/Number of Neighbors \_\_\_\_\_

Name/Number Grandparents or Close Relative \_\_\_\_\_

MEDICATION	WHEN GIVEN	PURPOSE	SIDE EFFECTS	CALL FOR HELP IF

Location of First Aid Kit \_\_\_\_\_

Location of Ipecac Syrup \_\_\_\_\_

Children's Allergies \_\_\_\_\_

Children's Boundaries:

Indoor \_\_\_\_\_

Outdoor \_\_\_\_\_

Special Rules \_\_\_\_\_

TV and Video Rules \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite Toys \_\_\_\_\_

Bedtime Rituals \_\_\_\_\_

Lights Out Time \_\_\_\_\_

Special Issues or Concerns \_\_\_\_\_

**\*Parents:** Fill out this form with pencil to allow for changes, or make multiple copies



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## JOIN **ADD**Connect ADDITUDE'S NEW COMMUNITY

A screenshot of the ADDConnect website. The header includes the logo 'ADDConnect' and the tagline 'Your community for attention deficit support and solutions'. Navigation tabs include 'ADHD Groups', 'Discussions', 'Journals', 'Contests', 'Videos', 'BLOGS', 'NEWSLETTERS', 'PORTABLES', and 'ABOUT OUR MAGAZINE'. A central banner says 'Join Our ADHD Community!' with a 'Join ADDConnect Now!' button. Below this are sections for 'TODAY'S TOP DISCUSSIONS' with links to 'Stingy Sister' and 'Peer Pressure', and 'Connect With Us' with social media icons. A sidebar on the left features an 'ADHD &amp; Me Contest' with a '\$250' prize. At the bottom, there are sections for 'Join ADHD Groups' and 'New Activity on ADDConnect' with a 'Your brain, just brighter' graphic.

REAL ANSWERS, REAL ADVICE

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