

Living With ADD/ADHD, Living Without Drugs

A Common-Sense Approach

by

Cynthia Rymer

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Introduction

When I was teaching in the late 1970's, I had a ninth grade English class that met right after lunch. One of the students, a short, thin, blonde boy, would come in so wired that I practically had to pry him off the ceiling. After several weeks of this behavior, I finally asked him what he'd had for lunch, and he told me cookies, an ice cream bar, and a can of soda pop.

No wonder he was crazy! So I talked to him about the effects of sugar, then called his mother and talked to her, and afterwards he was a different kid.

You don't need me to tell you that sugar drives children crazy. And when you add the caffeine in most soda pop, you might as well be shooting up your child with amphetamines.

Food affects our body chemistry, which in turn affects our behavior. And the smaller the child, the greater the effect.

But while food is the major factor that can harm your child's concentration, there is another factor that's almost as toxic: boredom.

When I look back at myself as a student, I realize that today I would be classified as having borderline ADD/ADHD (Attention Deficit Disorder). I was a very smart girl with a lot of physical energy at a time when girls were supposed to be meek and mild, and I had a very hard time sitting still in my seat while drowning in drivel.

Ninth grade was a particularly rough year because every day I was forced to sit through two hours of a combined English/social studies class that was deadly. I was so

miserably bored that I used to sit at my desk at the back of the room and tear sheets of paper into itty-bitty pieces to keep from howling in frustration.

By the time I finally escaped, I wanted to run out of that school and keep on going. But that was in 1964, when schools were still prisons, so instead I just went on to my next class, bristling with suppressed energy.

Most schools just don't challenge really bright students. They're designed to manage the broad middle range, and while federal laws insist that they take care of children with learning disabilities, there's nothing on the books to protect children with hyper abilities. And now that most schools are dealing with reduced budgets and financial pressure to focus on standardized tests, the very bright students are ignored even more.

Until they act up, of course. Then they're diagnosed with ADD/ADHD and drugged into submission, which makes life easier for everyone but them.

Are there children who really need drugs? Possibly, but if so, they're only a very small minority.

Can your child concentrate on something that interests him for at least five to ten minutes? Does she sit quietly while watching TV or a movie she likes?

If you can answer "yes" to either question, then the chances are very good that my approach will help you and your child learn to live with ADD/ADHD without using drugs.

But I want to warn you—this program will take a significant amount of time and effort, especially at the beginning when you're making so many changes. I know you parents are extremely busy, which is why I've made this book as short and as clear as I can. And if you do put in the time at the beginning, once your child starts having positive results, making the changes will get easier and easier.

Enough talk. Let's get started!

Introduction

1. Sugar + Caffeine = Wild Children
 2. Boredom can be toxic to your child's concentration.
 3. Most schools don't challenge really bright children.
 4. Only a very small minority of children with ADD/ADHD—if *any*—need drugs.
 4. If your child can concentrate on something that interests him or sit quietly watching TV or a movie, then this program will probably help him.
 5. This program will take a significant amount of time and effort, but once your child starts having positive results, the changes will get easier and easier.
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Other Factors

You need to make sure your child doesn't have any learning disabilities, especially dyslexia. If his brain is twisting letters and numbers, then schoolwork is bound to be torture for him.

You also need to make sure your child is in good health. Is her eyesight strong? Can he hear easily? Many children have trouble in school because they can't focus sharply on the blackboard or a page, or hear the teacher clearly.

Is she being tormented by other kids? Does he have a personality conflict with a teacher? Does she like her hairstyle? Does he feel comfortable in his clothes?

Equally important, does your child get along with her brothers and sisters? Does he have a good relationship with you, his parents?

Children live with very strong pressures to fit in and get along and do well, and if they're having trouble living with the stress, that could significantly affect their concentration.

So make your child is healthy, physically and emotionally, and if she's having problems, do whatever is necessary to help her become healthy.

Other Factors

1. Made sure your child doesn't have any learning disabilities, especially dyslexia.
 2. Make sure your child is in good health: Is her eyesight strong? Can he hear easily?
 3. Make sure your child is psychologically comfortable with other kids, her teacher, her family, and herself.
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Teachers

Do not make an enemy of your child's teacher unless you absolutely have to, especially if your child is in elementary school and spends most of the day with the same teacher. Instead, do your research (like reading this book), polish your diplomacy, and do everything in your power to work with her.

Most teachers are dedicated, hardworking, underpaid professionals who spend significant chunks of their income buying supplies for themselves and their students. Furthermore, teachers are often saddled with impossibly large classes of thirty or more students and are constantly being pressured to raise those test scores. The last thing a teacher needs is a sugar-crazed kid or three wreaking havoc with her hard-won order. So it's up to you parents to make sure that your child eats correctly, gets enough rest and exercise, and is prepared to behave appropriately and do his work when he gets to school.

On the other hand, you are also the only defense your child has against a medication-mad culture. It's far easier for the school personnel to drug your child than to work with her and you. Still, you can't expect them to do all the work. *You* are the parents, *you* bear the legal responsibility, and *you* have the moral duty to help your child become the best person he can be.

Teachers

1. Do not make an enemy of your child's teacher unless you absolutely have to.
 2. Most teachers are dedicated and hardworking professionals, but they're also overworked.
 3. Make sure your child eats correctly, gets enough rest and exercise, and is prepared to behave appropriately and do his work.
 4. You're the only defense your child has against a medication-mad culture.
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Food

In 1974, Dr. Benjamin Feingold, a pediatrician and allergist, published *Why Your Child is Hyperactive*, which presented a program to identify and remedy food allergies in children. If your child has a food allergy, you already know how it can cause dangerous physical problems. What Dr. Feingold discovered was that food allergies could cause *mental* problems. He also discovered that chemical additives could have the same allergic effect.

So if my common-sense food strategy doesn't work for your child, I strongly urge you to go to this web site: www.feingold.org, which is the home of the updated Feingold program. I'm not associated with this program in any way, and I'm no longer familiar with the specifics, but it does offer a chance to keep your child off drugs, and that's why I urge you to check it out if my strategy doesn't work.

Now to my food program:

1. No sugar, including corn syrup, fructose, and honey, and no caffeine.
2. No additives, including food coloring and natural and artificial flavors.
3. No chemicals, including preservatives, MSG, and artificial sweeteners.

You also need to be very careful with carbohydrates, especially the starchy ones, because our bodies quickly turn them into sugar. I'm not suggesting a low-carb diet—that would be extremely dangerous for a child. Instead, as an antidote, make sure your

child eats her carbs with other foods. So if he wants a piece of toast, add some butter or peanut butter or a small piece of cheese. Combine fruit with a little protein as well. (Fruit juice, however, is a non-no, because it has so much sugar.)

As we all know, protein is essential for energy and health, but it's very hard to digest great globs of it at once. So spread your child's protein out during the day, with the largest amounts in the afternoon. I know we Americans are used to eating big dinners, but that's really counterproductive. First we sit for an hour, wiped out while our bodies try to digest all that food, and then we get a jolt of energy, just when we should be winding down and getting ready to go to sleep.

This is particularly rough on small children, who need early bedtimes. So if you can't give your child her dinner by 6 p.m., arrange for her to have a hearty snack around 4, and then she can eat a very light dinner with you later.

Now we need to talk about food shopping. I follow a more rigorous version of this food plan (minimal salt, no bad cholesterol, no dairy), and it's gotten to the point where the only food I can buy at my regular grocery store is fresh produce, frozen vegetables, and canned fish.

Over the past few years, food companies have been adding preservatives to everything from bread to mayonnaise. MSG has become increasingly popular as a flavor enhancer, especially when processors cut down on salt, and food coloring and/or preservatives are now used in non-food items like toothpaste and eye drops.

You have to become an additive detective, examining food labels and charts and deducing that if a toothpaste has color and a sweet taste, it's going to have food coloring and artificial sweeteners in it. Same thing for vitamins and cough syrups and other medicines.

Speaking of vitamins, does your child really need to take them? If he eats a healthy variety of foods, including plenty of fruits and vegetables and enough protein,

he's probably getting everything he needs. I'm taller than both my parents were, and I never took vitamins as a child.

You also need to think about fortified foods, especially cereals. If your child is getting enough vitamins and minerals from her food, those extras could cause her to develop unpleasant sensitivities when she gets older.

I'm not a nutritionist, so I urge you to do some research. With the Internet and bookstores and libraries, there's a wealth of material for you to study. You could also check with your pediatrician, but I want to warn you that doctors get very little training in nutrition. Remember, doctors are human, like the rest of us, and if you have doubts about what they tell you, check it out on your own. (This is a lesson I've learned from bitter personal experience.)

We also need to talk about water. The water from your tap has been treated with chemicals to purify it of other chemicals. If you run your cold water for a minute or two, you can usually sniff a metallic scent. So be sure to attach a water purifier to your kitchen faucet and be rigorous about changing the filter regularly.

I buy most of my food at health food stores. Yes, they're more expensive, but I figure it's cheaper in the long run than getting sick.

The large health food store I go to is just like a fancy grocery store, with fresh baked organic bread, organic and conventional produce, a bakery, plenty of frozen food, organic chips and snacks, and even a deli with everything from poached salmon to meats without hormones or antibiotics.

I still read all the labels, though, because most of the frozen and prepared foods have a lot of salt and sugar and fat, even if they don't have chemicals. I understand that you busy parents don't always have the time to cook dinner every night, so just be careful about what you buy. And do consider simplifying your meals—you could heat up

a frozen casserole you made over the weekend, stir-fry a light meal, or have a salad and sandwiches.

Or you could eat out, just as long as you avoid the fast-food places. They use large doses of salt and sugar and fat to make their food have a taste, and they put preservatives in anything they can, including the buns, ketchup, and dipping sauces. Even if you ordered a salad, there's still a good chance that they would have sprayed it with a chemical or three to keep the lettuce from wilting. And then the dressing is going to be loaded with chemicals.

Unfortunately, the same thing could be true at a restaurant, since many restaurants buy their food from wholesalers who buy it from the same companies that put the chemicals in the food at your grocery store. So you're going to have to be careful about where you eat, and you're going to have to ask a lot of questions about the food.

If I were you, right about now I'd be thinking, "How on earth am I going to get my child to do all this?"

So try to put yourself in your child's shoes for a minute. He wants to please you and do well in school, but no matter how hard he tries, he just can't sit still long enough to do his schoolwork. So she ends up surrounded by people who keep picking at her until they make her feel like a miserable failure.

He could take a pill, of course, but all drugs have side effects, so he'd still feel surrounded by people watching and monitoring him.

There is another choice, however, and this is what you need to explain to your child.

Like the rest of us, children want and need to have some control over their lives. ADD/ADHD has taken this control away from your child, but she can take it back if she starts controlling what she eats.

I don't have any children of my own, but I know from my teaching experience that children want and need limits, and that they relish challenges. So make your child as full a partner as you can in this food program.

You can start by explaining, as I've done, about food and allergies, and then talk specifically about sugar and caffeine. Help your child figure out which foods are safe to eat, and then work together to create a week of menus.

Then go food shopping together. If your child is old enough to read, look at the labels together. If he's not, then read them to him. Remember that younger children can do less than older ones, so gear your planning and shopping to suit your child's energy levels and attention span. You may have to do most of the planning and shopping at the beginning, but as your child starts eating better and getting stronger, she'll be able to participate more and more.

This isn't going to be easy for either of you. Cutting out fast food and being so careful in restaurants is going to interfere with your social lives. And this program is going to take a lot more work from you and a tremendous amount of discipline from your child.

But, as you already know, ADD/ADHD is an insidious time gobbler anyway, so why not put in the time doing the preventive work, instead of being struck in the face with frustration and ambushed by unexpected disasters?

Food—Basics

1. No sugar, including corn syrup, fructose, and honey.
 2. No additives, including food coloring and natural and artificial flavors.
 3. No chemicals, including preservatives, MSG, and artificial sweeteners.
 4. Combine carbohydrates and fruit with a little protein.
 5. Fruit juice is a no-no.
 6. Spread your child's protein out during the day, with the largest amounts in the afternoon.
 7. If your child can't eat dinner by 6 p.m., give her a hearty snack around 4, and then she can eat a light dinner with you.
 8. If this food program doesn't work for your child, check out www.feingold.org.
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Food Shopping

1. Become an additive detective and examine labels and charts carefully.
 2. Does your child need vitamins and fortified foods like cereal?
 3. Attach a water purifier to your kitchen faucet and change the filter regularly.
 4. Find at least one health food store where you can buy the foods unavailable at your grocery store.
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Eating Out

1. Avoid all fast-food places because they use preservatives and loads of sugar, salt and fat.
 2. Be very careful about what you eat in restaurants, because much of their food is made by the same companies that put the chemicals in the food at your grocery store.
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Working With Your Child

1. Put yourself in your child's shoes.
 2. Explain that he can regain some control over his life by controlling what he eats.
 3. Children want and need limits, and they relish challenges.
 4. Make your child as full a partner as you can in this food program.
 5. This program is going to take a lot of work from you and a tremendous amount of discipline from your child.
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Rest and Exercise

As you already know, children have a lot of physical energy. Younger children get their energy in spurts and then need to rest afterwards, while older children develop the kind of sustained energy that gets them through soccer and baseball games.

When children don't get enough rest or exercise, their reaction is the same—irritability and loss of concentration. So it's essential that you make sure your child gets plenty of both.

Let's talk about rest first. All children need at least eight hours of sleep, and younger children need more. Since every child has different needs, I suggest you talk to your pediatrician to figure out the right amount of sleep for your child.

Young children also need a regular bedtime throughout the year. Of course there'll be exceptions for special occasions, but even on vacation it's important for your child to stay with her usual habits. This is particularly true for children with ADD/ADHD, since the more regularity they have, the more stable they'll become.

Children need quiet times during the day as well. School can be exhausting for any child, and a child with ADD/ADHD is going to wear out even more because of all the effort he has to use just to sit still.

So be sure your child has at least half an hour—hopefully more—every day just to relax and calm down. This should be time without television or the computer. She can read, draw a picture, sit under a tree, or stare at the ceiling, just as long as the time

gives her a chance to let go of the day's frustrations and gently pull herself back together.

Now to exercise (physical activity). Your child needs to have some free and unstructured time to do what he likes at the pace he likes. Anything from walking the dog to riding a bike to shooting hoops fits here—actually just about anything physical fits as long as it's *her* choice.

Then there are the structured activities. I think spending some time in a structured situation at least once a week could be very helpful to a child with ADD/ADHD, because it's an opportunity to move and learn at the same time. Any kind of lessons would fit in here, as well as team sports. A course in one of the Asian martial arts would also be a good choice, because martial arts combine mental discipline with physical activity.

As I'm sure you've heard, children are now starting to get adult illnesses, like diabetes and elevated cholesterol. Much of the fault lies with their diets, but another significant cause is their lack of activity. They come home from sitting in school all day and then they glue themselves to the TV, computer, or game machine.

So you're going to have to put limits on how much time your child can spend with these entertainments. Moving around, relaxing, and doing homework must come first, and only afterwards can they sit with their machines.

And you're also going to have to monitor content, particularly violence. I realize older children are going to fight you on this, but you're the parent and it's up to you to protect your child from growing up too fast.

Violent content is educational bad news as well, because it accustoms your child to fast and shocking action, which only makes it harder for him to develop the patience he needs to do his schoolwork.

Children are children, no matter how big they get, and they need to spend time with their parents. So spend some time with your child doing the good stuff, like bicycling or roller blading or just throwing a ball or taking a walk.

This book's approach to managing ADD/ADHD is only going to work with teamwork, and while that may seem onerous first, it's really a priceless opportunity for you and your child to spend more time together and cement your relationship.

Talk about a silver lining!

Rest and Exercise

1. Children have a lot of physical energy.
 2. When children don't get enough rest or exercise, their reaction is the same—irritability and loss of concentration.
 3. All children need at least eight hours of sleep, and younger children need more.
 4. Young children need a regular bedtime throughout the year.
 5. Children need quiet times during the day.
 6. Your child needs to have some free and unstructured time to do what she likes at the pace she likes.
 7. Spending time in a structured physical activity, particularly a course in the Asian martial arts, can be very helpful to a child with ADD/ADHD.
 8. Limit the amount of time your child can spend with the TV, computer, and game machine.
 9. Monitor content, especially violence.
 10. Spend some time with your child doing the good stuff, like bicycling, roller blading, just throwing a ball or taking a walk.
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Boredom

If your child is bored in a class, you could talk to his teacher about it. But that would probably just create some unnecessary antagonism, because if she wanted to help him, she already would have.

Instead, you can help your child. The major bookstores have shelves of workbooks for the elementary grades, and you could give her a few pages a day to work on. As your child gets older and is able to read easily on his own, make sure he always has an interesting book with him.

Then there's my favorite—puzzles. When I taught junior high school English, I always had stacks of them sitting on a table. I used to make word searches out of our vocabulary lists, which is something that you could easily do, especially since there are now several puzzle computer programs. And there are also many puzzle magazines, including the fat ones with a wide variety of word games.

If your child likes to draw, make sure she has some extra pencils and plain white paper. If he likes to write, encourage him to write stories or newspaper articles. Thanks to computers and scanners and printers, you could help your child become a published artist or author!

But—and this is a *big* but—make sure your child understands that she can do these activities only *after* she finishes her schoolwork. And make sure you talk to his teacher first and explain that these activities are part of your efforts to help your child become a better student.

If you keep your diplomacy polished, you can turn you child's boredom into a win-win-win situation, improving her relationship with her teacher, with you, and with herself.

Boredom

1. Help your child deal with classroom boredom by giving him workbook sheets, puzzles, drawing paper, and writing paper.
 2. When she's old enough to read easily on her own, make sure she always has an interesting book with her.
 3. Make sure your child understands that he can do these activities only *after* he finishes his schoolwork.
 4. Explain to her teacher that these activities are part of your efforts to help your child become a better student.
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Individual Interests

Children need to have dreams for themselves so they can feel hopeful about their futures. That's why they need to be exposed to the widest range of possibilities and to be able to explore them at will.

The "at will" part is extremely important. Children don't have all that much control over their lives, and those with ADD/ADHD have even less. They deserve at least to have the freedom to dream the dreams they want and to pick and choose among them.

I remember how my mother and I used to fight about my practicing the piano. There were days when I'd come home from school thoroughly wired from trying to behave myself, and the last thing I wanted to do was struggle with a new piano piece. But my mother insisted that I practice at least half an hour a day, so when I came home she'd lock me in the basement with the piano. Most days I'd play—grudgingly. But sometimes my frustration was so unbearable that I'd pound the keyboard with my fists until she let me out.

She would have been much smarter just to leave me alone. After a week or two of not practicing enough—and being embarrassed at my lesson—I would either have started practicing more or moved on to something else.

So I urge you to be smart with your child and let her explore at her own pace.

But first he needs to figure out what interests him. And that's where your neighborhood library comes in.

Chances are your child already knows the fiction section has loads of good stories, but she may not know that the nonfiction sections are filled with hidden treasure. Is he interested in dinosaurs? There are plenty of books about them. What about the stars or worms or Roman soldiers? Plenty of books about them, too.

Maybe she wants to learn about women scientists or fashion design or Greek mathematics. The library's got the stuff.

What's so wonderful about the library is the fact that all the books are free. So if he takes out three books about spiders and another about Mozart and then goes home and decides none of them are worth reading, he doesn't have to feel guilty.

And once she's found a sustainable interest, you two can go to a bookstore and buy some books about it. That way he'll have a reference library of his own to study whenever he wants.

And don't forget about the Internet. There are web sites dedicated to just about anything you can think of, and there are several children's sites with interactive sections so kids can talk to each other about their interests. Just be sure to monitor your child's activities on-line, because there's always the danger of predators.

And then there's that great open field of exploration, the encyclopedia. Most publishers now offer CD versions for under \$100, and libraries often sell sets at their used book sales or in their used bookstores. I got a huge, gorgeous set of a recent Encyclopaedia Britannica at one library store for only forty bucks!

Of course, interests don't have to be confined to reading. There's the old standby of music lessons, or maybe dance lessons or a drama club.

There's also the wide variety of arts and crafts. Since so many school districts have been cutting art programs because of budget crunches, this is an area you and your child should definitely consider.

Many local art centers and organizations like the YMCA offer classes, but sometimes it's more fun just to work on your own. It's not very expensive to have

drawing paper and crayons around, and if your child shows a strong interest, then he can move on to tempera or watercolor or even acrylic paints. (All three are water-soluble.)

Or she can work with clay or paper sculpture or altered books or stamping or collage—the opportunities for inexpensive fun really are endless.

I happen to love yarn, and I've worked my way through knitting and crochet and am now weaving on cardboard looms. I also spin my own yarn on a drop spindle. I didn't even know that regular people were still spinning yarn until I found the magazine, *Spin-Off*, at a bookstore. It took me a couple of years to get up the courage, but I finally ordered a starter kit and a video by mail, and after a few hours of breaking the fiber and banging my feet, I was spinning yarn. (Yee-hah!)

So browse the magazine racks wherever you find them. From model railroads and rockets to quilting and teddy bears, there's a magazine for just about any art or craft.

And then take an hour or two and go browsing with your child in a craft or hobby store. Every time I go to a craft store, I always find something new to intrigue me. It seems that women tend to go to the craft stores and men to the hobby stores, but don't let that stop your child. If your daughter wants to build a model airplane, get her one; if your son wants to start scrapbooking, get him the supplies.

And don't forget about sharing your own interests. Whether you collect stamps or sew doll clothes or build rocking chairs, there's a good chance your child will want to join you. Just don't pressure her to stick around if she appears to lose interest.

Individual interests are important to all children, but they're particularly helpful to children with ADD/ADHD because they encourage mental and physical concentration. There's nothing like doing something you enjoy to teach you how to wall out unwelcome distractions.

Finally, a personal, passionate interest can make life worth living. I got felled by chronic fatigue syndrome when I was 40, and there were times during my long and very frustrating recover when my love affair with yarn was the only thing that kept me going.

So give your child the gift of passion by helping him discover what he truly loves to do.

Individual Interests

1. Children need to have dreams for themselves so they can feel hopeful about their futures.
 2. Children with ADD/ADHD particularly need to have the freedom to dream the dreams they want and to pick among them.
 3. Your neighborhood library's nonfiction sections are filled with hidden treasures.
 4. Once your child finds a sustainable interest, go to a bookstore together and buy some books about it.
 5. The Internet has web sites dedicated to just about anything you can think of.
 6. There are several children's sites with interactive sections so kids can talk to each other about their interests.
 7. Be sure to monitor your child's on-line activities because there's always the danger of predators.
 8. Encyclopedias offer great open fields of exploration.
 9. Interests can expand beyond reading to music and dance lessons, a drama club, and the great variety of arts and crafts.
 10. Browse magazine racks wherever you find them, since there's a magazine for just about any art or craft.
 11. Take an hour or two to go browsing with your child in a craft or hobby store.
 12. Share your own interests with your child.
 13. Individual interests help children with ADD/ADHD because they encourage mental and physical concentration.
 14. A personal, passionate interest can make life worth living.
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Discipline

I firmly believe that praise is a far more effective form of discipline than punishment. When I was teaching, I always set very specific and rigorous standards for behavior, and I enforced them consistently. During the first few weeks of each term, I'd have to call some parents and speak sharply to some students, but once everyone settled in, I was able to put more and more attention on my students' achievements and encourage them with praise.

This new program for your child is going to require some very difficult changes. As I said in the chapter on food, children want and need limits, and they relish challenges. But they also need encouragement, and the more difficult the task, the more encouragement they need.

You don't want to offer false praise, of course, since your child will instantly know you're faking it. But I do urge you to find at least three things to praise your child for every day, and to make a strong effort to look for more and more opportunities.

And I want to warn you—your child will have setbacks. Someone will offer her some candy or a cookie, and she'll eat it. He'll flake out and forget to bring home his overnight assignment. Frustration is an integral part of any major change, and both you and your child will feel pushed beyond your limits. And more than once.

But that's all part of growth. It's up to you to insist on seeing the glass as half-full, even when it's close to empty. It's up to you to encourage your child with genuine praise even when you both feel like quitting.

And, most important of all, it's up to you to make sure your child always knows you love her, even when she just screwed up. Again.

Discipline

1. Praise is a more effective form of discipline than punishment.
 2. Find at least three things to praise your child about every day and look for more.
 3. Don't fake the praise.
 4. Your child will have setbacks and will need you to continue to encourage him with genuine praise.
 5. Make sure your child always knows you love her, even when she just screwed up.
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Reading

Even with the tremendous growth of electronic media, we still get most of our information and much of our entertainment from reading. We read e-mail and instant messages, we read web pages, and we continue to read books and magazines.

That's why it's essential that your child become a confident and delighted reader. If he has a learning disability, get him immediate help. If she has trouble focusing on the page, get her eyes checked. Do whatever it takes to remove any impediments between your child and the printed word.

Then help your child develop a passion for reading. Make a weekly date to go to your neighborhood library so he can freely explore and take out whatever books he wants. Give her a generous book allowance and take her book shopping to spend it. Teach your child that these books are for fun, so if he starts a book and doesn't like it, he can just put it aside and start another.

Spend time reading with your child. Instead of watching TV in the evening, read together. You can read to her, she can read to you, or you can each read quietly to yourselves.

Go book hunting together. Most libraries have used book sales, so mark the dates on your calendar and make them family outings. And don't limit yourself to your own library—you don't need a library card to shop, so check out all the libraries within a decent driving distance.

Then there are used and outlet bookstores, secondhand shops, and garage sales. Whenever you go to a mall or on a vacation, make book hunting a top priority.

And when birthdays and other holidays come around, give gifts of books and magazine subscriptions. Fill your home with reading material until reading becomes second nature for everyone in your family.

Reading is one of the great gifts of being human, so help your child learn to enjoy his birthright.

Reading

1. We get most of our information and much of our entertainment from reading.
 2. Your child needs to become a confident and delighted reader.
 3. Do whatever it takes to remove any impediments between your child and the written page.
 4. Help your child develop a passion for reading by taking weekly library and book-shopping trips together.
 5. Spend time reading with your child.
 6. Go book hunting together.
 7. Give your child books and magazine subscriptions for gifts.
 8. Fill your home with reading material until reading becomes second nature for everyone in your family.
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Study Habits

Once your child has settled down enough to concentrate, she'll be ready for you to help her develop flexible study habits. And I think you'll find that if you put in the time up front, studying will become a productive and—dare I say it?—enjoyable experience.

Learning something new can be one of the most thrilling parts of life. Do you remember when you finally mastered something difficult—Latin conjugation, quadratic equations, or mitered corners? Didn't you feel enormous satisfaction that left you glowing for days afterwards?

This experience of mastery builds confidence in our abilities, and for a child with ADD/ADHD, few things will be more thrilling than beating the demons in his brain and learning what he wants when he wants.

So what do I mean by “flexible”? Doing whatever it takes to learn the material. Studying is really a habit of mind, and once your child learns how to think about learning, she'll be able to create whatever strategies she needs.

Let me give you an example. When I was a senior in high school, I took advanced placement classes in English, American history, Spanish, and calculus. For the first time in my school career, I was actually challenged enough not to be bored (actually, calculus nearly did me in!), and my Spanish teacher, in particular, made going to class one of the peak experiences of my life.

This was in 1968, when the AP exams were fairly new, so there were no books or outside classes to help me prepare for them. This was also before teachers were

forced to teach tests, so we were told the basic setup of the exams—multiple choice questions and essays (long problems in calculus)—and then left on our own to study.

The only textbook I had was for calculus, so I went to the textbook store, and in the basement stacks I found a used college anthology of short stories, a two-volume outline of American history, and a Spanish grammar book.

I didn't do any cramming—I'd already gotten into the college of my choice and I figured any AP credit I got would be a gift. Instead, I relaxed and enjoyed myself, reading some fine literature, learning all sorts of new details about American history, re-immersing myself in beautiful Spanish, and reworking troublesome problems in calculus.

The long problems on the calculus test were so hard I figured I'd failed, but the other three tests were fun. I came to them with an open and positive attitude, and I came away feeling I'd done my best.

Then the shocking news came from my college. I'd gotten eight hours—a full year's credit—for calculus! Then I got six hours for history, four for Spanish, and three for English.

There I was, a girl who'd had trouble sitting still for most of my life, someone who'd been shredding paper in misery only three years earlier, and I was going to start college with twenty-one hours of AP credit.

Miracles can happen, and I'm living proof that one did back in 1968.

So let's get down to specifics.

Elementary School

When children begin elementary school, the most important thing they need is a sense of structure. Even if they've been to daycare or preschool, elementary school is the real thing, with grades and evaluations and the dreaded standardized tests.

So set up a schedule with your child. Be sure to give her plenty of time after school to unwind in the ways I discussed in the chapter on rest and exercise, and then help her learn how to settle down to do her homework.

You also need to set up a specific time for study and stick to it. Before or after dinner would work well, just as long as you make sure that your child is neither hungry nor sleepy. But do feel free to choose whatever time works best for you.

Younger children will have less homework than older ones, but it's never too early to get them in the habit of spending some quiet time studying. And do make sure the time *is* quiet—no radio, TV, game boxes, headphones, telephones, or talkative people allowed.

Younger children also need to be supervised, because they're going to need some time to figure out just what it means to study. Very young children can practice printing the alphabet and numbers. As they get older, they'll probably have specific assignments, but if they don't, they can always review vocabulary words and arithmetic facts, practice their penmanship, or do some reading for a future assignment.

Depending on where your child goes to school, some or even most of his homework may have to be done on a computer. So make sure she has enough room to work, even if that means establishing a quiet study time at the kitchen table.

After you've set up a structure, you'll be able to start helping your child learn how to work. But be sure you limit yourself to helping—children need to do their own homework not only to learn honesty, but also to develop confidence in their abilities.

Start by talking together about what his assignments are. Do the harder ones first, when she has the most energy, and then work your way to the easier ones.

And break longer assignments into manageable pieces. It's one thing to practice printing the letters "A", "B", and "C", and another to master the entire alphabet in one evening.

The same principle holds true for learning arithmetic facts. Start out with the smaller numbers and then work your way up to the larger ones. Teachers automatically do this, but it's always a good idea to review the early—and easier—facts first, especially if your child is starting to get frustrated and lose confidence.

I think flash cards are a great way to learn bits of information, like multiplication tables, vocabulary words, and historical dates. You can buy many commercial packs, especially for arithmetic, but I always had more fun making my own. Get some big note cards, put the problem or definition or question on the front, and then put the answer on the back. Once your child can print confidently, let her make her own, and if she wants to be artistic about it, make sure she has crayons and colored markers.

Learning bits of information can become an easy task, once your child's mind becomes clear enough for him to concentrate. But as she gets older, she's going to have to learn how to pull information out of her reading, and that's when you'll need to use leading questions.

As experienced readers know, writers use a lot of words and sentences that make reading smoother but aren't necessary for understanding. And when we're looking for specific information, we may even be able to ignore entire paragraphs.

For instance, you could boil my paragraph about flash cards down to one sentence: Make your own flash cards to study bits of information. Such bald writing, though, would quickly become annoying to read, so we writers smooth out our basic information with examples and anecdotes.

But to beginning readers every word is equally important, so you need to teach your child how to pull out what he needs by asking questions.

Let's take the food chapter. The first question would be, "What are the three basics of the food program?" Then you could ask, "Why should carbohydrates be combined with other foods?" or "Why does it matter if a toothpaste has color?"

I call this kind of question leading, because the phrasing leads you to a specific answer. A more general question, such as “Did you like this book?” might be more interesting, but when your child is looking for specific information, she needs to be pointed in the right direction.

This kind of reading comprehension is the most important skill your child can learn for school. As you probably remember, it’s the basic form for questions on most standardized tests. So it’s essential that you start preparing your child as early as possible, with gentle leading questions, before he gets sucked into the whirlpool of academic testing.

As both a former teacher and a former student, I dislike standardized tests enormously. Rather than testing a student’s knowledge, they test her ability to take a specific test at a specific time on a specific day. They evaluate a child’s ability to conform instead of his ability to think imaginatively, and the questions are biased in favor of children whose parents most resemble the writers of the test—i.e., well-educated professionals.

Since teachers are now being forced to teach the tests, your child will be getting a basic grounding in how to handle the questions. What she’ll need from you is back-up. Those tests are so boring that he’ll want to zip through the questions before he falls asleep, so he needs you to remind him to take his time and then to be sure to go back and check over his answers. It’s all too easy to blacken the wrong spot, and if she gets off the line—i.e., marks answer 13 in line 14, she can screw up all the rest of the answers.

For a child with ADD/ADHD, taking a standardized test can be torture. So I suggest you turn a potential disaster into an exciting challenge. There are all sorts of workbooks with sample questions available, so buy a couple and make a big deal out of mastery. For younger children, keep a chart on the wall with stars for every correct answer. For older ones, keep a scorecard. Build in little rewards for finishing a section,

and do cheers and victory dances when your child figures out a particularly tough question.

Remind him that building brainpower requires the same kind of discipline and determination that building muscle power takes. Arnold Schwarzenegger didn't become Mr. Universe overnight, and she won't become a test ace overnight either.

Secondary School

So far I've been talking about working with elementary school children. But when a child moves over to middle school, he's going to need an even firmer structure because of all the changes he'll be facing.

The first and most obvious change is that she'll have to go to a different room with a different teacher for each subject. Such a major disruption will be hard on any child, but for one with ADD/ADHD, it can feel like chaos.

You're going to need to spend some time over the summer preparing your child for the change. Start by talking about the differences between elementary and middle school, and find out how she feels about making the change. He's going to be scared, even if he doesn't say it, so be sure to give him lots of encouragement.

When she gets her schedule, go to school with her (or if she prefers, send an older sibling or friend) and find all the rooms together. Find his locker and let him practice the combination until it's second nature. Then walk around the school and browse, so she can get a sense of the building. The more comfortable he feels physically, the more easily he'll adjust.

The second change will be the kind of work she'll be doing. The assignments, both in school and at home, will be longer in length and longer in time. Breaking the assignment into small parts will still continue to be a useful strategy, but for long-term assignments you need to do specific planning as soon as she finds out about them.

The third change will be in the quality of the teaching. Secondary school teachers receive an education that's much lighter on teaching techniques, so unless they either have an outstanding methods teacher or work with a masterful supervisor during student teaching, they're not going to understand the difference between assigning and teaching.

Let me give you another example from my supposedly fine education. When I was a junior in high school, my combined studies (English/social studies) teacher assigned Arthur Miller's play, *The Crucible*, while we were studying Puritan New England. He assigned the play in sections, which we read at home, and then we talked about the characters and plot in class.

On the surface, *The Crucible* is a dramatization of an extended witch trial held in Salem, Massachusetts in 1692. At that time, the Devil was considered a very real presence in everyday life, and men as well as women were tried, tortured, and killed on the basis of an accusation and bizarre and specious evidence.

Because *The Crucible* was written by the great Arthur Miller, it's also about fear and lust and greed, as well as courage, integrity and defiance.

But my teacher never talked about Arthur Miller and his well-earned reputation as a great American playwright. Even worse, he never even mentioned the fact that Miller wrote *The Crucible*, which was first performed in 1953, as a scathing indictment of the Communist witch trials then being conducted by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and by Senator Joseph McCarthy.

Those trials, camouflaged as hearings, brought people into the Congress to testify publicly about their membership in the Communist Party and to give the names of others who had also belonged. If the "witnesses" refused to cooperate, they were fired from their jobs, blacklisted from getting any other jobs, and sometimes even sent to prison for contempt.

If I were to teach *The Crucible* today, I'd make sure my students learned about the Salem witch trials, Arthur Miller, and McCarthyism. I could give lectures about the information, but if I wanted my students to really *learn* the material, I'd have them do the research and then present short oral reports to educate the rest of the class.

And if I were really on the ball, I'd get copies of the relevant sections of The Patriot Act and have the class read and discuss them as well.

I'm being very specific here, because as your child gets older and is faced with more sophisticated material to study, you're probably going to have to step in and provide the teaching that she'll miss out on in school. Most teachers do not deliberately shortchange their students—they teach the way they were taught, and if they never learned the difference between assigning and teaching, they won't know they're doing anything wrong.

I've given you the specifics I think you'll need to help your child study effectively so he can do well in school. But I don't want to end this chapter without reminding you that learning really can be thrilling. If you can find the time and the energy and the heart to work with your child and encourage her, by the time she graduates from high school, she'll have a passion for learning that will nourish her for a lifetime.

Study Habits—Basics

1. If you put in the time up front to help your child develop flexible study habits, studying will become a productive and enjoyable experience.
 2. Learning something new can be one of the most thrilling parts of life.
 3. The experience of mastery builds confidence in our abilities.
 4. “Flexible” means doing whatever it takes to learn the material.
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Elementary School

1. When children begin elementary school, the most important thing they need is a sense of structure.
 2. Set up a schedule with your child that includes a specific time for studying.
 3. It's never too soon to get your child in the habit of spending some quiet time studying.
 4. Quiet time means no radio, TV, game box, headphones, telephones, or talkative people.
 5. Younger children need to be supervised because they're going to need some time to figure out just what it means to study.
 6. Be sure that your child has enough room to work, even if that means establishing a quiet study time at the kitchen table.
 7. Limit yourself to only helping—children need to do their own homework not only to learn honesty, but also to develop confidence in their abilities.
 8. Discuss your child's assignments with him and do the harder ones first, when he has the most energy.
 9. Break long assignments into manageable pieces.
 10. Flash cards are a great way to learn bits of information.
 11. Use leading questions to help your child pull information out of her reading.
 12. Teachers will provide your child with a basic grounding in how to handle standardized tests, but he'll need back-up from you.
 13. Do practice tests at home and make a big deal out of mastery.
 14. Building brainpower requires the same kind of discipline and determination that building muscle power takes.
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Secondary School

1. Your child will need an even firmer structure when he moves to middle school.
 2. Going to a different room with a different teacher for each subject could feel like chaos.
 3. Prepare your child over the summer by talking about the changes.
 4. When your child gets her schedule, go to the school and find all the rooms, practice her locker combination, and then browse through the building.
 5. Assignments will be longer both in length and time, so do specific planning.
 6. Secondary teachers receive an education that's much lighter on techniques, so they may not know the difference between assigning and teaching.
 7. Be prepared to step in and provide any necessary teaching.
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Booze, Drugs, and Sex

Children should not drink alcohol.

Children should not take drugs.

Children should not have sexual intercourse.

Period.

My teaching experience taught me that there's a direct correlation between parental involvement and academic achievement. Whenever I participated in an open house, my regular and advanced classes were always full, while my underachiever classes were always empty.

The same principle applies to personal achievement.

No one forced you to have your children. They're divine gifts, so take good care of them.

Booze, Drugs, and Sex

1. Children should not drink alcohol.
 2. Children should not take drugs.
 3. Children should not have sexual intercourse.
 4. Period.
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Self Defense

I never thought I'd be saying this, but you need to make sure your child can defend herself. Bullying has become a national pastime, and no child is safe no matter where he may live.

First, though, make sure your child hasn't become a bully herself. Kids with problems in school may respond by attacking others, so spend some time talking to your child to find how he's handling his anger.

And she *is* going to be angry. No one likes to fail, especially in front of a large group of people. And when that group is a bunch of insecure children, your child could be in for some vicious hazing.

So start by helping your child deal with his anger. Following this program is a good start, because it gives her something active to do, and something that will show results. And spend time alone with your child, gentle and quiet time, when you can talk to each other about anything that interests either one of you. It's O.K. to let him know that you, too, get frustrated and angry, and that rough times are occasionally a part of life.

But the key word is "occasionally." A child with ADD/ADHD is going to face continuous frustration in school, so she needs you to be a safe harbor where she can talk and vent and ask for help.

Dealing successfully with frustration and anger is the core defense against bullies. If your child feels confident in his ability to handle difficulty, he's going to make a less attractive target for attacks.

But chances are that she'll still be attacked, at least verbally, so you need to help her come up with a response. I like "You're certainly free to think what you like—that's why we have the First Amendment." And I'm sure you can think of others. Then spend some time together play-acting, so he can have a chance to try out several responses to see what works for him.

Unfortunately, children are also facing unprecedented physical attacks. That's why I like the Asian martial arts, because along with mental and physical discipline, they also teach self-defense. You need to do some research in your area to find out what kinds of classes are offered, but I urge you to find *something*. Hopefully, your child will never have to use her self-defense skills, but she needs to have them just in case.

And as girls get older, they're going to need additional preparation. Too many boys are becoming sexual predators (actually even one boy is too many), so your daughter needs to be very careful about dating and parties. Teach her never to accept a drink of any kind from a boy unless she sees him open the can or bottle and pour it directly into a glass. The date-rape drugs are tasteless, as are several other drugs, and you want to make sure she knows what she's drinking and where it came from.

Because your teenaged child is still young and inexperienced, he continues to need you to protect him. Be an active parent—know where your child is going, and with whom, and when she'll be home. Set a reasonable curfew, and be flexible enough to accept a phone call if something happens to delay him. This is the time when children are in active rebellion against everything stable, so you're going to have to walk that fine line between martial law and loving concern.

As you know, I'm very firm about no booze, drugs, or sex. But I'm also realistic enough to know that teenagers face almost unbearable pressure from their peers. So

make sure your child knows that she can talk to you about anything, including birth control. And make sure he knows that you'll always love and help him, no matter what kind of trouble he may get into.

The world can be a very frightening place for children, so they need you, their parents, to be their haven. They need to know they can trust you and turn to you for help, and that you'll always act—or at least try to act—in their best interests.

Self Defense

1. You need to be sure your child can defend himself.
 2. Make sure your child hasn't become a bully because of her anger with her ADD/ADHD.
 3. Help your child deal with his anger by being a safe harbor where he can talk and vent.
 4. Practice comebacks to verbal attacks.
 5. Find a self-defense class for your child.
 6. Teach older girls never to accept a drink of any kind from a boy unless she sees him open the can or bottle and pour it directly into a glass.
 7. Be an active parent—know where your child is going, with whom, and when he'll be home.
 8. Set a reasonable curfew for your teenaged child, and be flexible enough to accept a phone call if something happens to delay her.
 9. This is a time when children are in active rebellion against everything stable, so you're going to have to walk that fine line between martial law and loving concern.
 10. Teenagers face almost unbearable pressures from their peers, so make sure your child knows he can talk to you about anything, including birth control.
 11. Make sure your child knows that you'll always love and help her, no matter what kind of trouble she may get into.
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Conclusion

What really matters in life?

Is it grades? SAT scores? Class rank? What about appearance or popularity?

Later on in life, is it money? Stuff? Appearance again, or popularity?

Many people would say love. But what kind of love—Romantic? Familial?

Altruistic?

I think what really matters is wholeness.

Among all the creatures on this earth, humans have the longest defenseless childhood. Children's lives become a series of increasingly complex negotiations based on one question: How do I keep the outer protection I need while still protecting my inner self?

This question doesn't live in their conscious minds—if it did, it would drive them crazy. But if you carefully observe their behavior, you'll see how they instinctively move between placating others and asserting themselves.

For children with ADD/ADHD, this balancing act becomes even more difficult. Because they're disruptive, they're quickly surrounded by adults who are determined to force them to change their behavior. And because these adults are far more interested in their own lives than in your child's, they're going to choose the quickest and easiest strategy—drugs.

I wrote this book because I want your child to have more choices. I want him to be able to make some of the important decisions in his life. And I want her to feel that she can get the outer protection she needs without abandoning her inner self.

As parents, you are your child's primary protection against the outside world. But you're also the most serious threat to his inner life, because he'll do whatever it takes to keep you from abandoning him.

So, please, be careful as you work with your child. In a family, love, of course, is what really matters. Your child needs to keep her inner self safe and well nourished, and she can do this only if she knows she can trust you.

Your love really can set your child free.

Conclusion

1. Children's lives become a series of increasingly complex negotiations based on one question: How do I keep the outer protection I need while still protecting my inner self?
 2. As parents, you are your child's primary protection against the outside world.
 3. You're also the most serious threat to his inner life, because he'll do whatever it takes to keep you from abandoning him.
 4. Your child needs to know she can trust you.
 5. Your love really can set your child free.
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About the Author

Cynthia Rymer is a former teacher who had borderline ADD/ADHD as a child. As Empress Cindy, she wrote *Empress Cindy's Guide to Really, Truly, Easy Weaving* and has published several poems and short essays.

She can be reached by e-mail: ecimes@yahoo.com