

Tips to help improve

EARLY MORNING

FUNCTIONING

A guide for parents and caregivers of
TEENAGERS WITH ADHD



THE EARLY MORNING CHALLENGE

Do you feel stressed and overwhelmed in the morning trying to get your child ready for school?

You're not alone.

The early morning can be a time of chaos for everyone in the household trying to get ready to start the day. This is especially true for parents of children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

It is challenging trying to get children to stay on task and pay attention to the morning activities in order to get to school on time – and that's exactly where this booklet can help you.

It is designed to provide you with helpful tips and resources that address how to handle specific unwanted behaviors so that your child can stay focused on completing tasks, leaving the house on time and getting a good start to the day.

Early morning functioning (EMF) occurs from the time of awakening until school or other morning activities.

TIPS TO HELP IMPROVE LISTENING SKILLS



Give your child the first say

Would you like your child to listen to you?

Try letting him or her speak first. Sometimes if given the chance to speak first, children may be more willing to listen to what their parents have to say.



Importance of listening

Highlight the importance of listening to others. Listening is not just taking in information, it also involves connecting with another person. Encourage your child to step out of his or her own frame of reference and into another person's perspective.



Really listen

Children often complain that their parents want their child to listen to them, but don't seem to reciprocate and listen to their child.

Take opportunities to listen to your child's thoughts, ideas and experiences without speaking. Listening quietly can help demonstrate that you value what your child has to say.



Be neutral

Your child may want to share his or her feelings with you, especially when feeling moody or upset. Try not to get upset with him or her, just listen.

Learning how to deal with emotions is a normal part of the adolescent years. By acting as a neutral sounding board for your child it may help him or her express and figure out his or her feelings.

TIPS TO HELP IMPROVE YOUR CHILD'S ABILITY TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS

FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS



Turn down the heat

If the household temperature is too warm, it may be difficult for your child to get motivated to follow directions and get through morning tasks. Consider opening up a window or turning down the temperature in the morning.



Shower your child with encouragement

Does your child have difficulty following directions?

Offer praise, rather than criticism, when your child completes a task. Positive words are especially important for people with ADHD who often receive criticism from those around them.

Try to find three positives for each negative behavior. Your encouragement may help your child through day-to-day challenges.



Structure and consistency

Children often benefit from both structure and consistency when following directions.

Try to keep requests as routine as possible. This can help give your child a reliable measure of his or her behavior and choices. There will be unique situations when you need to be flexible, however, this should be the exception rather than the norm.



Short and to the point

Use clear and specific language to communicate directions to your child. Avoid vague language or talking too much, especially when making requests.

TIPS TO HELP MANAGE OVERALL ORGANIZATION

ORGANIZATION



Plan ahead

Does your child lose time in the morning looking for lost items?

Preparing the night before can be a big help. Have your child:

- Pack his or her backpack and leave it by the door
- Make lunch for the next day or have money prepared if buying lunch
- Choose and layout clothes for the next day

Getting organized the night before may help save valuable time in the morning and help avoid morning chaos.



Try open storage

It may look “cleaner” to store items out of sight, however, are they easy to access and put away?

Consider open shelving for frequently used items like toiletries, towels and washcloths. Try hooks for jackets, hats and keys. Consider having your child use laundry baskets to store clean cloths.



Create “zones”

Make it easier for your child to put away his or her belongings by organizing them into “zones.” For instance:

- Keep all sports equipment together in a big bin
- Store backpacks and jackets on hooks near the front door
- Put all shoes in a basket or on a shoe shelf



Name storage

Having names for storage areas may help prompt your child to put items back where they belong, such as:

- Sock drawer
- School supplies
- Towel shelf
- Coat closet
- Dish cabinet etc.

TIPS TO HELP MANAGE GETTING DRESSED IN THE MORNING



Stylist hack

Does your child have trouble deciding what to wear?

Have him or her document preferred outfits by writing them down on index cards or taking pictures. This way, it will be easier for him or her to identify matching items and accessories. Your child should keep the pictures or cards near the closet.



Realize where your child is coming from

Children desire both independence from family and acceptance from peers. They may be more conscious of their appearance and compare themselves to friends or standards set in popular culture.

Help your child realize that his or her own self-esteem should be based on factors beyond his or her appearance.



Use hooks

Hooks can be a great solution for frequently used items such as hoodies, jeans or towels. Install hooks at different heights on doors or near the closet in your child's room. This may even help avoid clothes piling up on chairs or on the floor.



Streamline clothing

At the start of each new season, take time with your child to review, purge and update his or her wardrobe as needed. Gather clothing that are no longer in use and consign, donate or throw them away. Less clothing may make dressing easier in the morning.

TIPS TO HELP IMPROVE ATTENTIVENESS

ATTENTIVENESS



Keep it simple

If your child has trouble focusing, try streamlining his or her schedule. Participating in one activity at a time may be easier than trying to keep track of multiple activities and balancing a hectic schedule. Increased downtime may help improve your child's ability to focus and possibly decrease stress.



Motivate with music

Use the power of music to help keep your child moving in the morning. Have him or her queue up a playlist with upbeat tunes. Making music a part of the morning routine can help set a positive tone for the day and may help your child focus on completing tasks.



Focus on audio

Does your child need help staying focused?

Consider soothing music, ambient audio like nature sounds, or white noise such as a fan.

TIPS TO HELP CHILDREN QUIET DOWN

QUIETING DOWN



Show, don't tell

Rather than telling your child that he or she is talking too loudly, consider getting an app to do that for you. Ask your child to use a decibel measuring app such as "Noise Down" to actually see how loudly he or she is speaking. The app should also show the "normal" speaking range for him or her to compare.



Cancel noise with noise

Noise is often an issue in an ADHD home. Whether your child may be bothered by noise or you may be bothered by the noise from your child, there are strategies that can help. Cancelling noise with noise is one of them. Try white noise, nature sounds, or calming music on headphones.



Keep your cool

Children can sometimes mirror the attitudes of their parents.

A cool, positive attitude may help set the tone for the morning routine. If your child isn't doing what he or she is supposed to do to get ready, provide a reminder in a calm voice.

TIPS TO HELP MANAGE DISTRACTION

DISTRACTION



Unplug

Rather than starting the day looking at a screen, encourage your child to begin the day by stretching or playing music. Focusing on a fulfilling activity can help limit distractions in the morning.



Move the phone to the sidelines

Make unplugging at night part of your child's routine to help during the morning. At bedtime, have him or her turn off or silence the cell phone and either dock it in the kitchen or stow it in his or her backpack. Moving the phone to the sideline may help your child get more sleep and ultimately help get tasks completed in the morning.



Try headphones or ear buds

Listening to music through headphones might make it easier to block out distractions and focus on staying on track in the morning. Noise cancellation headsets are also an option.

TIPS TO HELP MANAGE PROCRASTINATION

PROCRASTINATION



Start with the most important task

If your child often procrastinates, encourage him or her to pick the most challenging task and begin the day focusing on it. This way, your child can start the day productively, which provides momentum for completing other tasks that need to get done.



Divide and conquer

An ambitious task may look more achievable when divided into smaller parts. Encourage your child to divide a large task into manageable chunks that can be done over multiple sessions. It may not feel overwhelming if done this way.



Eliminate electronic distractions

Social media can often lead to procrastination. When your child needs to complete a task, ask him or her to turn off or put away the cell phone while working. Interruptions from beeping or flashing notifications are tempting distractions that can be difficult to ignore.

Download:
Habit List



An app designed to help create good habits and break bad ones. Use it to help keep track of what needs to get done so you can meet your goals.

TIPS TO HELP MANAGE FORGETFULNESS

FORGETFULNESS



Capture information electronically

If your child is forgetful, get him or her in the habit of storing important dates, events and tasks on his or her cell phone. This strategy may help your child keep track of anything he or she needs to remember.



Take note

Have your child choose a system for note-taking. Consider having important notes and reminders on index cards, post-it notes, on a smart phone or in a small notebook. The key is to find one system that works best for your child – and for him or her to use it on a daily basis.



Record goals

Have your child put goals that he or she wants to accomplish in writing or in pictures. Thinking about goals may help your child remember what it is he or she would like to achieve. Goals should be visually displayed on a phone, bulletin board or bathroom mirror to serve as daily reminders and as motivation.

TIPS TO HELP MANAGE THE MISPLACEMENT OF ITEMS

MISPLACING
ITEMS



Use a launch/landing pad

Does your child tend to lose track of items?

Designate a launch/landing pad for your child to consistently put his or her keys, phone, wallet and backpack when leaving and returning to the household. Consider letting your child personalize this area using decorations.



Give your child a recycling bin

To make it easier for your child to organize his or her backpack on a regular basis, provide a large recycling bin at the start of the school year by his or her desk. Your child can store all papers in a chronological order so that he or she can easier find any items needed. Empty the bin each quarter of the year so that your child doesn't worry about throwing out papers that may be needed at a later time.



Check the lost and found

Your child should check the school's lost and found a few times during the school year. Perhaps some items that he or she thought were lost have been recovered there.



Create a plan to keep track

If your busy child constantly loses personal items, review his or her schedule together. Often items get lost or misplaced in transitional times, such as on the way to practice or between classes. Consider making a simple checklist comprised of your child's activities and any items associated with them. The checklist could be posted at home near his or her backpack, in his or her locker or on a cell phone to make it easier to have the list readily available.

TIPS TO HELP MANAGE HYPERACTIVITY

HYPERACTIVITY



Choose your battles

Children with hyperactivity may have difficulties on a daily basis. It is important to remember that your child's hyperactive behavior is a symptom of ADHD and is not a reflection of a "bad kid."

Try to focus on addressing issues that really matter and letting go of those that aren't critical.



Work it out

A morning workout can be a great way for your child to help manage hyperactivity.

Jumping rope at home might be a good starting point as a workout for your child.



Provide day-to-day structure

If your child is hyperactive, you can help him or her by trying to maintain an ordered household with clear and consistent rules. Hyperactive children may have difficulty in an unstructured environment.

TIPS TO HELP MINIMIZE TALKATIVENESS

TALKATIVENESS



Talk it out

Some children are verbal processors and need to talk out loud to think. This may be frustrating for others who are trying to listen.

If this describes your child, encourage him or her to talk out loud alone before sharing information with others in order to reduce talkativeness.



Identify thinking out loud

Ask your child to identify when he or she is thinking out loud to verbally process information, rather than sharing ideas and thoughts with others. People may be more willing to listen if they understand the reason why your child may be using a lot of words.

Encourage your child to use statements such as, "I think better when I talk it out," or "This isn't a decision, I'm just thinking out loud," before speaking.



In their shoes

Have your child consider the person to whom they are speaking: What is his or her life like? What may he or she be going through?

Thinking about these questions might make it easier for your child to interact with other people. When your child spends time in another person's shoes, he or she may be able to relate to this person and avoid talking too much.



Don't speak, write

Sometimes putting thoughts in writing can be more effective than saying them out loud. Writing them down can give your child time to process and organize his or her thoughts. In addition, reading a note can give your child time to respond, rather than react. Consider using email, texts or a notebook to communicate.

TIPS TO HELP PREVENT INTERRUPTIONS

INTERRUPTIONS



Enlist a friend's help

Is your child trying to improve his or her conversational skills?

Encourage him or her to enlist the help of a trusted friend. The two of them might agree on a discreet signal that the friend can use to let your child know when he or she is interrupting a conversation. Family members can also use the signal in the household as well.



Wait to speak

Pauses aren't always the end of a conversation. Some people pause to make a point or to gather their thoughts.

Encourage your child to wait a moment and pay attention to the other person's demeanor during a conversation before jumping in.



Interrupt politely

There may be times when your child feels forced to interrupt. Maybe he or she has somewhere to be or is afraid of forgetting something important. Teach your child how to politely interrupt by waiting for a pause in the conversation and say,

"I am sorry to interrupt, but can you remind me to tell you about...when you finish so I don't forget?"



Use a quick apology for accidental interruptions

A quick apology will do if your child accidentally interrupts. Saying, "I'm sorry, go on," is enough to let the other person continue speaking.

TIPS TO HELP MANAGE SILLINESS



Meditate

Does your child get too wound up at times?

Meditation may help him or her settle down. Encourage your child to take a few quiet minutes each day to sit, focus on his or her breathing and try to settle. Your child can use this strategy at times when he or she needs to calm down.

YouTube videos or meditation classes may help your child get started!



Humor helps

Try to appreciate the humor in some of the silly behaviors when possible.



Keep it in perspective

Silly but annoying behaviors such as humming, making noises or faces and bouncing around, can often be ignored.



Give a signal to settle

Sometimes a gesture works better than words. Devise a silent signal with your child to indicate it is time to settle down. Use the signal anytime he or she begins to get worked up.

TIPS TO HELP ENCOURAGE TAKING TURNS



Serve others to gain perspective

If your child needs to improve focusing on the needs of others, encourage him or her to get into the habit of serving others. It can be as simple as assisting family members, neighbors or people in the community. This will allow your child to step away from his or her own concerns and focus on helping another person. The recipient's appreciation may broaden your child's perspective and improve his or her ability to wait for others.



Choose words that motivate

Use phrases such as, "Wait a moment," rather than, "It's not your turn."

Using words that invite a new, desired behavior may be more encouraging than reminding children of an undesired one.

TIPS TO MANAGE BREAKFAST IN THE MORNING

BREAKFAST



Redefine the menu

Breakfasts don't have to be limited to cereal, waffles, eggs, or pancakes. Consider burritos, pizza, pasta, or soup, for example – which may be more appealing and still offer nutrition.



Make it portable

If your child doesn't have time for breakfast before school, make breakfast to go!

Offer portable, healthy foods such as bagels, burritos, breakfast sandwiches, boiled eggs, fruit, yogurt or cheese that can be eaten on the go while providing nutrition.



Prepare in advance

Many breakfast foods can be prepared ahead of time, such as smoothies, hard-boiled eggs, muffins, overnight French toast or yogurt parfaits.

TIPS TO MANAGE HYGIENE

HYGIENE



Think it through

Have your child start the day by taking a shower or washing his or her face immediately after getting up. In addition to practicing good hygiene, the warm (or cool) water may help him or her wake up.



Time it right

If your child likes to luxuriate in a warm shower or spend a long time in the bathroom, encourage him or her to do some of these activities at night. This way, he or she won't be rushed or keep others waiting in the morning.



Don't forget the tongue

Encourage your child to brush his or her tongue every so often – in addition to daily brushing and flossing. This habit can help eliminate bacteria at the back of the tongue, a frequent cause of bad breath.

TIPS TO ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENCE

INDEPENDENCE



Let your child decide

The morning routine is a good time to let your child practice decision-making – one of the keys to independence. Give your child the opportunity to choose clothing, meals for breakfast and lunch, morning music and after-school plans, for example.



Practice letting go

Giving your child more freedom can be a scary thought. But don't let your own fears prevent you from giving your child reasonable opportunities to develop his or her independence.

Search for potential areas with a high likelihood of success and minimize risk. Start allowing him or her to increasingly do things alone. It might not be perfect, but it will be a start.

Your feelings can help instill confidence in your child as he or she navigates the world.



Hold your child accountable

How can your child develop independence?

Have him or her be accountable for his or her actions and behaviors. For instance, if one of your child's morning responsibilities is to wash the breakfast dishes, don't do it instead when forgotten. Leave the dishes and have your child do it after school.

Decide on a consequence with your child if it happens a second time.



Let your child take ownership

You can encourage your child to develop independence by letting him or her take ownership of personal belongings. The idea of ownership is not just possessing something, but also caring for it. Allow your child to take ownership of (and responsibility for) clothing, his or her bedroom and other belongings.

TIPS TO HELP YOUR CHILD'S SENSE OF AWARENESS

AWARENESS



Move the alarm clock

If the snooze button keeps your child from waking up on time, move the alarm clock across the room. The physical motion of getting out of bed to turn off the alarm (or to push the snooze button) may naturally force your child to wake up.



Use technology to keep track

Does your child have difficulty keeping track of time in the morning?

Have him or her use a cell phone to set multiple alarms for each task that needs to be completed throughout the morning routine.



Fact check

How long does it really take to shower? Get dressed? Pack lunch? Eat breakfast?

Have your child estimate the time it takes to complete each morning task. Then time each task to see if time was over- or underestimated. This can help create an accurate awareness of time.

TIPS TO HELP GET TO SCHOOL

GETTING TO
SCHOOL



Set two alarms for departure time

Set one alarm to go off at the departure time and another alarm to ring approximately 5 minutes before.

The first alarm gives your child a warning to get ready to leave while the second alarm indicates it is time to go now!



Use a mantra

If your child gets distracted on the way out the door, suggest he or she use a mantra to help stay on track. It can serve as a reminder when repeated out loud,

“I’m going to the bus, I’m going to the bus, I’m going to the bus...”



Plan to arrive early

Does school start at 8:30? Plan to be there at 8:15.

Encourage your child to arrive 15 minutes early to events and appointments. Getting into this habit can help him or her arrive on time when there is traffic or a delay.

