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## AD/HD and Family Dynamics

The start of school is a familiar ritual --- fresh pencils and notebooks, new clothes, the farewell to summer, and the excitement of seeing last year's friends. And, each new year also brings unfamiliar teachers, routines, and expectations --- possibly even a new school.

Transitions don't come easily to children who have AD/HD (Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder) or other learning differences. These children typically thrive on predictability. Each year parents and educators need to look for opportunities to bring order to a child's environment and routines, to help them focus on classwork, raise their hand before speaking, and remember to turn in assignments and homework.

In addition to wonderful suggestions and guides found in publications like "*ADDitude*" and "*Attention!*," the following list is adapted from the timeless *Driven to Distraction*, by Dr. Edward Hallowell.

### Ten Tips on Structuring and Organizing the Life of the Child with ADD

1. Write down the problem. Sit down with the child – or the whole family – and write down exactly where the problem areas are.
2. Come up with specific remedies for each problem area.
3. Make use of concrete reminders like lists, schedules, alarm clocks, and the like.
4. Incentive plans are fine. Don't think of them as bribes, but rather as incentives. Children with ADD are born entrepreneurs.
5. Give frequent feedback. Kids with ADD often don't see what they are doing as they are doing it. Don't wait until the house is completely torn apart before suggesting that it be put back together.
6. Give responsibility wherever possible. If the child is old enough to get up on his own in the morning, give him the responsibility for doing that.
7. Make copious use of praise and positive feedback. More than most people, people with ADD blossom under the warmth of praise.

8. Consider using a coach or tutor when it comes to schoolwork. You do not want to give up your role as parent to an ad hoc role of supervisor-tutor-badgerer-teacher. A coach can keep the “player” focused on the task at hand and offers encouragement along the way. A coach, someone on the outside, can holler at the ADD mind when it starts down the old negative grooves and bring it back to a positive place.

9. Provide the child with whatever devices he or she demonstrates can help. As the child what will help. Experiment with different plans and devices. One child organized his homework by setting his alarm clock to go off at twenty-minute intervals and would plan out his homework in twenty-minute chunks. Another child found that a work processor made the task of writing immensely easier. Another found that studying with earphones on allowed for better concentration. Use as your guiding principle: Whatever works --- but isn't illegal or dangerous.

10. Always remember: negotiate, don't struggle.

Parents and educators have the power to make a difference in each child's life, and the start of the school year provides the opportunity for new beginnings and new ways of dealing with old challenges. A small adjustment to your routine or a change to the old patterns and attitudes can have a tremendous impact on positive family dynamics. It is when teachers and parents feel helpless and hopeless about their child's learning abilities that serious failures and difficulties result.

By setting up some structures and helping to organize the life of your child with AD/HD you optimize the potential for a successful start to a new school year. The feeling of success --- however small --- provides the foundation for a more positive attitude about school, learning and the possibilities that can come with having AD/HD. Help your child to see that AD/HD is less about deficits and disabilities, but more about Attention that is Determined, Healthy and Definitely creative. With that optimistic attitude your family can always be filled with **HOPE** --- **H**elp to **O**ptimize the **P**otential for **E**xcellence. And, when there is more HOPE, life at home can be so much fun.

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