

Rising to the Parenting Challenge

As a psychologist who had worked with children and adolescents with emotional and behavioural disorders for many years, I really thought I understood ADHD. Then I had my first daughter.

D began talking early, she was a bright little girl and I marvelled at her observations about the world and noted her high energy level very early on. Now at age 10 D is a strong, intelligent, beautiful, sweet girl. However, she also misses important information, frustrates others by talking constantly, and struggles to follow a short series of instructions without becoming distracted. She is usually in motion and she is frequently upside down.

As a parent it is very difficult to know how capable D is, yet have to work so hard to help her get through daily routines. How do I prevent ADHD from having such a detrimental impact on everyone in our family? How do I get her through the tasks and transitions of each day without negatively impacting how D feels about herself? With my knowledge about the numerous forms of increased risk, as well as the disorders often associated with ADHD, it is easy to become concerned about my daughter's future.

Despite my educational and professional background, I often find myself wishing I was doing a better job of rising to the challenge of parenting a young person with ADHD and wondering: *How do other parents do this?*

When I do rise to the challenge of parenting a child with ADHD

1. *I am proactive instead of reactive.* I plan ahead for the difficult parts of our day. I am creative about how to gain and maintain her focus on tasks. I ensure she has regular body breaks and snacks. I make sure that there are rewarding activities built into her day.
2. *I choose my battles.* While D needs to be at the table for supper, I recognize that does not necessary mean she is always fully sitting in a chair! When I am tempted to correct her yet again for something trivial, I stop myself and give her a hug and whisper something I really appreciate about her.
3. *I keep the behaviours in perspective.* I dig deep for patience I may not have, use humour, take breaks, and draw on the support of others.
4. *I highlight strengths and connection.* I try my best to immerse D in her areas of competence. I support her doing things that she loves. I make time to encourage time with friends and others who she enjoys being around.

5. *I separate the child from the behaviours that I want to change.* I make sure that the people around D (including me) understand her struggles and remember to celebrate *who* she is.

If you have a young person with ADHD in your life, you know this is a difficult path to be on. Even when we know what to do it does not mean we do it all of the time. I encourage you to reflect on how you rise to the parenting challenge, and give yourself credit for all that you do.