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## Family Stress Points: Living with ADHD 24/7



Family Stress Points  
LIVING WITH ADHD 24/7

## Introduction

It's difficult enough being a parent, but having a child with ADHD brings its own challenges. All parents of children with ADHD know that it affects many more people than those who have been diagnosed: brothers and sisters, friends, teachers and grandparents can all experience its disruptive effects. Most parents also know that ADHD is a 24-hour condition with few times during the day when relief can be guaranteed.

There are also certain times of the day when coping with the condition can seem particularly difficult. Many parents of children with ADHD find that mornings and evenings are the most testing stress points in the day. Getting ready for school whilst juggling gym bags and cereal bowls heightens the breakfast time tension. Meanwhile, at the other end of the day, homework, teatime and bath time all provide their own challenges.

This leaflet aims to provide practical information on managing these family stress points. As well as hints and tips, it also points you in the direction of further sources of help and advice.

Dr David Coghill, Senior Lecturer in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, University of Dundee

Dr Tanya Byron, Consultant Clinical Psychologist and Presenter of BBC TV's "Little Angels"

***"Children with ADHD and their families can work together to find practical ways of managing their lives in order to minimise daily disruptions and stresses and maximise quality loving and positive family time."***

*Dr Tanya Byron*

## Family Stress Points

Being the parent of a child affected by ADHD involves many more obstacles than parenting a child without the condition. Not least of these is managing the times of the day when your child's behaviour can seem to be more than usually disruptive. These times – in particular early mornings before school and evenings before bed – are often "family times" and the disruption goes further than simply one child's behaviour:

***"Often it's up to you, as a parent to act as a "buffer" between your child and everyone else affected by their behaviour. This can mean explaining and helping others understand the reasons behind their behaviour as well as protecting your child, trying to manage their actions and enabling them to understand and manage their own actions as well."***

*Dr Tanya Byron*



## Identifying Family Stress Points

**The first step towards managing the most difficult times of the day is identifying “hot spots” and knowing what to expect.**

Some of the most common, which you may be familiar with, are:

- **Getting out of bed.** Unlike many children (and parents!), children with ADHD are often first out of bed in the morning, rushing around the house unsupervised and waking everyone else.
- **Getting ready for school.** ADHD may cause your child to fidget and not concentrate on, for example, packing a school bag.
- **Breakfast.** Children with ADHD find it difficult to sit at the table and will often play with their food or steal their siblings' food rather than eating their own.
- **Playtime.** Winding down after school is important but your child may not understand risk, meaning that he or she may like to play more unsafe games than other children.
- **After-school groups.** Children with ADHD are often excluded from these, especially if they are run by adults with no experience or understanding of the condition.
- **Teatime.** Teaching your children to use cutlery and crockery properly can be a challenge when your child with ADHD finds it difficult to learn.
- **Homework.** Asking your child to concentrate on his or her homework can be a real challenge.
- **Bedtime.** Often children with ADHD will not want to go to bed or will stay up much later than their brothers or sisters. It can be very difficult to get them into a bedtime routine.
- **During the night.** Children with ADHD find it difficult to settle and will often get up in the night, disturbing you and the rest of the family. They may also be prone to sleep-walking.

## Managing Family Stress Points

There are no set rules for dealing with stress points in the day. Because a child with ADHD is unpredictable, you'll need to experiment to find out what works best for your child.

***“Behaviour change takes time, consistency and patience. It is important to think about the long-term and not be discouraged if something doesn't work the first time you try it. Remember, it's going to benefit you all in the end!”***

Dr Tanya Byron

There are some practical steps you can take which may work for you.

- **Establish rules and boundaries.** At times of the day when you are pressed for time, establishing specific rules can help things run more smoothly. You may want your child to finish his or her homework before watching TV. Having set this rule, you must then be consistent in enforcing it, reminding your child of the consequences if it's challenged and then enforcing those consequences.
- **Encourage good behaviour.** If you make it clear that the consequences of good behaviour will be a reward, then your child will want to collect these rewards no matter how small – children with ADHD love seeing things add up! Remember, rewards don't have to be material – a hug or a kiss can be enough.
- **Try not to pick up on every 'small' difficult behaviour.** The key is to know your child's triggers and as soon as you think their behaviour may become challenging, distract them with a song or a hug. Be preventative rather than reactive!
- **Establish routines.** This can be especially useful at bedtime. Agree what will happen in advance – for example, bath, story, bed – then be consistent in enforcing the routine and timings for each. It has to happen every single time. Also, do not forget to reward adherence to that routine and reaffirm that they are doing well.
- **Find the right after-school activities.** Some experts believe that certain activities are more suitable for children with ADHD. Your child may benefit from learning a new skill on a one-to-one basis rather than in a class. Activities with a singular focus allow children to concentrate on fewer things at once and give them the opportunity to succeed which will bolster their self-esteem.
- **Give clear commands with one step given at a time.** Your tone of voice should be even and authoritative but warm. When you are communicating with your child, make eye contact on their level, so it commands their attention. Ask your child to repeat or rehearse what you have asked them to do, then coach them through and praise them every step of the way.

## How I dealt with family stress points

*“Bringing up a child with ADHD is not just a case of having to cope with him being fidgety or not being able to concentrate for half an hour or so. ADHD is a condition that affects the whole day. Before we found a treatment that worked for my son, Joe needed a permanent supervisor in the mornings – I couldn’t trust him to carry out a task like cleaning his teeth without him getting distracted by something else.*

*“After school we allowed Joe one hour watching TV, during which time he was completely engrossed and quiet. That seemed to help him calm down and gave us a well-earned rest. The evening activities were structured around a routine, with calm activities and no sugary things to eat. One of us had to give him total devotion during bathtime and bedtime to keep him calm and get him settled.*

*“We tended to keep meal times to a routine, all sitting down together, taking away distractions and of course using unbreakable plates and cups. Joe found it so difficult to sit down for long and got upset with himself for making a mess or knocking things over. I had to explain to my other children why the ‘rules’ were different for Joe – he couldn’t cope with a knife and fork so ate with his fingers. He also went through strange food fads so we tried to give him things he would eat (as long as he got enough of a balanced diet). Meal times were so demanding we felt it was better to minimise the frustrations and upset for Joe so it wasn’t too stressful for all of us.*

*“Of course, he could easily end up doing something dangerous, even though we thought our house was ‘Joe-proof’. It needed one of us to give him all our attention – to listen to his ideas or worries about school, keep him focused and away from anything dangerous.”*

**Charlotte**, mother of Joe, now 14

***“Remember that behind the ADHD diagnosis is your child. Your child is a unique and special individual who enriches your life and has many wonderful factors to their character other than their diagnosis. This is something to be celebrated.”***

Dr Tanya Byron

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*“ADHD affects everybody in the family, not just the diagnosed child and this is especially true at the most stressful times of the day before medication takes effect and after it has worn off. Putting some practical measures in place and knowing where to turn for help and support can make a big difference to the quality of family life as a whole.”*

Andrea Bilbow, Chief Executive of ADDISS

## Further sources of help

**If your child is experiencing stress points at certain times of the day, the best person to talk to is your specialist.**

There are many ADHD support groups throughout the country. To find the one nearest to you, contact ADDISS:

Phone: 020 8906 9068 | Fax: 020 8959 0727 | [www.addiss.co.uk](http://www.addiss.co.uk)

ADDISS, 10 Station Road, Mill Hill, London NW7 2JU

ADDISS also provides factsheets and can recommend books written by specialists.

There is lots of useful information on managing ADHD in your family on [www.adhdmatters.co.uk](http://www.adhdmatters.co.uk)

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