

Chapter 1

The Real ADHD: Navigating the ADHD Difference

Sometimes there is just so much to think about, I don't know where to start!

– Matt, age 9

Sam is 7 years old. From the time he was 2, his parents knew there was something special about him. He was as loving as could be with his “Pup-pup,” his constant stuffed animal companion, and was already the comedian in the family. By the time Sam turned 3, his mom had learned to wear running shoes to keep up with him. Sam regularly dashed away from the shopping cart in the grocery store parking lot. He would climb anything and everything. His well-earned nickname was “Speedy.”

By the time Sam went to kindergarten, his parents knew that he wasn't your average child. Weekly phone calls from his teacher initially were made out of concern for Sam's awkwardness around the other children. Before long, however, the calls became a litany of complaints about his behavior. Sam wouldn't sit still. He was disrespectful during lessons and was constantly “goofing off.” He grabbed the other children's papers, talked out of turn in class, and couldn't stay in his seat. Six months into a difficult school year, a family friend suggested to his parents that Sam should be evaluated for ADHD.

At the pediatrician's office, Sam's parents were given a checklist to fill out and another one for the teacher. At a follow-up appointment, Sam was given a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. His parents left the appointment with a prescription for Adderall and an overwhelming sense of loss. Their heads flooded with anxious questions about what Sam's future would hold, as a “kid with ADHD.” How can special little Sam possibly have ADHD? Will this label follow him around for the rest of his life? Will his life always be so hard? As the week progressed, more and more questions popped into their heads. They didn't know where to turn for the answers. They weren't even entirely sure what ADHD was.

DEFINING ADHD

What is ADHD? ADHD stands for *attention deficit hyperactivity disorder*. ADHD was formerly known as *attention deficit disorder* (ADD), but became ADHD in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1994. The term *ADD* is sometimes still used to describe a type of ADHD that doesn't involve hyperactivity.

ADHD can affect how well someone can sit still, control his behavior, focus, and pay attention. A person with ADHD may understand what is expected of him but have trouble following through because he can't sit still or pay attention to details. If your child has received a diagnosis of ADHD, it means that he has differences in his brain that cause those ants in his pants. Your son isn't a troublemaker and your daughter isn't off in her own little world; they have ADHD.

Three Types of ADHD

ADHD is subcategorized into three distinct types:

- hyperactive-impulsive
- inattentive
- combined.

Hyperactive-impulsive

Children with the hyperactive-impulsive type of ADHD can be described as constantly in motion. Sitting still in school can be a challenge and their behavior can be viewed as difficult.

A child with hyperactive-impulsive ADHD may:

- fidget and squirm in a seat to the point of actually falling out of the chair

- interrupt frequently
- blurt out answers before hearing the question
- be impatient
- find waiting turns difficult
- talk incessantly.

Inattentive

The inattentive type of ADHD commonly goes undiagnosed because the behaviors aren't as obvious. Children diagnosed with the inattentive type don't get in trouble as often, but are considered to be dreamy, disorganized, or even lazy.

A child with inattentive ADHD may:

- find paying attention or staying focused on a task or activity very challenging
- finish school assignments at school with great difficulty
- have trouble focusing on instructions and difficulty following through
- appear to daydream frequently
- lose or forget things, such as homework
- be easily distracted, even when doing something fun
- make careless mistakes
- have trouble organizing tasks and activities.

Combined

The combined type of ADHD is the most commonly diagnosed type. This diagnosis signifies that the attributes of hyperactive-impulsive and inattentive types are present.

Hallmarks of ADHD

A high activity level, impulsivity, and inattention are the hallmarks of ADHD. These characteristics help define the diagnosis and may impact a child's life negatively over time because they're constant and not just experienced sporadically.

Hyperactivity

If your child has a high activity level, or *hyperactivity*, he may get into trouble in school more than his peers because he can't sit still. He may not be able to complete his school work because he falls off of his seat when directions are given. He may have trouble with friendships because of his constant interruptions and his inability to contain himself physically and verbally. You can be sure that your child's inner world is the same way; his thoughts are in constant motion. In a child with ADHD, the brain may not have enough of the chemicals that help suppress hyperactivity. Thus, your child's hyperactivity isn't caused by your child choosing to be in constant motion, but by his brain's inability to inhibit this activity adequately.

Impulsivity

Being impulsive can make everyday life very difficult. When the filter in your child's brain doesn't recognize inappropriate behavior until after it has occurred, it's difficult for your child to be successful in many aspects of life. Trying to work on impulse control for a child with ADHD can be like trying to stop a sneeze. Your child may not be able to stop herself from hitting another child when she's frustrated or yelling at another student across the classroom. Impulsivity doesn't happen because your child doesn't want to be in control; it happens because the parts of your child's brain that should cause her to stop and think aren't working as efficiently as they should.

Inattentiveness

A common misconception of children with ADHD is that they choose not to pay attention some of the time. In fact, because of this misconception children who are inattentive don't always get the support they need. In the classroom setting, your child may even be able to look at the teacher and appear to be paying attention when, in reality, he isn't taking in what the teacher is saying at all. Being inattentive means that when your child should be paying attention, the parts of his brain that are responsible for this job aren't working as they should. The part of the brain that motivates your child to pay attention even when something is boring is underactive.

Other Characteristics of ADHD

In addition to the classic characteristics of ADHD, other behaviors that don't define the diagnosis commonly appear in affected children. These symptoms can change from person to person and from minute to minute, hour to hour, and year to year as a child grows. Some common symptoms include hyperfocus, a low threshold for frustration, and unpredictability.

Hyperfocus

Many children with ADHD have the ability to hyperfocus on certain tasks. This trait can confuse parents, as they see their highly distractible child engrossed in a video game, for example. They call his name but he has tuned them out, along with every other stimulus in the room. In fact, it's common for parents to doubt their child's ADHD diagnosis because they see him have remarkable focus at times. They believe when their child loses focus in math class or when cleaning his room, he's choosing not to pay

attention. The reality is that the chemicals in their child's brain aren't regulating his attention properly, so stimulating activities of interest, like a video game, can produce hyperfocus, and everyday mundane tasks won't attract his attention.

Low frustration threshold

In addition, many children with ADHD have a low frustration threshold and become emotional when faced with an overwhelming challenge. Seemingly minor setbacks can send a child with ADHD into a fury of frustration because of her daily challenging experiences with disorganization, social interactions, and keeping up with responsibilities. Facing each of these constant challenges depletes her reserve of tolerance, thus creating a tailspin of emotion for a seemingly small situation, such as a torn homework page. She becomes so entrenched in her emotions that finding a solution may seem impossible to her.

Unpredictability

Children with ADHD are also commonly unpredictable in their responses to a situation. In the same situation, your child's reaction may be positive one day, and negative the next. Unpredictability is a common challenge for parents because it's difficult to anticipate their child's reaction. Let's explore the concept of unpredictability by examining a typical scenario.

It's a sunny day and Ryan is waiting for a friend to come over for the afternoon. His dad is mowing the grass, people are walking by with their dogs, his sister and her friend are running around outside, and he's throwing a tennis ball against the side of the house. Suddenly, Ryan hears his father's voice.

Ryan's dad: Ryan, stop throwing that ball against the house, please.

Ryan's dad: Ryan, stop throwing the ball!

Ryan's dad: Don't throw the ball!

Ryan: Oops, I didn't mean to!

Ryan's dad: I told you three times not to throw that ball! You just don't listen.

Ryan shakes his head and walks away, wondering, "Why can't I listen?"

Ryan tries to do what he's told, and sometimes he succeeds -- but not always. Why is it that your child can sometimes respond appropriately and at other times he can't? Let's take a look into Ryan's brain while he was throwing the ball. Ryan's dad assumes that Ryan is focused on throwing the tennis ball. He is, but he's equally focused on his dad, his sister, her friend, and the dogs walking by. He's probably even paying attention to the sounds of the leaves rustling in the wind and the smell of the cut grass.

When Ryan's dad tells him to stop throwing the ball, Ryan doesn't process what his dad said; he barely hears it. He hears his dad the second time and knows that he's telling him something, but he isn't sure what. The third time he understands what his dad said, but the ball has already left his hand by the time it registers. On another day when there isn't as much going on outside, Ryan throws the ball. His dad says, "Don't throw the ball!" Ryan hears him the first time and puts the ball down. Ryan's dad is pleased but perplexed and more than a bit frustrated by his son's unpredictability.

THE ADHD DIFFERENCE

Some may question the characteristics of ADHD, such as the high activity level, impulsivity, and inattention, asking, "Aren't all children active, impulsive, and inattentive?" Of course, they are. From time to time, everyone daydreams in a boring class, makes careless mistakes as they tear through their homework on a sunny day, interrupts others when they're excited, bumps into people when they're in a rush, or even forgets to turn in their completed homework. The difference in children with ADHD is the intensity of their activity, impulsivity, and inattention. For example, during a 20-minute math lesson, Sam, who has been diagnosed with ADHD, needs to change his position in his seat five times while Dylan can sit in his seat without moving. Sara, who has been diagnosed with ADHD, takes three times as long as her sister to get ready in the morning because she gets distracted and forgets to brush her teeth and comb her hair. Children with ADHD have so much trouble staying focused and controlling their behavior that it can affect their emotions, self-esteem, and all areas of life, including school and friendships.

WHAT CAUSES ADHD?

Researchers have yet to determine a definitive cause of ADHD; however, experts agree that there seems to be a strong genetic component. Scientists are also exploring other factors that may be associated with ADHD, such as environmental factors, nutrition, and brain trauma.

Experts agree that ADHD is a medical disorder affecting certain areas of the brain that control attention, impulsivity, and executive functions. Executive functions are the

organizing components of the brain that regulate behavior, working memory, thinking, and planning. While the specific contributing factors for ADHD are unclear, we do know that it isn't caused by poor parenting, too much television or video games, lack of discipline, low intelligence, or too much unstructured play.

HOW IS ADHD TREATED?

ADHD can be treated with coaching, psychotherapy, behavioral therapy, medication, mindfulness training, nutrition, and educational planning and support. The goal is to find the treatment or combination of treatments that will help you and your child develop strategies to manage the symptoms most effectively. The most important component in ADHD treatment comes from awareness of how the ADHD brain operates. Once you understand your child and he understands himself, you'll together be able to meet the challenges of ADHD, using your own repertoire of systems and strategies.

THE FLIP SIDE OF ADHD

Calls from teachers, playdates gone badly, and feelings of frustration when your child isn't listening to you existed long before you heard a diagnosis of ADHD. While the diagnosis can be overwhelming and confusing, it can also be a comfort to have, at last, a reasonable explanation for your child's behavior. You may feel, like so many parents do, that you finally understand your child. The behaviors and challenges now make sense and you know that, with the right strategies, your child can be successful.

On the other hand, a diagnosis of ADHD may be heartbreaking because life can be difficult enough without added challenges. Your child will have more hurdles to jump over than her classmates in order to learn, get along, and enjoy the milestones of

growing up. We want you to know that when you understand what ADHD is and isn't, you'll see that your child's strengths are vast. When you're aware of the flip side of the behaviors associated with ADHD, you can shift your view of your child and the ways in which you support her.

How can the characteristics of ADHD be both challenges and strengths? Children with ADHD do *everything* in extreme. Whatever they do, they do it big. Emotions are extreme with ADHD. Their anger is huge, their love even bigger. Their meltdowns are big, and so are their hugs. They may not be able to focus on homework for 2 minutes, but can build a Lego tower for 2 hours. They can scream at the top of their lungs when they hear the word "no," and speak in the gentlest tones to the toddler next door.

There are many opposing traits in a child with ADHD, including:

- being easily distracted and hyperfocused
- being fixated and creative
- lacking inhibition and showing courage
- being disorganized and very organized
- procrastinating and being impatient
- having lots of energy or no energy
- being forgetful or having an extraordinary memory
- having passionate interest or no interest
- being irritable or tender-hearted
- being worried or not worrying enough
- rejecting help or giving help.

Easily Distracted and Hyperfocused

How can it be that your child can't seem to settle into homework time but can build with Legos for hours? His homework would be done in 20 minutes if he could just focus! Yet when a child with ADHD is engaged in an activity that he finds stimulating, his level of intense focus can be truly remarkable. While these contradictory characteristics are perplexing, they're among the great strengths in people with ADHD. Imagine your child in 20 years working at a career that he finds engaging and the extraordinary focus he'll bring to it. Working with your child now to develop strategies to harness his strengths and direct their focus appropriately will make all the difference.

For the present, however, the twin traits of distractibility and hyperfocus in the child with ADHD can make life challenging, especially in school. Children with ADHD pay attention to everything in their surroundings, but not always what they need to focus on in the classroom. While this characteristic can be debilitating, there are strategies that will help. Removing known distractions is very important. A child with ADHD shouldn't sit next to the window at school or next to a child that is very social. Engaging your child's teacher in a dialogue about what is obviously distracting to your child is a great way to individualize the classroom experience for your child and to minimize his personal distractions. You can also discuss opportunities for harnessing your child's ability to hyperfocus on stimulating activities by making school work more interesting to your child, such as creating a visual book project, instead of writing a book report. There are also less obvious distractions for children with ADHD. Many children become distracted because they place their attention on "the unknown," or what could be happening in the near future, rather than focusing on the task at hand. For example, rather than

completing a spelling test, the child could be wondering what he'll be doing in his special or elective class.

To help in such a situation, review your child's routine and school day before he leaves for the bus and try to anticipate and answer those questions before they become distractions. This strategy of planning for the unknown can be used across all new experiences. Your child may need your help, for example, to anticipate events, so drive the new bus route together, schedule several visits to a new school, and rehearse what to say in a new situation. Though this method of reducing distracting thoughts may take more time than simply moving your child away from the window at school, it's a great way to teach your child to stay focused on the present, rather than "the unknown." You'll be helping your child learn what he needs to do for himself in order to be successful.

Fixated and Creative

Sometimes a child with ADHD can be rigid and fixate on a topic or activity and won't be able to see any other way of working. Other times, that same child could be wildly creative. Sometimes the ADHD brain gets stuck and can't get past an idea or complete an activity to the level it was striving for. Even when offered other methods of completing the idea or task, the child can't move beyond his initial thought. Being fixated on something can be very stressful for all involved. You may have experienced a situation similar to Johnny's.

Johnny and his dad were working on a project for music class that required him to create a musical instrument. Johnny's creative invention was to drill holes in PVC pipe to create a flute. While his dad was very handy and willing to try, the instrument simply wouldn't make a sound. Johnny's dad offered many different solutions and ideas for creating a different instrument;

however, Johnny couldn't move past his original idea. He was completely stuck. In the end, he took his PVC pipe with the drilled holes to school and used a spoon to bang on the pipe for noise. It wasn't anywhere near his original idea and he wasn't happy with it, but he couldn't fathom creating a different type of instrument.

While Johnny's idea was incredibly creative, he just got stuck. On a different day, his creativity may have taken flight and he would have been able to expand on his idea boundlessly. There are many times in life when sticking to an idea beyond all reasonable expectation -- and resisting that feeling of discouragement -- is exactly what is in order. Isn't that the quality of all of our great leaders?

Creativity is a wonderful trait. Children with ADHD may be creative in many different ways, including writing, music, drama, building, acting, painting, problem solving, making scientific discoveries, and drawing. Sometimes this creativity shows itself in your child's unique perspective on the world. Most children with ADHD think big and their ideas are truly innovative and exciting. They think outside of the box as they problem-solve and imagine their futures. Your child may express his creativity through being a nonconformist. Your child may be a nonconformist because he doesn't fit into those particular boxes in which schools tend to place children. His creativity and view on the world may be different, but also refreshing and energizing. Remember, nonconformists are trailblazers and make thrilling things happen.

Help your child determine an outlet for his creativity, because it will instantly boost his self-esteem as he showcases his talents. It can be very draining on your child's self-esteem to be redirected for all of his challenges throughout a typical day. By fostering your child's strengths and helping him display his natural creativity, you're helping him show the world all of the wonderful things he has to offer. You may want to recruit your

child to make dinner once a week, help redesign the morning routine, initiate a community service project, or start a neighborhood business cleaning up yards or serving as a mother's helper. The goal is to put your child's creativity into action. When your child puts his creative talents to use, he'll reach a desired outcome. This outcome will help prove to your child that his strengths are valuable and, when put to use, can help him reach his goals.

Lacking Inhibition and Showing Courage

Children with ADHD commonly get into trouble because they don't inhibit their responses. They don't filter information in their environment efficiently, so their responses can be inappropriate.

Information in the environment may include who's in the room, the timing of their response, body language and facial expressions, and where they are physically. For example, let's say your child is in class and the teacher is in the middle of a lecture on the Holocaust and your child says, "Can you repeat the homework for tonight?" In this example, the question isn't inappropriate but the timing is completely off. Another example might be when your child is in class and notices the teacher has a new hair style and says, "Your hair looks weird!" Another example may be that the child sitting next to your child is singing to herself. Your child may yell, "Stop singing. Your voice is terrible!" All of these responses might be the same as those we have in our own mind, but the filter in our brain tells us it would be inappropriate to say them out loud.

However, the same lack of inhibition indicates that hesitation and fear won't hold your child back from reaching for his dreams. This courage your child possesses allows

him to make speedy decisions that move him forward. This forward momentum will help your child accomplish things that others might be afraid to take on.

Disorganized and Remarkably Organized

How can a person be disorganized and organized at the same time? Can your child really have a messy backpack, disastrous bedroom, blank homework agenda book, and a perfectly organized baseball card collection at the same time? Yes, this contradiction is true, and it isn't. Because your child cares more about baseball, he's more focused on organizing his cards than organizing his backpack or homework. His baseball card book is simply more stimulating than the backpack he uses every day.

However, you can teach your child strategies to organize his school work in the same manner he has learned to organize his baseball card collection. If your child keeps his baseball cards in a binder in a specific order, then maybe your child can use binders to organize his school work in an order he creates. He might have one binder for each class, with dividers that are labeled according to what makes sense to his brain. When your child has an organized system for sports equipment, help him use this same type of system for where he does homework and keeps his school supplies. If equipment is kept in separate bags for each sport, you might consider having a box or container for pencils, one for pens, and one for markers. When a system works, help your child duplicate it for other areas of his life.

Procrastinating and Impatient

Children with ADHD have a hard time getting started. There is so much going on in your child's brain, it can be difficult for him to quiet his mind so that he can begin to focus on

a task. At times, however, your child may delay and delay until the last minute and still end up with fantastic results because he has been thinking and thinking about the task before sitting down to work on it. His tendency to procrastinate, however, may be paired with sudden bursts of impatience: *This must happen right now or I just can't take it!* The need for immediate results is highly stimulating and hard to manage. Learning when to procrastinate and when to be proactive will be a gift to your child. You can help your child learn when procrastination might be okay and when it isn't by discussing with your child the end result of each decision. Let's take a look at the following example to understand how a proactive approach to procrastination might look.

Timmy's mom: When is your project for social studies due?

Timmy: I don't know, maybe next month. I'm not worried. Can I go over Sam's now?

Timmy's mom: Remember the last project? You didn't start it until the night before. Before you go, grab your social studies folder and check when the due date is.

Timmy: Fine, it says that it's due on December 1st.

Timmy's mom: Okay, so how many weeks does that give you?

Timmy: Um, three and half weeks. It's simple, though, so can I go now?

Timmy's mom: Well, we need to do a quick time line of when you're going to start the project, when you're planning on working on it, and when it's going to be finished so we don't wait until the last minute.

Timmy: I work the best when I think about the project first and then do the time line, so can I think about it tonight and then tomorrow night we do the timeline?

Timmy's mom: Okay, the deal is, before you do anything tomorrow after school, you give me your timeline. Before you go to Sam's, write down in your agenda on tomorrow night's homework that you're showing me your timeline.

In this situation, Timmy's mom works with his brain and not against it. If she forces Timmy to sit down right after school, she'll most likely be in a battle of wills, and Timmy's timeline will be rushed and won't work. When Timmy's mom gives him some guidelines for moving forward with his timeline, he begins to learn how to manage his work according to how his brain operates. She also allows him to make his own choice about when to do the timeline, which balances out his immediate need to go to Sam's house.

Having High Energy and Low Energy

Your child may exhibit so much energy that you wish you could borrow some. Yet, after expending so much energy, she can be wiped out. For example, when your child has lots of energy right after school and then is completely exhausted an hour after playing, homework hour can go terribly. A good strategy is to decide with your child how much play time is appropriate before starting homework. Of course, your child may say she just wants to play, but you can be sure that she doesn't like how it feels when she has a meltdown during homework time. The goal is to help your child find a balance between getting her energy out and saving enough for homework time. You might help your child recognize what type of play activities seem to help channel her energy positively. Riding her bike might be a good way to channel her energy before homework time, rather than

playing with the neighbor with whom she has frequent arguments. Knowing that your child can move quickly from the peak of energy to the lowest valley enables you to help her channel her energy appropriately.

Keep in mind that intense energy can be helpful when channeled correctly and a sleepy mood can be useful when your child needs to recover from a busy day or exhausting experience. Your child must learn to balance these two energy states in order to benefit from the ups and downs. For instance, on a night when you know your child needs to get to bed early, you might want to consider scheduling a playdate with another high-energy child to alleviate your child's intense energy. You can be assured that, as soon as the playdate is over, your child will succumb to her low energy and get a good night's sleep. You also want your child to recognize these two energy states within herself so she can move back and forth between the two. It will be helpful to ask your child how she feels physically when she has lots of energy and when she has just expended a lot of energy. By asking your child questions, you'll help her take notice of how she feels when she's in each of these energy states. When your child notices how she feels, she'll eventually be aware of cues that she's beginning to get tired and needs to take a break.

Forgetful and Having an Extraordinary Memory

The opposing traits of forgetfulness and extraordinary memory can be particularly maddening and difficult to understand. Your child's brain races along, taking in all of the stimuli around it. Without an effective system for prioritizing and remembering everything it absorbs, it's difficult for your child's brain to remember what is important without recalling quantities of random information.

When effective systems are in place, your child's ability to recall only necessary information, rather than all of it, will grow. For example, to help a child who likes music remember a poem he has to recite, he might benefit by putting the poem into a rhythmic beat.

Passionately Interested and Lacking Interest

Passionate interest and lack of interest are also paired traits that demonstrate the extremes of ADHD. When your child is extremely interested in something, there is no stopping her. Some of the typical traits you see in your child may vanish when she engages in something she's passionate about. After witnessing this intense passion, it's discouraging then to see your child put her interests to the side and seem to have none at all. This tends to happen because children become fatigued after expending a lot of energy or because they're ready and waiting for a new, highly stimulating interest to develop.

Remember that your child's brain likes what is exciting and new. Although she may have an interest she's passionate about, something about the interest may lose its luster for her. The key is to help your child match her strengths to her passions and continue to offer experiences that allow her to be engaged with her interests.

Irritable and Tender-Hearted

You may find your child to be moody and irritable at times and very kind and empathetic at others. Both of these emotions are highly stimulating, so the child's brain is drawn to both. Learning to anticipate what triggers irritability in your child will help you minimize the occurrences in his daily life. In the long run, he'll face fewer consequences from his

irritability, which will naturally increase his self-esteem. For example, if you know your child tends to be moody in the morning, talk with him about what can help make the morning easier. Your child may say he doesn't want anyone to talk to him, or he may want to lie in bed for 10 minutes and then get up. He may ask if he can eat breakfast before or after a sibling to avoid early morning arguments. All of these requests are fairly easy to work with and will help your child find solutions to dealing with moodiness. To further build your child's self-esteem and maximize his strengths, help facilitate more situations that showcase his tender side, with the goal of overshadowing irritable times with moments of tender-heartedness. Arrange for him to spend time with a younger child or pet sit for a neighbor's dog. Then tell him how proud you are that he's so responsible and kind.

Excessively Worrying and Not Worrying Enough

Worrying takes focus. Your child's brain focuses on everything going on around it. It also latches on to the most stimulating events. Worrying is so stimulating it wins out as the most stimulating event of the moment. Most of the time, what your child is fretting about isn't logical. She may have worried about something imagined so much that it has become real in her mind. For example, your child may worry that if she misses a day of school, her teacher will be mad or she'll miss a major assignment. No amount of reassuring will assuage her worry.

The best strategy you can use is to teach her about anxiety. Help her understand that worrying is about "what she believes could possibly happen," not what she *knows to be true*. Help your child use logic and gather the facts. Has her teacher ever gotten mad at her before? Have other children missed a day of school? Was the teacher mad

at those children? Could she ask her teacher if she missed any important assignments? The answer to all of these questions will be founded on what she *knows to be true*, so the goal is to get your child to shift her thinking from worry to logic.

You may also be concerned that your child isn't worrying when she should be. She probably doesn't share your concern about a given topic, because whatever she has on her mind is a lot more interesting than your concern. So, if your child is going on her first sleepover and doesn't seem to be bothered by the fact that she has never slept away from home, you may have concerns that she isn't processing the reality of the situation. She may truly not care, but it's more likely that she's more focused on the fun things that she'll do at the sleepover than the reality that she might wake up in the night.

The best way to handle insufficient worry is to make a plan A and a plan B. In plan A, you can lay out the action plan: Your child will have fun, bring her favorite stuffed animal, and call you before bedtime. With plan B, you help your child decide what to do if she can't get through plan A. In this instance, she can call you to pick her up. While you don't want to create excessive worry when only a little concern is needed, having a plan A and B teaches your child valuable reasoning skills that she can carry into adulthood.

Rejecting Help and Giving Help

Children with ADHD tend to reject help, but are eager to give it -- even when it isn't requested. Consider this scenario with Sarah.

Sarah's mother asks her if she'd like to take drum lessons. Sarah responds, "Why do I have to take drum lessons? I already know how to play the drums. I can play the drums better than the drummer we just heard in that song!" Later, when Sarah's younger brother wants to practice

the piano, Sarah sits down next to him and tries to tell him what to do -- even though she has never played the piano.

Why does Sarah reject help when she's so eager to give it? Being helped isn't as stimulating as helping someone else. When on the receiving end, the child with ADHD needs to use all of her energy to pay attention to her helper. That is tiring and sometimes confusing, because the person helping may not be teaching in the way a child with ADHD needs to be taught. The eagerness to help and teach others, however, is a positive emotion and can be channeled into becoming a real skill. This eagerness to help also provides opportunities for your child to think about boundaries and how to avoid overstepping them.

In order to help your child receive help from others, there needs to be a shift in how your child is responding to and thinks about help. First, review with your child what she should say to someone who's trying to help, especially when she doesn't want the help. If your child typically responds rudely, work with her to come up with a better way to respond. Also, help your child recognize that other people want to share what they know, and that they might have some interesting information to share. Your child may stay stuck in the belief that there just isn't any other information to know, but you can help your child open her mind to the possibility that she can learn from others.

THE END RESULT

Some experts believe that many of the behavioral symptoms of ADHD can disappear with maturity. Organizational symptoms, however, tend to be lifelong challenges. The good news is that with proper strategies and support, children with ADHD can learn to

manage their symptoms and become successful beyond parents' wildest dreams. Let's take another look at Sam and see how he's doing.

Sam is now 8 years old and he's doing great. Sam and his parents are now aware of what ADHD is and isn't. They understand some of Sam's strengths and have learned to use his skillful memory and passionate interests to help him with schoolwork and social situations. Sam says that it feels good to understand how his brain works. He now knows that just before his challenging math class he needs to take a break, so he takes a short walk to the bathroom and back. Sam is also making good choices about who to stand next to in line. He's no longer getting in trouble for "falling" out of line and disrupting the class. Now when his teacher calls home, it isn't to report on disruptive behavior, but to comment on his effort and kindness to others. Sam's parents no longer feel a sense of loss, as they're able to recognize how Sam's character traits can become unique strengths. They know now that Sam has a bright future ahead of him. The ADHD diagnosis hasn't decreased their expectations for him. In fact, they now believe Sam's high energy and sense of adventure will prove to be an asset in his future career.

Sam and his family have experienced a shift in thinking; they're now able to manage what was once completely overwhelming for them. Sam still faces challenges, as everyone does, but now he and his family have a new level of understanding and knowledge about how to help him.