



Guidelines for a Healthy Lifestyle

These are a set of common-sense ideas that are truly helpful to children with attentional, learning and behavioral/emotional difficulties. They are part of a lifelong set of habits that help to manage stress, sustain energy for attention and effort to non-preferred tasks, enhance learning, reduce frustration, and improve self esteem.

The key to these simple ideas is to "practice" them regularly. These are behaviors, choices and commitments that have a real benefit when they are a part of a person's daily routine. However regular "practice" serves to eliminate and reduce many of the ups and downs that befuddle children with attention, learning and social/emotional difficulties.

We encourage parents to consider how to make some of these activities into family habits. Do not just "practice" these activities for your kids! Do them for yourself. In addition, your children are more likely to make them a part of their own lifestyle if they see you "doing" rather than "saying."

Do Things With People (Being Social)

Children with attentional and behavioral difficulties often have problems socializing with peers because they have a hard time learning social skills and rules, reacting appropriately, and reading other's faces and body language. Work with your child to overcome their difficulties by using some of these techniques:

- Speak gently but honestly with your child about their challenges with socializing and how to make changes.
- Go through a magazine and point out pictures of people with different facial expressions. Use sticky notes to label each picture with the person's possible emotions or feelings based on how they look.
- Play charades and have you and your child act out different emotions and try to get the other to guess correctly.
- Role-play various social scenarios with your child. Trade roles often and try to make it fun.

It is important for your child to participate in social activities like sports, dance, karate, etc., but even just playing at recess with other children or at the park after school can be beneficial. Some children may find it easier to start off in small groups. With that in mind, follow these basics:

- Be careful to select playmates for your child with similar language and physical skills.
- Invite only one or two friends at a time at first. Watch them closely while they play.
- Have a zero tolerance policy for hitting, pushing and yelling in your house or yard.
- Make time and space for your child to play, and reward good play behaviors often.

Books

Parker, Harvey C. (2001). *Problem Solver Guide for Students with ADHD*. North Branch, MN: Specialty Press. Ideas for study habits, socialization, and written language skills.

Taylor, John F., Ph.D. (2006). *The Survival Guide for Kids with ADD or ADHD*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, Inc. An excellent resource for children with ADD or ADHD. Recommended for children 6 to 12 years old.

Websites

<http://www.effectiveparentingadvice.com/helping-your-adhd-child-socialize/> (Advice for helping your child learn to socialize and play with others.)

<http://www.additudemaq.com/adhd/article/5401.html> (17 ways parents can help children make friends.)