

# solutions

## PARENTING CHILDREN WITH ADHD: FOCUS ON SAFETY

Parenting a child with ADHD is a very difficult journey. In fact, parents of children with ADHD report greater parenting stress, more frustration, and more depressive symptoms themselves than other parents. But if your child has ADHD, you are not alone. As many as 11 percent of kids ages 4 to 17 (6.4 million kids) in the United States have been diagnosed with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), according to a survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by difficulty paying attention, excessive activity, and impulsivity. Short attention spans and high levels of activity are a normal part of childhood. However, for children with ADHD, these behaviors are excessive, inappropriate for their age, and interfere with daily functioning at home, school, and with peers. To compound these challenges, it has come to light that there is a strong link between risk taking behavior and ADHD. Research has revealed that teens with learning and attention issues may be more likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as alcohol and drug abuse, dangerous driving, self-inflicted injury, unprotected sex, and suicide attempts. According to a recent study in Archives of General Psychiatry, children with ADHD have nearly a four times higher risk of suicide attempts and depression than children without ADHD. Therefore, keeping these children safe has become the number one priority for parents and medical providers who care for them.

Considering the obstacles children with ADHD are faced with helps us to understand why a teenager with ADHD might become depressed. They can develop feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy over any or all of the following challenges:

- Disappointment from parents for not behaving like "other" kids
- Struggles in the classroom caused by their own forgetfulness, disorganization, and difficulty concentrating.
- Academic failure and negative judgment from other children and adults
- Peer rejection
- Increased temptation and decreased impulse control leading to early-age alcohol and drug abuse

The following suggestions are offered to support you and your child as you work together to meet the challenges of ADHD and to make your teen less susceptible to risk taking and depression.

### 1. Let your teen know you care about him.

Teens sometimes feel like they can't do anything right. Let your teen know you care about him and that he can come to you with problems. This could make him less likely to engage in risky behavior than a teen who feels unconnected.

### 2. Address your teen's learning and attention issues as soon as you suspect a problem.

Studies show that teens who get help for their learning and attention issues are less likely to engage in risky behaviors than those who don't. Find a counselor skilled in treating ADHD. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a short-term form of therapy that has been used successfully to treat ADHD.

### 3. Get yourself educated on the signs of suicide and depression in children and teens and talk to your child openly about mental health issues.

### 4. Make rules and stick to them.

Discuss rules ahead of time with your teen so s/he clearly understands them. Then stick to them.

### 5. Let your teen make decisions.

In addition to rules, it is also good to start letting your child make some decisions. He'll need to make decisions once he becomes an adult, so s/he needs to practice and be guided by you to think things through before making a final choice.

### 6. Provide structure and routine.

Teens who spend a lot of time unsupervised may be more likely to get into harmful situations. And teens who feel close to their families are less likely to engage in risky behaviors.

#### Resources:

ADHD and High Risk Behavior by Eileen Bailey

Your Defiant Teen: 10 Steps to Resolve Conflict and Rebuild Your Relationship, by Russell A. Barkley, Ph.D., and Arthur L. Robin, Ph.D.

Goldstein, S. & Ellison, P.A. (2002). Clinician's Guide to Adult AD/HD: Assessment and Intervention. New York, NY: Academic Press.

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry and American Psychiatric Association.

#### PARENTS MATTER:

Parents can play a large part in helping their teens with ADHD develop a resilient mindset and avoid high-risk behaviors.