

Stem the tide of family ADHD conflict through rewards and consequences

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News

We are a family of ADHD members looking for more structured consequences and rewards to help end the conflict at home.

The challenge of raising children with ADHD often extends into the family. The presence of multiple family members with ADHD and/or non-ADHD siblings complicates and frustrates parents' attempts to keep the peace. Impulse control problems fuel chronic name calling, on, corrosive and senseless competition, persistent provocation, and deliberate aggression, eroding the fabric of family life. Parents face the sometimes daily barrage of siblings baiting and blaming one another while marital happiness is strained by the burden of figuring out the best responses to the problems of the day.

If ADHD creates too much conflict in family life read these tips to impose structure through a consequence- based coaching plan:

Both parents construct a coaching plan, or what is termed "family peace plan," during family discussions, that details family rules (and rewards for following them) and consequences to infractions. List the rules on paper. Rules are to be realistic and clear, such as "No threats to hurt one another." Talk separately with each child to review the rules and request feedback and additions to the list. Ensure that the rules encompass parental behavior if circumstances warrant. For example, "No family members are to use profanity." Summon all family members together to discuss the list and categorize each rule violation in one of three categories: mild, medium, serious. Request input from the kids with the understanding that parents have final say.

Once the list is complete parents meet separately to agree upon a continuum of consequences tied to the three tiers of violations. A mild violation could warrant a thirty minute time-out, a medium infraction might receive a two hour grounding from inside and outside privileges, and a serious one could receive a two day grounding. In circumstances where more than one child is at fault parents are use their best judgment as to which infraction level is appropriate to each child's contribution. Consider including the option of "mature processing of the event with my parents and/or sibling" as a way of reducing consequence time. This would entail a thoughtful discussion where children recognize problem triggers, accept constructive feedback, and offer a sincere apology.

Meet separately with each child to discuss the three consequence levels and where their typical misbehaviors would land them. For the child with ADHD, stress how certain times of the day, such as early morning and before bedtime, and circumstances, such as hunger and fatigue, place them at greater risk to break rules and suffer consequences. Explain how their reacting side is more easily triggered by siblings during these times, and the importance of being more watchful and ready to "walk away, look away, or move away" from

siblings if that happens. If misbehaviors are triggered by parental requests explain that a mutually agreed upon "advance readiness plan" can help them prepare to comply so that their thinking side is not seized by the reacting side. Parents should also meet separately with the non-ADHD child to address their typical contributions to the cycle of conflict. Remind them of the greater impulse control they have at their disposal and the importance of not taking advantage of their sibling's reactive nature.

It is critical that parents honor their agreement to provide the rewards that are tied to the family peace plan. This means ensuring that the necessary time is invested in reviewing the success of all family members in following the rules. Provided parents are able to keep their own thinking sides in control it is preferred that the children are tracked through a simple daily system that lists their success in following the rules. This system can be tied to a continuum from 1-10 that graphically displays the different increments of success. For example, 10 stands for excellent adherence to the rules, 9 for great, 8 for good, 7 for working on it, 6 for needs to work harder, and so on. As points are tallied up for each child a system of reward exchange is followed.

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