

# **SELF-ESTEEM AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS**

## **9. SELF-ESTEEM AND ADHD**

### **9.1. Self-Esteem in Children with ADHD**

ADHD stands for Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. It's thought to be caused by developmental differences in the brain that affects the parts controlling attention, concentration, impulsivity, activity levels and memory. ADHD is a common behavioral disorder that affects an estimated 8% to 10% of school-age children. Boys are about three times more likely than girls to be diagnosed with it, though it's not yet understood why. Children with ADHD act without thinking, are hyperactive, and have trouble focusing. They may understand what's expected of them but have trouble following through because they can't sit still, pay attention, or attend to details. Of course, all kids (especially younger ones) act this way at times, particularly when they're anxious or excited. But the difference with ADHD is that symptoms are present over a longer period of time and occur in different settings. They impair a child's ability to function socially, academically, and at home. The good news is that with proper treatment, kids with ADHD can learn to successfully live with and manage their symptoms. What are the symptoms of ADHD? There are three primary characteristics of ADHD: inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.

The symptoms of ADHD usually appear in early childhood, but symptoms are often confused with other disorders or mistaken for normal childhood behaviors. In order for a child to receive appropriate intervention and treatment, it is important that a diagnosis is made by a well-qualified mental health professional. ADHD symptoms such as hyperactivity and impulsiveness tend to appear before inattentiveness. In many cases, symptoms only become apparent in specific situations. For example, a parent might not notice inattentive behavior because it does not cause major problems at home. However, inattentiveness will become more apparent when the child enters school and experiences academic difficulties due to inattentive behavior. Hyperactivity and impulsivity draw greater notice because these symptoms lead to obvious behavioral problems and more disruptive

behavior in school. Most children display these behaviors at some point, but this behavior could be a sign of ADHD when hyperactivity, distractibility, poor concentration, or impulsivity negatively impact school performance, social functioning, or family life. According to researchers, there are three patterns of behavior that indicate ADHD:

1. **Predominantly hyperactive-impulsive type**, who do not exhibit significant inattention.
2. **Predominantly inattentive type**, who do not show significant hyperactive-impulsive behavior, occasionally referred to as ADD.
3. **Combined type**, who display both inattentive and hyperactive-impulsive symptoms.

Regarding the concept of self-esteem, it is about self-value. It's not about being bigheaded or bragging. It's about how we see ourselves, our personal achievements and our sense of worth. Self-esteem is important because it helps children feel proud of who they are and what they do. It gives them the power to believe in their abilities and the courage to try new things. It helps them develop respect for themselves, which in turn leads to being respected by other people. How is self-esteem affected by ADHD? Remember that children's self-esteem is shaped by:

- how he or she thinks
- what they expect of themselves
- how other people (family, friends, teachers) think and feel about them.

Many children with ADHD have problems in school and with teachers and sometimes have difficulties at home. They find it difficult to make and keep friends. People often don't understand their behavior and judge them because of it. They disrupt situations, often gaining punishments, so they may find it easier not to bother trying to fit in or do work at school. All this means, children with ADHD often feel badly about themselves. They might think they're stupid, naughty, bad or a failure. Not surprisingly, their self-esteem takes a battering and they find it hard to think anything positive or good about themselves. Hyperactive, disruptive behavior is often observed in children and young people with ADHD. They can't help behaving this way, but teachers trying to cope with a disruptive child may attempt to manage the situation by excluding them from the classroom. Birthday parties and social events are a natural part of growing up, but other parents may not want to invite a child with a reputation for bad behavior. Again, this can lead to a child with ADHD being excluded. Exclusion only adds to negative feelings in

children and young people reinforcing the idea that they are 'naughty' and unwelcome.

If your child is lacking in self-esteem, there are things you can do to help:

- **Praise and reward:** you need to make your child feel positive about themselves, so try and give praise wherever possible. This can be for large or small actions – for example if they have tried hard at school or helped clear up after a meal. As well as verbal praise, giving small rewards can highlight accomplishments.
- **Love and trust:** don't attach conditions to your love. Your child needs to know you love them no matter how they behave. Tell your child they are special and let them know you trust and respect them.
- **Goals:** set goals that are easily achieved and watch your child's confidence grow.
- **Sports and hobbies:** joining a club or having a hobby can build self-esteem. Depending on your child's interests, the activity could be swimming, dancing, martial arts, crafts or cooking. No matter what the hobby, your child will gain new skills to be proud of and for you to praise. Sometimes children with ADHD will go off their activity, so be prepared to come up with new ideas.
- **Focus on the positive:** get your child to write a list of everything they like about themselves, such as their good characteristics and things they can do. Stick it on the bedroom wall or in the kitchen, so it can be seen every day. Encourage your child to add to it regularly.

## 9.2. Improving Self-Esteem In a Child With ADHD

It's common for children with ADHD to have a low self-image. They so often face failure and criticism that they can end up feeling pretty lousy about themselves. It's not unusual for these kids to think and say things like "I'm so stupid," or "I'm dumb." Worst of all, perhaps, low self-esteem keeps many children from putting effort into things, such as sports or homework, because they expect to fail.

Fortunately, you can do a variety of things to boost your child's self-esteem and counter his feelings of failure. The more self-confidence your child has, the easier it will be for him to face the challenges of ADHD. Here are some suggestions from specialists that can help your child develop and keep a positive self-image.

**1. Heap on the praise** - All children benefit from being told they've done a good job, acted nicely, or tried hard. But frequent praise is especially important for children with ADHD since they're so often being told they've acted inappropriately. Lavish it on, because praise can be a very powerful motivator. Praise all your child's positive behaviors, from sitting at the table while finishing breakfast to remembering to bring the backpack home from school. Try not to focus just on your child's problematic behavior. You may have to readjust your perspective to look for positives. The goal is to catch them being good.

**2. Plan ahead for success** - Praising your child will be easier if he has more chances to shine, or at least to not goof up. Guide your child toward activities that he can excel at. You don't need to shelter him from all possible negative experiences, but you can try to give him plenty of opportunities for success. For example, if your child doesn't do well at team sports but excels at swimming, forget about the weekend soccer team and head for the pool. If playing with lots of kids is too difficult, have one friend over at a time. It can take time to develop a good sense of what works best for your child and what doesn't, but the investment is worth it. Have realistic expectations, keep your eyes open for what they're good at, and find ways for them to participate in these things.

**3. Use reward systems** - Verbal praise goes a long way, but more tangible reward systems, such as giving stickers or other treats for good behavior, are also a helpful way to reinforce positive behaviors and help your child stick with them through the years. Before starting a reward system, sit down with your child to talk about what behaviors will earn marks, so everyone's clear. You can give rewards for accomplishments such as finishing homework or cleaning up one activity before moving to another. Clinical psychologists advise giving the reward immediately after the behavior so that the child is sure to make the connection. Kids with ADHD also seem to benefit from seeing their successes accrue visually, so it helps to keep track of them on a chart. The gold stars they get serve as reminders that they can do well. You may even give your child a special treat after he earns a certain number of stars.

**4. Make tasks a joint effort** - Many kids with ADHD have a tough time finishing things. It helps keep them on task if you're in there actively helping or partnering with them to reach a goal, says child psychologists. Don't do the task for them, but make it a joint effort. Tell them "I'll clean up with you," or "Let me be your clean-up assistant." This will work a lot better than standing over your child while he struggles alone. At mealtime, make it a rule that he has to stay seated for, say, 15 minutes. If your child gets distracted, help him stay focused with light

conversation, eye contact, and reminders that he only needs to finish a few more bites. Brush your teeth together. Make sandwiches for lunch together. You don't need to shadow your child and do everything in unison; instead try sharing the tasks he struggles to complete on his own.

**5. Avoid comparisons** - After they've been in elementary school for a few years, children with ADHD often know they're different. They get reprimanded by the teacher more than other kids do. They tend to have fewer friends. To counter this negative feedback, try hard not to compare your child to his peers while he's around. It's easy for even the most sensitive parent to blurt out comments like, "Your brother can do it; why can't you?" or, "Look at Jenny. She gets it. You can, too." But practice self-control. Comparisons will only serve as further ego blows. Your child needs you to be his number one fan, not just occasionally but again and again.

### **9.3. Parenting Children With ADHD**

Days are often so busy. Our to-do list can sometimes be pages long. It may seem difficult to fit one more thing in, but regular one-on-one time with your child is very important. How often do you sit down with your son or daughter with no distractions, just focusing on him or her, listening without correcting, being together and soaking up positive one-on-one attention? This special time is important for all children and it is especially important for child with ADHD. Unfortunately, children with attention deficit disorder are more likely to experience negative interactions socially with peers and even from adults who may end up correcting them repeatedly or getting frustrated with the ADHD behaviors. As a result, many kids with ADHD also suffer from low feelings of self-worth. Parents are powerful influences in their child's life. Children and teens who feel loved and valued and positively connected with their parents tend to have higher self-esteem and confidence and are also less likely to engage in acting out or risky behaviors. One way to make sure your child is getting the positive attention he needs is to set aside at least 20 minutes a day of special time for just the two of you. Let your child choose how to spend the time. He may want to take a walk together, work in the garden, play a game of cards, prepare dinner together or just sit down and talk.

If you have more than one child, work out a schedule that allows you to spend alone time with each. If you have two kids, see if you can set up time with each daily. If this isn't doable, set up alternating days. If you have three or more children, come up with a plan that will work for your family and be consistent with it. Preserve this time. If the phone rings, let the answering machine pick up or

better yet, turn the ringer off during the 20 minute time. Work hard to make sure there are no distractions. If one of the other children comes over and wants to join, you will have to remind her that this is her sibling's special time and you will have time with her later, too. Remember this is time for listening. Really listen to what your child is saying while you are together. Don't interrupt, correct, teach or question. Listen. Reflect upon your child's feelings. Respect your child's opinions. You don't have to agree with them, just acknowledge them without placing judgment. Keep this time positive and warm. You may be surprised at how important this time becomes for the two of you.