

Tips to help improve

EARLY MORNING

FUNCTIONING

A guide for parents and caregivers of
PRE-TEENS WITH ADHD



THE EARLY MORNING CHALLENGE

Do you feel stressed and overwhelmed in the morning trying to get your child ready for school?

You're not alone.

The early morning can be a time of chaos for everyone in the household trying to get ready to start the day. This is especially true for parents of children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

It is challenging trying to get children to stay on task and pay attention to the morning activities in order to get to school on time – and that's exactly where this booklet can help you.

It is designed to provide you with helpful tips and resources that address how to handle specific unwanted behaviors so that your child can stay focused on completing tasks, leaving the house on time and getting a good start to the day.

Early morning functioning (EMF) occurs from the time of awakening until school or other morning activities.

TIPS TO HELP IMPROVE LISTENING SKILLS

LISTENING SKILLS



Let them vent

Is your child upset about something?

Let your child air his or her frustrations and concerns. Resist the urge to reassure or solve the problem.

Just listen.

Sometimes children may just want to be heard.



Ask, don't tell

When your child shares a problem or frustration with you, resist the urge to immediately give advice.

Listen first, rather than sharing your wisdom.

Ask a question instead such as, "What options are you considering?"

This gives him or her opportunity to practice solving problems, using you as a sounding board.



The echo approach

Does your child have difficulty following or remembering your directions?

Have him or her repeat what you just asked.

A verbal confirmation can help in two ways:

1. It lets you know that he or she heard what you have said
2. It can assist your child in remembering the directive by saying it out loud

Download:

iRewardChart



An app that helps keep children organized by allowing them to earn rewards for completing each task as they go through their morning routine.

TIPS TO HELP IMPROVE YOUR CHILD'S ABILITY TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS

FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS



Pause

After you give instructions, be quiet and wait ten seconds. This gives your child time to follow directions. Sometimes children may be distracted by too many words. If your child doesn't begin the task, address him or her by name, and repeat the instruction,

"Amanda, I'd like you to please put your dishes in the sink."



Put it in writing

Reinforce oral instructions by writing them down. Be sure to post the instruction in a visible, accessible place.

If you are assigning a new project or task, consider showing an example of the completed task so that your child understands what you are asking him or her to do.



Communicate consequences – and stick to them

The morning routine is orchestrated – but what happens if someone doesn't follow along?

Determine consequences in advance with your child. Decide how many warnings you will give out. Sticking to consequences can help reinforce expectations for your child during the morning routine.



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TIPS TO HELP MANAGE OVERALL ORGANIZATION

ORGANIZATION



Try sport/activity-specific containers

If your child plays multiple sports or participates in various activities, consider storing uniforms and any required equipment for each activity separately in clear, plastic containers or tote bags. This way, your child can find items at a glance needed on that activity day.



Give your child a “launch pad”

Designate a small shelf or table by the door as your child’s place to put anything required for school the next day, such as library books, permission forms, or gym clothes. Have your child get in the habit of checking it each morning before heading out to school. You may even want to consider having him or her decorate the launch pad to personalize it.



Have a backpack ritual

Each night before bed, sit down with your child while he or she packs the backpack for the next day.

Sign any permission slips or forms and supervise while he or she assembles items needed.

Use Fridays or Sundays as the time to get rid of items that are no longer needed and to organize materials for the week ahead.



Clean together

Is it time to tidy up your child’s room?

Offer to be his or her cleaning buddy.

Have him or her lead the effort by:

- Determining the start and end time
- Assigning tasks for you to do
- Choosing a reward that you can both enjoy together when the job is done

TIPS TO HELP MANAGE GETTING DRESSED IN THE MORNING

GETTING
DRESSED



Choose clothes the night before

Deciding what to wear to school can take time, especially for children. Avoid a morning run-around looking for the right shirt. Have your child choose and lay out the complete outfit the night before.



Dress before breakfast

Avoid a breakfast scramble with this rule:

Everyone must be dressed for school before sitting down to the table.

This can make for a more leisurely meal and perhaps lead to a less stressful morning.

TIPS TO HELP IMPROVE ATTENTIVENESS

ATTENTIVENESS



Play music in the morning

Play upbeat music in the morning to help your child get the day started and to improve his or her ability to pay attention to the tasks that need to be completed. Ask your child for input in creating the playlist.



Make exercise a daily routine

Have your child participate in some form of physical activity each morning. Consider using Brain Gym exercises to see if it helps improve his or her attention and focus.



Rock out

Did you know that the rhythmic movement of rocking chairs can help with concentration?

Consider having your child sit in a rocking chair to help focus on morning reading or studying.



Have consistent special time

It is important to spend quality time with your child on a regular basis. Set aside time each week to be together one-on-one. Have him or her choose a fun activity such as playing a game, taking a hike or drawing pictures.

Your undivided attention helps communicate that your child is loved and valued.

TIPS TO HELP CHILDREN QUIET DOWN

QUIETING
DOWN



Play the conversation game

Play the conversation game if your child is either too quiet or not quiet enough. The rules are simple: listen and to take turns talking.

Start the game by quietly listening to your child until he or she is finished speaking, then take your turn to talk. Perhaps have your child count how many times you spoke and how many times he or she spoke.



Secret sign

Determine with your child a silent signal that you can use to indicate that it is time to quiet down. Putting a finger to your lips or a light hand on his or her shoulder can convey that it's time to quiet down.



Keep your cool

Children can sometimes mirror the attitudes of their parents.

A cool, positive attitude may help set the tone for the morning routine. If your child isn't doing what he or she is supposed to do to get ready, provide a reminder in a calm voice.

TIPS TO HELP MANAGE DISTRACTION

DISTRACTION



Using headphones or ear buds

Listening to music through headphones or ear buds may make it easier for your child to block out distractions and stay on track in the morning. You may even want to consider noise cancellation headsets instead.



Reward concentration

A system of positive reinforcement may encourage your child's efforts to focus on tasks. Try giving rewards for short periods of time when he or she has avoided distractions and has stayed on track during the morning routine. Consider giving tokens or points that may be traded for specific rewards.



Download:

Focus Booster



An app that serves as a customizable timer that encourages time management.

TIPS TO HELP MANAGE PROCRASTINATION

PROCRASTINATION



Swap activities

Is your child avoiding undesirable activity?

Try offering a desirable activity as a reward. For example, if he or she finishes breakfast by 7:30, perhaps he or she could play video games until it's time to leave.



Let your child set the start time

Have your child select the start time for a task. If he or she doesn't remember the selected time on his or her own, give a reminder that it was chosen by him or her. This strategy may help your child begin the task without a debate or argument.



Text it

When your child has a task to complete, send him or her a reminder via text and ask him or her to text you back when it has been completed.



Just get started

It may be difficult to think about doing an entire task or set of tasks. Consider having your child just complete the "set up" to begin a task to give him or her something to work off of. For instance in the morning, have him or her just select clothing items or set up the food for breakfast.

TIPS TO HELP MANAGE FORGETFULNESS

FORGETFULNESS



Remember: It's forgetfulness

Keep it in perspective. Don't confuse forgetfulness for noncompliance.

Many children with ADHD have difficulty remembering rules, tasks and routines, even if they've done them before. Rather than punish forgetfulness, work with your child to develop strategies and tools to help him or her remember and deal with working memory challenges.



Keep it simple



Does it seem like your child is often noncompliant?



Notice how you give directions. If you give multiple instructions at once, your child may have difficulty remembering them all. Try giving less information at one time or writing down directions step-by-step.



Tap into the strength of visual memory

If your child has a better visual memory (sights) rather than an auditory memory (sounds), consider using visual cues and reminders as often as you can. Showing, rather than giving oral instructions, may be more effective for children with ADHD. Try to use brightly colored post-it notes, pictures, or posters in strategic places as reminders for what needs to get done.

TIPS TO HELP MANAGE THE MISPLACEMENT OF ITEMS

MISPLACING
ITEMS



Make it about them

Do you hear this phrase from your child,

“Why do I have to clean my room?”

Answer with practical reasons. The fact that items are missing or broken in a messy room may be more compelling to your child, than your desire for cleanliness and order.



Wrap up – and pack up – schoolwork at night

Encourage your child to practice this habit:

Finish and pack up schoolwork each night, so that it’s all ready to go the next day. This nightly routine may go a long way in the morning by helping save time and reducing stress.



Home sweet home

With your child’s input, create a “home” for all important items that belong to him or her. Use labels or templates to help your child recognize what items belong in each area. Check the house each night for any homeless items.



Make a school zone

Create a space in your house specifically for school items. Use wall hooks, shelves, or big crates for your children to stow backpacks, lunch boxes, coats and hats. Having a designated place for school materials may help save time during the morning routine.

TIPS TO HELP MANAGE HYPERACTIVITY

HYPERACTIVITY



Let them move

For some children with ADHD, movement may help to improve concentration. Allow your child to be active or at least avoid sitting down as much as possible. Even at breakfast, allow your child to stand at the counter while eating.



Burn energy

Encourage your child to participate in a physical activity before attending an event that requires him or her to stay seated for an extended period – such as during school. In the morning, they could play tag, have a race, or run around the block before leaving the house.

You may even want to consider using a quick DVD or video clip such as Brain Gym.



Try fidget objects

Fidgeting is one way that a number of children with ADHD help manage their hyperactivity. Try giving your child small, quiet fidget objects such as gum erasers, silly putty or rubber bracelets to keep his or her hands busy.

TIPS TO HELP MINIMIZE TALKATIVENESS

TALKATIVENESS



Secret signal

With your child's input, develop a gesture or sound cue that means he or she is talking too much and needs to allow the other person to talk.



3 questions

Does your child talk over people in conversations?

Encourage your child to ask the other person a question or two or three before continuing to talk. Perhaps a 1:1 ratio to start or, starting out with questions may help. You may need to provide your child with a cue, such as a physical gesture, or hand action, to indicate he or she needs to stop talking.

TIPS TO HELP PREVENT INTERRUPTIONS

INTERRUPTIONS



Remember: Interrupting is a symptom

Interrupting is one symptom of impulsivity in ADHD.

Reminding yourself of this may help you be more understanding with your child's behavior.

Problems with interruption may last awhile so be patient and persistent.



"Excuse me" and pause

"Excuse me" can be a handy tool for helping your child to avoid blurting out information and interrupting. Point out that it is only polite when used with a pause. Teach your child to wait after saying "excuse me," rather than launching right into what he or she wants to say. Once you indicate it's ok to talk, then he or she can start speaking.



Use a signal

With your child, decide on a signal to use if he or she wants to talk to you when you're speaking with someone else. It might be a light touch on your arm or silent mouthing of your name. Give a nod to acknowledge the signal.

TIPS TO HELP MANAGE SILLINESS

SILLINESS



Tune in to music

Music, dancing and singing can be a great way to start the day!

Have your child create a playlist of upbeat tunes to set the tone for your morning routine. This may help keep it fun yet manageable in the morning.



Keep it in perspective

Silly but annoying behaviors such as humming, making noises or faces and bouncing around can often be ignored.



Redirect

Sometimes silly behavior may be able to be redirected rather than confronted head-on. Ask your child to do something or look at something that is incompatible with his or her current behavior.



Give a signal to settle

Sometimes a gesture works better than words. Devise a silent signal with your child to indicate it is time to settle down. Use the signal anytime he or she begins to get worked up.

TIPS TO HELP ENCOURAGE TAKING TURNS

TAKING TURNS



“Wait” strengthening

It may be possible to help your child learn to reign in impulsivity and wait longer by supplying stronger rewards for waiting than for immediate gratification. In the morning, perhaps offer choices such as,

“You can have cereal now or, if you are willing to wait, you can have pancakes in 10 minutes.”



Stagger routines to minimize turn taking

Does the morning ritual include siblings arguing over who gets to use the bathroom?

Try and space out your children’s routines. Get one child up and moving to be out of the “conflict zone” before the other wakes up to help minimize the need to take turns as much as possible.



Choose words that motivate

Use phrases such as, “Wait a moment,” rather than, “It’s not your turn.” Using words that invite a new, desired behavior may be more encouraging than reminding children of an undesired one.

TIPS TO MANAGE BREAKFAST IN THE MORNING

BREAKFAST



Redefine the menu

Breakfasts don't have to be limited to cereal, waffles, eggs, or pancakes. Consider burritos, pizza, pasta, or soup, for example – which may be more appealing and still offer nutrition.



Turn on the TV

Does your child have difficulty sitting still at the breakfast table?

Consider allowing him or her to watch TV while eating. This may help him or her stay still long enough to fuel up before going to school.



Try DIY breakfasts

Encourage your child to prepare his or her own breakfast. The night before, prepare a small tray with breakfast foods – cereal boxes, breads or fruits. Keep individual milk cartons, cheese chunks, or yogurts together in the fridge for him or her to select from.



Backup plan – Make grab-and-go breakfasts

Does your child sometimes run out of time for breakfast?

Assemble a couple portable breakfasts to grab if needed, and eat on the way to school.

TIPS TO MANAGE HYGIENE

HYGIENE



Think it through

Does your child resist teeth brushing?

Don't explain why he or she should do it. Engage him or her in thinking it through.

Ask questions:

“Why might it be important to brush your teeth? What may happen if you don't brush them? What do you think you should do?”



Consider other hygiene options

Does your child have physical sensitivities?

Provide alternative hygiene options like dry shampoo, body and facial wipes, electric toothbrushes, or showerheads with different settings.

TIPS TO ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENCE

INDEPENDENCE



Balance freedoms and responsibilities

As you grant your child new freedoms, you can balance them with new responsibilities. For instance, if you allow your child to go to bed later, you may also have him or her be responsible for getting out of bed on time. If your child wants to pick out his or her own clothes for school, you may ask that the outfit is laid out ready the night before.



Create a morning checklist

Does your child forget to do tasks in the morning without reminders from you?

A checklist may help him or her remember – and develop independence. Create one with your child and have him or her post it in a visible place to keep track of what needs to get done.



Let them do it

While it may be easier to do something yourself, let your child handle new responsibilities on his or her own. The first lunch he or she packs may take longer to put together, and it might feel uncomfortable not to help. Over time, he or she will get the hang of it and in doing so, build his or her own independence.



Make activity lists

If your child participates in multiple activities, have him or her write a list of needed items for each activity. Consider attaching it to the sport or activity specific box, bin or bag that contains most of the items. This way, your child will have a quick reference when it's time to pack his or her things.

TIPS TO HELP YOUR CHILD'S SENSE OF AWARENESS

AWARENESS



Use technology to keep track

Does your child have difficulty keeping track of time?

When age-appropriate, have your child use his or her cell phone to set multiple alarms for tasks. As he or she goes about the morning routine, the alarms can help manage the time for each task such as showering, getting dressed, eating breakfast and brushing teeth.



Practice estimating time

How long does it really take to shower? Get dressed? Pack lunch?

Have your child estimate the time it takes to do morning tasks. Then time him or her to see if time was over- or underestimated. This exercise can help your child start managing time better in the morning and throughout the day.



Plan the departure time

If lateness is an issue, have your child get in the habit of planning the time to arrive. Working with the departure time as the target, he or she may be more likely to arrive on schedule.

TIPS TO HELP GET TO SCHOOL

GETTING TO
SCHOOL



Get into the groove

Let music help get your child moving in the morning!

Have him or her create a playlist to start the day. Lively tunes may help energize your child as he or she gets ready for school.



Address sleep issues

If your child has trouble waking up in the morning, identify why this may be – and address it!

Is your child up late on the phone? Dock the phone in the kitchen at night.

Is he or she watching TV too late? Make a rule to turn it off by a specific time.

Does he or she have trouble falling asleep? Set an earlier bedtime or allow reading instead of screen time before bed.



Talk with your child

Is it often difficult to get your child off to school?

It may be possible that he or she really doesn't want to go to school. If you think this may be the case, find out why before it becomes a bigger problem. Choose an appropriate time to talk with your child, rather than during the morning rush.



Decrease stress. Plan to arrive 15 minutes early.

Does school start at 8:30? Plan to be there at 8:15.

This allows time for unplanned delays such as last minute missing items or traffic.

Enjoy the extra time with your child if you arrive early. Bring a game, book, magazine, or sketch pad to give your child something to do if he or she has to wait.



Preview the day ahead

Each morning, spend a few minutes previewing plans for the day ahead. Go over any pickup times, lessons, sports, appointments, or chores your child needs to do.



Allow screen time

Consider allowing your child some screen time for the ride to school. Listening to music is also an option.

