

## When the Parent Has ADHD

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If you're a parent who has ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), every day brings a series of parenting adventures, or misadventures. Since research has proven there is a genetic component to ADHD, it's possible that at least one of your children will be diagnosed with ADHD, too. It's not necessarily as overwhelming as it may seem, however, if you think of ADHD as "an explanation, not an excuse" (Barkley, Russell. 2011).

The scenario that I'm about to describe is typical of a parent and a teen, both of whom have ADHD.

I was going to a garage sale with my son, Brian. He was looking for electronic equipment, which he would ultimately disassemble. We noticed a series of signs with pink arrows on them. We commented on how easy it was to follow arrows to the sale rather than finding an address. We followed the arrows to a very nice neighborhood, and marveled that this would be an upscale garage sale. Brian saw pink balloons and announced that he'd found the sale. I parked the car, and we wandered up the driveway. He found some huge stereo speakers, while I helped myself to the lemonade and cookies that our hosts had graciously left on a table.

After a few minutes, Brian tapped me on the shoulder and hissed that we had to leave. I replied sweetly, that I was looking at some beautiful dishes. Brian persisted, asking me if I'd noticed a group of people in the backyard taking pictures. I muttered absently, that I wasn't sure why they'd take pictures at a garage sale, but we should mind our own business. Brian pulled on my sleeve and told me that the people were taking pictures of "some kid" wearing a white communion dress. I heard what Brian was saying, but, I didn't process it until he told me outright that we weren't at a garage sale: we had crashed a first communion party. Brian and I drove home in silence.

Confusing a party with a garage sale is only one of the many incidents that a parent who has ADHD may experience, but not all the anecdotes are humorous. It's not that we can't focus or pay attention to detail; we can hyper focus on things that we're interested in (looking at the dishes) and recall even minute details. Meanwhile, things that we're not interested in (people taking pictures in the backyard) elude us.

As a parent, you may be relieved to be diagnosed with ADHD, because it explains a variety of things that you may have struggled with since childhood. Along with that explanation, there is a caveat: it's time to examine and redefine your parenting style.

First, educate yourself on adult ADHD, since symptoms differ somewhat from the childhood variety. Consider joining a support group to network with other ADHD parents and find out what works for them. (CHADD, Children and Adults with ADHD, is a national non-profit organization with support groups in Monmouth County.)

At home, use a large whiteboard to create a master family schedule. Remind everyone to update the schedule regularly, or enlist a non-ADHD family member to help. If something isn't on the schedule, it

doesn't get done. Set aside a regular time each week to hold family meetings. You can review events of the previous week, plan for upcoming events and generally touch base with family members.

Make exercise and good nutrition a family priority. Foremost though, is staving off chaos that can exist in an ADHD household when emotions escalate. Refuse to engage in a power struggle with your kids by calling a mutual time out. Separate at the first signs of conflict and go to different rooms for 15 minutes. Lastly, begin each day with a mantra such as "I can be calm." Only then will you have the stamina to face a new day while trying to find your missing car keys.