



Loving Your Child in the Face of Opposition

Excerpted from a chapter in *SuperParenting for ADD: An Innovative Approach to Raising Your Distracted Child* by Edward Hallowell, M.D. and Peter Jensen, M.D.

I have ADD. My daughter and one of my sons have ADD. In my daily practice, I see and treat kids with ADD. Just being with them usually makes me smile. They invariably have a special something, a spark, a delightful quirk – which they sometimes try to hide, but which I usually can find. Then they relax, brighten up, and make me laugh and learn. Indeed, I think that people with ADD represent some of the most fascinating, fun, and fulfilling of all the people I meet.

If you have a child with ADD, it's important that you help that child feel good about who he or she is and what to expect in life. It's important that you search out and promote the positives – both about life and about your child – even as you deal with the all-too-obvious negatives. If your child feels good about who he is and about what life has to offer, he will do far better than if he does not.

My son Jack has ADD. I'll never forget when his seventh-grade English teacher asked all the students in his class to write down adjectives describing themselves. When they were done, she asked them to circle the three qualities they were most proud of. Jack circled creative, athletic, and ADD. Bingo! I knew he was on the right path.

But much as we love children who have ADD, we also know how difficult, at times impossibly difficult, it can be to raise them. Just as we know how charming and creative they can be, we also know what a trial they can be. We know how exhausting life can be when you have just one child who has ADD, let alone more than that, or if your spouse has it, too. And it is often the case that your spouse will have it, because ADD is highly heritable, so often one or both parents supplied the genes.

What's hard in raising a child who has ADD? If you have a child with ADD, we probably don't have to tell you. Small and large issues give us trouble. Small issues that we can't seem to resolve get bigger; bitg issues are often divisive and destructive. No doubt you'll recognize your own experiences here:

The answer to the question "How many times do I have to tell you?" is: about two thousand.

Socks migrate. You will find odd socks in the attic, in the basement, behind the washer, in the freezer, in the toilet tank, under a rock outside, in the car, or just about anywhere except neatly rolled up in the drawer reserved for them.

Teachers don't understand. Good teachers. Master teachers. After you have spent an hour explaining ADD to them, or after they have listened, understood, and appreciated a lecture on ADD from a guest expert, they will send home a note about your son the very next day that reads, "Will needs to pay better attention in class. He needs to focus his mind better. Unless he tries harder, he will not achieve success. He is letting himself, you, and the school down. I would like to see his attitude improve in this regard. Please urge him to pay attention." It can seem that what I call the "moral model" – that your child's ADD is somehow something he or she is not willing to overcome, and/or that it is a result of something that you as a parent are not doing right – is burned into the brain of many teachers and that understanding ADD as a biological difference in wiring goes against one of the ten commandments of teaching.

Forget about teachers, because even you don't understand. You can't really fathom why your son or daughter behaves in such an inconsistent, self-sabotaging way. How can he or she be perfectly prepared for the test the night before, only to forget everything while taking the test? How is that possible? Must there not be some terrible force at work, some force of self-destruction? How can anyone waste his or her talents so foolishly? Why doesn't your child buckle down and try harder and get his or her act together and stop being so exasperating and frustrating? Then you listen to a lecture or read a book, and you say, "Oh, I see, now I get it." And then, of course, even you forget it. Just like your son or daughter forgets what's on the test – only you don't have ADD.

Your mother doesn't understand. Boy, does she ever not understand. "All he needs is discipline. You remember what I would do if you ever did that?" You remember. You shudder. You're glad your mom is not in charge anymore.

Your spouse doesn't understand. Let's say you are the wife and you know your husband has ADD (it is often the other way around: many women have ADD). But, of course, he doesn't believe in ADD – as though it were something like a religious principle, a matter of belief. Still, that's what he says as he eats his dinner and mutters about what his father would have done if he ever brought home grades like that. And you're glad neither he nor his father is in charge. But you don't want to have to be so much in charge yourself, and you keep trying to figure out ways to get your husband to see the light and get help with his ADD.

Homework expands. In your son's hands, homework is like some strange substance that grows the more you try to cut it down to size. Your son works on his homework for three hours and then shows you what he's done, which is almost nothing that was supposed to be done.

When you scream, "Why didn't you spend those three hours doing the homework that was supposed to be done?" he looks at you and gives you the most honest answer in

the world of ADD to all “why” questions: “I don’t know.” That’s the truth. He doesn’t know. Which only makes you feel like going more ballistic.

Time is different. In the world of ADD there are really only two times: now and not now. Test in a week? Not now. While a child who doesn’t have ADD will start to plan how to get ready for the test, the child who has ADD waits until the test enters the zone of now and then, in a panic, starts to prepare. Actually, this sometimes works, because in a panic you pump out a lot of adrenaline, which is nature’s own stimulant medication, a lot like Ritalin or Adderall.

Words such as structure, supervision, reminders, and persistence don’t even begin to describe the magnitude of the task you have to tackle every day...