

12 Ways to Build Strong ADHD/ASD Families

1. Educate the family.

Many problems will take care of themselves if all family members know the facts about your child's diagnosis and understand what's going on. Listen to everyone's questions, and make sure they all get answered. Let in extended family members, too. The more they know, the more help they will be.

2. Make it clear that ADHD/ASD is nobody's fault.

Not parents', not siblings', and not the fault of the person who has it. All family members must understand this. Lingering feelings that ADHD/ASD is just an excuse for irresponsible behaviour or laziness will sabotage family life.

3. See it as a family issue.

ADHD/ASD touches everybody in the family in a daily, often significant way. Let each member of the family become a part of the solution, since each has been involved with the challenges.

4. Balance attention within the family.

The attention may not always be positive, but the ADHD/ASD child often gets more than their share, and the others often get less. This imbalance creates resentments among siblings and deprives them of what they need. Siblings need a chance to voice their own concerns, resentments, and fears. They need to be allowed to get angry as well as help.

5. Give everyone a chance to be heard.

Not everyone in the family may feel they have a voice. Let those who are in silence speak.

6. Turn negatives into positives.

Get everyone pointed toward positive goals, rather than negative outcomes. Applaud and encourage success. One of the most difficult tasks for families is getting onto a positive track. But once this is done, the results can be fantastic. A good therapist or coach can help.

7. Be clear about your expectations.

All family members need to know what is expected of them, what the rules are, and what the consequences are.

8. Target the problem areas and brainstorm solutions.

Typical problem areas are study time, morning, bedtimes mealtimes, holidays and transitions (leaving the home is an example). Once these are identified, everyone can approach problems more constructively. Negotiate how to make it better: ask one another for specific suggestions and brainstorm solutions together. Approach problems as a team.

9. Confer with your spouse.

Consistency helps, so try to present a united front. The less that either parent can be manipulated, the better.

10. Get feedback from outside sources.

Sometimes a person won't believe something a family member says but will listen if it comes from someone (teacher, paediatrician, therapist, other parents, and children) on the outside.

Support • Educate • Empower

11. Never worry alone.

Cultivate as much support as possible. From paediatricians to family doctors to therapists, from support groups to professional organisations to national conventions, from friends to relatives to teachers and schools, make use of whatever supports you can find. Group support can help you solve problems and keep your perspective.

12. Keep a sense of humour — and hope.

Sometimes the keys to success are persistence and humour. Call someone who will listen to the bad news but will also lift your spirits. And keep reminding yourself of the positive aspects of ADHD/ASD — energy, creativity, intuition, good-heartedness, dedication, deep feelings, passion....