**Supporting Children with ADHD During Lockdown**

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Remote schooling has made it more difficult for many children to stay on track and meet behavioural expectations. Here are suggestions for helping kids with ADHD during the pandemic.

**Structure the day**

You’ve heard it continuously since the lockdown last spring, but structure is crucial during this prolonged disruption, especially for children with ADHD. A child with ADHD often does not deal well with uncertainty, long delay of gratification, and not knowing when the activities they will find more rewarding are going to occur. So, especially with the younger children, it is important to have a schedule that’s posted somewhere in the home that shows what they’re going to be doing at any given time of the day.

**Clear the workspace**

For children who have trouble focusing, having a workspace that’s free of distraction helps them get into the mindset they need to concentrate. Especially for children who tend towards distraction, having a dedicated workspace that is neat and functional is really helpful for getting engaged during any kind of remote learning lesson.

**Turn off notifications**

Those pesky notifications that pop up on our computers can disrupt vital concentration, so make sure they are turned off before children are logging into classes or sitting down to do assignments. If you’re getting pinging from Instagram or TikTok, or any of those things that you’re far more interested in, of course you’re going to be distracted. So, go to the notification centre and put the computer on ‘Do Not Disturb.’

**Help your child connect with the teacher**

For children with ADHD, the personal connection to the teacher is crucial to learning, and it’s harder to establish remotely than in the classroom. It’s also more daunting for children to ask questions on Zoom, and more difficult for teachers to know who’s struggling and needs extra attention. That’s why it’s important for children to ask for one-on-one help. Encourage children to reach out to teachers to say, ‘I have a question,’ or, ‘I want to share this thing with you,’ or, ‘I’d like to discuss this topic.’ It’s not only helpful for reinforcing the information and actually answering questions that children might be too shy or embarrassed to ask in front of their peers, but it also helps to build that connection with the educator that has a positive impact on the learning experience.



**Think in terms of learning bursts**

Instead of thinking of a school day devoted to learning running from 9am to 3pm, it will be good to think in terms of learning bursts, as research shows that children can only really focus and work effectively for 45 minutes at the most.

Clinicians sometimes call this “chunking” — engaging children for a period of time that’s realistic for their attention span, and then giving them a break. Children with ADHD in particular benefit when parents are able to set clear expectations in advance for how long each chunk will last and what they are to do in that time period, and then follow up to see if they did the work as expected.

**Make it multi-sensory**

A passive “sit and listen and watch kind of experience” is especially hard for children with ADHD to focus on, so making it multi-sensory can enhance concentration. For older students, note-taking can help engagement. Even jotting down a few main ideas or drawing a picture or writing down the things that the teacher’s writing on the white board/screen/PowerPoint can promote processing and retention. Mind-mapping key points can also help to engage. Record ideas on your phone.

**Alternate activities**

Think about what motivates your children, and alternate activities that are less appealing to them — which may include schoolwork — with those they enjoy more. It will help for parents to stagger the schedule and activities based on less preferred things being followed by highly preferred things.

So, if they are expected to do 45 minutes or an hour of work a teacher has sent home, it can be followed by a favourite snack, a walk or playing video games.

**Use positive attention — and make it big!**

We know that positive attention is the most powerful motivator we have for influencing children’s behaviour, and with kids who have ADHD it’s helpful to make that attention as powerful as possible. Children with attentional and impulse control difficulties need their feedback big, bold, immediate and intense.

When we think about attention, we shouldn’t just be thinking in terms of whether our feedback is negative or positive. We need to think about how long we give the positive attention, how close we are when we give it, how specific we are, and the tone of voice. When we praise them, it makes a difference whether we say, “Good job” or “GREAT JOB GETTING STARTED ON YOUR ASSIGNMENT SO QUICKLY!”

**Get children set up in advance**

For primary students, try focusing the night before on the child’s schedule for the next day, to make sure everything they need will be on hand when they need it, including folders for each subject and tools or materials they might need, so the child will not be running around looking for them.

For older students, try setting them up with something like Google Calendar, which will generate reminders about what is coming up. Once a recurring appointment is set up for each class, they will get a reminder, and all they have to do is click to have the link and the password they need at hand. It’s a lesson in organization, too. Once they enter the adult world, Google Calendar will rule their life anyway, so they might as well learn to use it earlier than they otherwise would!

**Be present when you’re present**

We know many parents are juggling childcare responsibilities with remote work and, when there are two caregivers, often they are trying to work in shifts.

Children need to be convinced that when work time is finished, and you step away from the computer, that they are actually going to get your attention. So, stick to that boundary and avoid checking your phone or emails during the moments when you have promised them your undivided attention. The goal is that when you go back to work, hopefully their gas tank is full to the point where they can sustain themselves for those periods of time where you need to have that call or you need to work.

**Exercise**

take advantage of the daily exercise rule and ensure your child takes this time to exercise outside. Many studies have shown consistent benefits of spending time exercising outside; even a 20 minute walk in the afternoon was found to be enough to help relaxation, improve mood and sleep.

 Vitamin D is absorbed by the body when exposed to sunlight and plays a crucial role in maintaining the health of our bodies, supporting the immune system, brain function and the nervous system. There are also ongoing studies on the role that vitamin D plays in mental health.

 If there is still energy to burn after your daily exercise, log onto the computer for a free online workout from the comfort of your living room!

**Take up a new hobby**

Now is the perfect opportunity to take up a new hobby, learn a new skill and further education such as baking (making pizza dough with your store cupboard staples) or gardening – plant seeds and watch them grow on the windowsill. Set times following lessons for your child to have a goal to work towards.



**Mental Health and Well-being**

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Try this website for helping to reduce your child’s anxieties:

Calm Zone

<https://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/calm-zone/>

“There are lots of ways to feel calmer. It's about finding what works for you. Try some of our breathing exercises, activities, games and videos to help let go of stress.”

* Activities and tools
* Breathing exercises
* Expressing yourself
* Yoga videos
* Play games
* Ways to cope videos

There are also various useful apps for your devices:

* **SleepTown** - Build regular and healthy sleep habits in the most simple and interesting way.
* **Calm** - Calm is a leading app for meditation and sleep.
* **Shine** – Self-care, meditation, reflection.
* **Clear** – Daily organiser, check lists.
* **ADHD Angel** - ADHD specific, planning, organising and managing situations.
* **Remember The Milk** – Planning, organising and memory.
* **Evernote** - This app allows you to create notes, add pictures, make checklists or record audio on one device and then share it with other people.
* **Home Routine** – planning, organising and memory. Earn accomplishments!
* **Time Timer** – Concentration.

