

Family Education Sheet

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD): Behavioral Tips for Families During COVID-19



Boston Children's Hospital

View more health education materials at www.bostonchildrens.org/familyeducation

This sheet explains some different behavioral approaches that can help your child manage their ADHD during this time. You may have been using some of these before COVID-19.

How can I stick to a normal schedule?



Structure at home is the “magic ingredient” for behavior management. This is especially true now!

Work with your child to put together a daily schedule. Hang it on the refrigerator or in a place where they do their virtual/online schoolwork.

[Here are some ideas from the American Academy of Pediatrics to help you create a daily schedule:](#)

- Wake up, get dressed and have breakfast at the same time you used to.
- Figure out where everyone can work most effectively. It's best if your child doesn't work in their bedroom.
- List the times for learning, exercise and breaks on the schedule.
 - **For younger children** you can start by trying 20 minutes of class assignments followed by 10 minutes of physical activity. You can make changes as needed.
 - **Older children** may be able to focus on assignments for longer stretches. They can take breaks between subjects.
 - Include your hours as well. This helps your children know when the “work day” is done.
- Schedule time for nutritious lunches and snacks. Many schools are providing take-home school meal packages for students who need them.
- Don't forget to make time for afternoon breaks!
- Have dinner together as a family and talk about the day.
- Enjoy family time in the evenings. This can be anything from playing or reading to watching a movie or exercising together.
- Stick with normal bedtime routines as much as possible.

The “[How to Structure Your Day](#)” handout has a sample daily schedule and some more tips!

How flexible should I be about rules?

It helps to be flexible, but children still need to follow important rules.

Try to be consistent with rules and setting limits.

- Set house rules that you, your partner and your children can agree to.

- Agree on rewards for following the rules and consequences for breaking them (for example, limiting screen time).
- Keep rules simple. Complicated rules can be tough to follow even in the best of times.
- Be strict about the rules that really matter.
- List rules on a board or a sheet of paper so that everyone can see them.

How can I limit conflicts?

Try to ignore behavior that's not breaking rules but may still be bothersome. If you can't ignore it, talk with your child about why it's bothersome without raising your voice or snapping at them.

Following routines and keeping your child busy can help lower the chance for conflicts.

Give advance warnings to prepare your child when it's about time for them to stop doing something they enjoy or when breaks are about to end and it's time to get back to schoolwork.

Try to avoid situations that can make you or your child anxious or upset. Try to distract your child with something they enjoy or find funny if they're getting upset.

Pick out a quiet and safe space at home where you or your child can go to calm down.

It's important to always keep your cool! Take a breath and pause to collect your thoughts if you feel yourself starting to overreact or get upset.

Remember to **take care of yourself**. to eat healthfully, exercise, get enough sleep and take breaks. Take turns watching your child if more than 1 parent or caregiver is home.



How should I manage screen time?

Try not to worry about how much screen time your child is having. Focus instead on the **3 C's: child, content and context**.

- **Child:** You know your child best! Help them choose the kind and amount of screen time that works best for them. Stay away from news or scary videos if your child is anxious. Find videos that encourage singing like musical soundtracks if your child likes music.
- **Content:** Use tools like [Common Sense Media](#) to see suggestions for age-appropriate and positive media content. Video games are OK as long as your child plays them socially with friends.
- **Context:** This means the way(s) you interact with your child around media use. Ask them to explain to you what they're watching and try to connect their media use with

something “real.” This can mean watching a cooking video and then cooking together.

How important are sleep routines?

Getting enough sleep is a **very** important part of self-care. This is also especially true during stressful times.

Recommended sleep times:

- Kids under age 5 should get 10-13 hours
- Kids 6–12 years old should get 9-12 hours
- Teenagers from 13–18 should get 8-10 hours

Not getting enough sleep can make it harder to focus during the day and can raise stress and anxiety levels. Keep to a regular daily routine and try to shut down screen time for 1 hour before bed. Try not to talk about COVID-19 in the evening if talking about that tends to make your child anxious.

Some children have their devices charged in a common area overnight to make sure they are not texting or checking social media before bed. It helps to talk about this and explain the rule with your child so they do not see it as a punishment but as a way to help them sleep better.

What about physical activity?

Staying active and getting exercise is especially important for children with ADHD. You can take advantage of physical education ideas that your child’s school posts or watch some exercise videos. Here’s [a list of healthy eating and home exercise sites and videos](#) from our Optimal Weight for Life Program. You can go outside and take walks as the weather gets nicer. Remember to wear a mask! [Here are some tips from the CDC on making your own mask at home.](#)

Should I check in with my child’s teacher(s)?

It’s important to work with your child’s teachers to find a healthy balance of:

- Motivated participation
- Completing work (up to your child’s ability)
- Psychological well-being

Be flexible: There’s no perfect balance. Talk with your child’s teachers and try to work on a reasonable balance if doing schoolwork from home is challenging for your child.

How can I help my child build coping skills?

Children often base their responses to changes and challenges on how their parents respond. **Focus on the positive.** Take time to talk with your child about their fears and anxieties. You can be honest and share yours!

You can say things like, “Yes, I’m also worried about the virus. But I know there are things we can do to protect ourselves and our family.” Find things that help you lower stress levels—like deep breathing exercises. Try them with your child.

Sharing what works for you to decrease stress can help older children build their own coping skills for dealing with stressful times.

How can I help an older child/teen?

Many of the above suggestions work for teenagers. There are also some other things to try with them.

Allowing downtime and alone time is a good idea. Set some time during the day when they can unwind on their own. But keep some family time (like dinner) and reach out to them then.

Let your teen stay connected online but **remind them to be careful** with their privacy settings. [The Center for Young Men’s Health](#) and [Center for Young Women’s Health](#) have excellent tips for teens on handling COVID-19 related stress and staying active and healthy during the pandemic.



What are some signs that my child is having trouble adjusting?

You know your child better than anyone. Be on the lookout for behaviors that are out of the ordinary.

Crying a lot is something to be concerned about. Other signs include irritation in younger children or regression (returning to behaviors they have outgrown, like toileting accidents). Acting out more than they have in the past or having difficulty sleeping can also be signs of stress in younger children.

Stressful times can raise the risk of depression or anxiety in teens. Watch your child(ren) to see if:

- They seem to lose interest in things they used to enjoy
- Have excessive anger
- Are very moody or sad
- Have changes in sleep patterns

[The American Academy of Pediatrics has some other signs to look out for that your child may need more help.](#) **Remember:** If you have any concerns you can always reach out to your child’s or teen’s pediatric or mental health teams even during the pandemic. Most clinics offer virtual visits or telephone calls to check in.

This Family Education Sheet is available in Spanish.

This Family Education Sheet is designed to supplement [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder \(ADHD\): Behavioral Tips for Parents](#), written by Dr. Jason Fogler, PhD. Please see that education sheet for more ADHD specific information and resources. Below are some resources specifically for COVID-19.

What are some resources?

Emotional Support Resources for Parents, Children, and Teens

[Parents Helping Parents of Massachusetts](#)

Parent Support Group—free, confidential service, available 24/7.

Call: 1-800-632-8188

[NAMI Helpline](#)

The National Alliance on Mental Illness provides advocacy, education, support and public awareness. If you're in a crisis, call: 1-800-950 6264 or text "NAMI" to 741741.

[How to Cope with Anxiety Related to Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

This website suggests ways how to cope with stress during the pandemic. It's appropriate for families and providers.

[MASS 211](#)

A program of local United Way and The Commonwealth of Massachusetts providing free and confidential advice.

[Family Resource Centers](#)

Massachusetts Family Resource Centers (FRCs) are a statewide network of community-based providers offering multi-cultural parenting programs, support groups, early childhood services, information and referral resources and education for families whose children range in age from birth to 18 years of age. Find your local center at: frcma.org



Community Resources

[The Office of Community Health at Boston Children's Hospital has a list of community resources](#) that may be able to help with some of the many financial and resources strain that families are going through during COVID-19.

Food Resources

[The Greater Boston Food Bank](#)

The Greater Boston Food Bank partners with 520+ hunger-relief agencies in Eastern Massachusetts.

Visit their website or call: 617-427-5200

[FoodSource Hotline](#) from Project Bread

Help with finding food resources in your community.

- Call 1-800-645-8333 (TTY 1-800-377-1292) Monday–Friday from 8:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m. and Saturday from 10:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.

[Information from the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute on expanded SNAP Benefits as well as information on accessing DTA and other benefits](#)

Financial Support

[United Way Massachusetts COVID-19 Family Support Fund](#)

- For general questions about the COVID-19 Family Support Fund, please email info@supportunitedway.org

[Massachusetts COVID-19 Relief Fund](#)

- For general questions about the COVID-19 Relief Fund, please email info@MACovid19ReliefFund.org

Housing Support

[Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless COVID-19 site](#)

- Information for families who are homeless or worried about their housing

Massachusetts currently has a moratorium on eviction during the state of emergency for COVID-19.

- [This information sheet from Mass Legal Help](#) reviews tenants' rights and about how to access court assistance emergently if a landlord tries to evict or turns off utilities

Health Insurance

For more information on applying for health insurance, go to the Massachusetts Health Connector website (mahealthconnector.org) or call 877-623-6765 (TTY: 877-623-7773). You may be eligible for low or no-cost coverage for you and your family. For more information on whether you may be eligible for MassHealth, please [go to the MassHealth website](#) or call 800-841-2900 (TTY: 800-497-4648). You [can also find a certified enrollment assister online](#) or reach out to your child's clinic to talk with a social worker or financial counselor who can help.



Age-Appropriate Information about COVID-19

- [Boston Children's Hospital COVID-19 Parent Information Page](#)
 - General information and resources on COVID-19 from Boston Children's Hospital experts
- [It's okay to be scared: talking to your children about COVID-19.](#)
 - Tips for talking to your children about COVID and scary events
- [KidsHealth: Understanding Coronavirus](#)
 - A number of information pages on COVID-19 to help talk to children about it, as well as general helpful suggestions
- [COVID-19 Information for children in many languages](#)
 - Infographics from the Harvard Health Literacy Project for children and teenagers explaining COVID-19

Parenting During COVID-19

- [COVID-19: Stress, anxiety & parenting](#)
 - Tips from Boston Children's Hospital psychologists on helping parents cope with stress and anxiety during COVID-19
- [Positive Parenting in a Pandemic](#)
 - Tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics on helping your family through the outbreak
- [Discipline Looks Different in a Pandemic](#)
 - Tips for maintaining discipline but being flexible during COVID-19 (free article, registration required)
- [Parents Need Stress Relief Too](#)
 - Tips for helping parents cope (free article, registration required)
- [Tips for building resilience in children during times of crisis](#) and [supporting your child's resilience](#)
 - Information from the American Academy of Pediatrics on helping build your child's emotional strength during difficult times

Teens and Stress

- [The Center for Young Men's Health](#) and [Center for Young Women's Health](#) have excellent tips for teens on handling COVID-19 related stress and staying active and healthy during the pandemic.
- [Teens, social distancing, and anxiety in the time of COVID-19](#)
 - Tips and brief video with advice on helping teens cope with COVID-19 stress
- [Teens & COVID-19: Challenges and Opportunities During the Outbreak](#)
 - Tips for parents of teenagers to help during COVID-19

Keeping Routines

- [Help your kids stay busy and happy at home during COVID-19 shutdowns](#)
 - Tips on maintaining routines while staying at home
- [Tips on staying focused and a free schedule maker online](#)

Resources for Learning

- [Working and Learning from Home During the COVID-19 Outbreak](#)
 - Tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics on working and learning from home
- [Home-Schooling Tweens and Teens During Coronavirus Closings](#) (free article, may need registration)

Staying Fit

- [Getting Children Outside While Social Distancing for COVID-19](#)
 - Tips for going outside and staying active **(safely!)** during COVID-19
- [87 tips and games for kids to burn energy at home](#)
- [Family Dinner Project](#): Tips on healthy cooking at home and staying active
- [List of healthy eating and home exercise sites and videos](#)
 - From the Boston Children's Hospital Optimal Weight for Life Program

Media Use

- [Common Sense Media](#)
 - Tips on appropriate media use by age
- [Tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics on making a family media use plan](#)
- [Center on Media and Child Health – tip sheets on media use by age with COVID-19 specific tips \(video and information sheet\)](#)