

# SAMPLE PREVIEW

## What Your ADHD Child Wishes You Knew

Working Together to Empower Kids  
for Success in School and Life

For parents  
of kids ages  
6 to 18



Dr. Sharon Saline

foreword by **Dr. Laura Markham**,  
author of *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids*

@ DrSharonSaline  
Drsharonsaline.com

---

# Contents

<i>Foreword by Dr. Laura Markham</i>	vii
<i>Introduction</i>	xi

## Part One: Life with ADHD

---

CHAPTER 1: The Five C's of ADHD Parenting	3
CHAPTER 2: Understanding the ADHD Brain Makes All the Difference	33
CHAPTER 3: Accepting the ADHD Brain You Have	61

## Part Two: Life at School

---

CHAPTER 4: Overcoming the Hurdles of School	87
CHAPTER 5: Don't Freak Out: Using and Teaching <i>Self-Control</i>	95
CHAPTER 6: Walking Through School in Their Shoes: Three Steps to Building <i>Compassion</i>	103

CHAPTER 7: Creating School Solutions That Stick: <i>Collaboration Is Key!</i>	117
CHAPTER 8: Keeping It Going: Fostering Consistency About School	127
CHAPTER 9: <i>Celebration</i> : More Than Saying “Good Job!”	131

### Part Three: Life at Home and Beyond

---

CHAPTER 10: Managing Big Feelings	139
CHAPTER 11: Getting Stuff Done	165
CHAPTER 12: You’ve Gotta Have Friends: The Social Lives of Kids with ADHD	185
CHAPTER 13: Plugged In: Crazy About Technology	201
FINAL NOTE: Hope and Confidence	221
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	227
<i>Resources for Parents</i>	229
<i>Notes</i>	231
<i>Bibliography</i>	239
<i>Index</i>	245
<i>About the Author</i>	257

---

## Chapter 1

---

# The Five C's of ADHD Parenting

*MEET DREW, AGE 12, as he says to his dad: "Don't open my locker! Just help me get to class on time."*

*They make an odd but not unusual pair. The boy is tall and gangly with wavy black hair that perpetually falls over his eyes, wearing a wrinkled T-shirt and black Converse sneakers whose size matches his age—12. His father, a squat, balding man a few inches shorter than his son, limps alongside him. Their mission: go to the middle school after the students have left the building on this autumn afternoon and map out the best route to classes so that Drew, recently diagnosed with ADHD, won't be late anymore.*

*It's weirdly quiet when they enter the school. Bill, who never really liked school, looks around warily. He takes a deep breath and reminds himself that he is here to help his son. He turns to Drew and grumbles, "Let's start with your locker." They make their way through the empty hallways in silence until arriving at Locker 152.*

*"Open it."*

*"Dad, seeing my locker wasn't our deal. We're here to figure out how I can get to classes without being late, which isn't going to work anyway because I'm just slow. I'm a slow walker."*

Bill's eyes narrow, and his throat tightens. "Drew, open your locker. I want to see how you keep your things. Your progress report says that you're late to classes and you forget to turn work in. So open it up. Let's see what's going on in there."

Drew reluctantly turns the dial on the combination lock, and, as the door pops open, a notebook, several sheets of paper, and an empty soda can fall to the ground.

"Drew, you can't keep your stuff like this. It's a mess, just like your room." Bill bends over and starts picking up the various papers strewn on the floor. "These need to go in folders, and these books should be stacked up, not shoved in here. Hey, what's this?" He picks up a half-eaten candy bar that's melted onto a notebook. "Haven't I taught you better than this?" He starts pulling everything out of the locker onto the floor.

"Dad, will you just stop? Dad! This is why I didn't want to open my locker. It's my stuff. I don't even need half those papers. . . ." Drew raises his voice: "Stop touching my stuff! You don't know what you're doing!"

Bill continues, mumbling about responsibility. Drew pounds his fists on a nearby locker and, when that does not stop his dad, throws himself on the floor before finally storming away. He hates when his dad flat-out ignores him, and besides, they were supposed to figure out how he can get to classes faster, not organize his locker. This is stupid. Bill yells after him, "Where do you think you're going?"

"Away."

"I'm your ride home."

"I'm walking."

Confused and frustrated, Bill watches Drew leave and wonders how he can help his son.

Sound familiar? If you are a parent of a kid with ADHD, you've probably been through a scenario similar to this many times. You ask yourself over and over, *What's so difficult? Why does he keep making the*

*same mistakes? What doesn't she get?* You feel as though you're living in the movie *Groundhog Day* because the same negative behaviors occur and nothing you try seems to make a difference. You love your child, but you are repeatedly frustrated, and at a deeper level, you're frightened. You ask yourself, *What will become of my child if they can't get it together? Are they destined to spend their life working at a low-paying, dead-end, and unfulfilling job?* Parenting any child is hard enough. But parenting a child with ADHD sometimes feels like peaks of progress are regularly followed by intense backslides.

Why is daily life often harder for kids with ADHD? They seem to struggle academically, socially, and psychologically. They forget things, can't slow down, find it hard to focus, space out regularly. They are disorganized; they feel overwhelmed; they can't control their emotions; they miss the nuances of peer interactions. While they like their creativity, their "out of the box" thinking, and their energy, they are usually ashamed of their shortcomings, want to avoid dealing with them, and often feel powerless to change them. Similar to all kids, they just want to be "normal." They certainly don't want to have a "disorder," and no matter how many times you tell them that everyone's brain is different, they think it is definitely more than a "focus problem." As a parent, how can you feel competent and effective in assisting them to overcome the daily challenges they face and embrace the brain they have? How can you listen to what they are telling you about their experiences and offer them the empathy and guidance they need?

These two questions are fundamentally linked. It's as difficult for them as it is for you. It's crucial to remember that kids with ADHD are doing the best they can with their skills—skills that are compromised by the inherent complexities of having ADHD (challenges with working memory, impulse control, and concentration). They do the best they can with their personal resources and know, either outright or internally, when they are falling

.....  
It's as difficult for  
them as it is for you.  
.....

short. You, as their caretakers, witness their efforts. You see them triumph one day and flop the following. You try to make things better for them, sometimes offering suggestions that work while others are rebuffed before you can finish your sentence. Too often, you end up doing an '80s slam dance: colliding into each other and then bouncing away, bruised and overheated.

While children and teens with ADHD often feel misunderstood and criticized for things they can't help doing, they also want to be connected to others, loved, and accepted for who they are. They want to be skilled and successful, they want to feel as though they belong, and they especially want to be heard. Instead, they often feel just the opposite: incompetent, insecure, worried, angry, silenced. Sometimes they cling to parental help, and sometimes they push it away. Despite any actions and words otherwise, kids with ADHD, like all young people, desperately crave their parents' approval and support. They also want the acceptance of their teachers and peers.

While you love your kids, as their parent, you may be more often exhausted by their antics than amused by them. Although you may value their creativity, intelligence, or athletic prowess, you probably struggle with maintaining patience, balance, and humor in the face of strife or chaos. You want more cooperative, responsible behaviors. You don't want to remind your son to put away his laundry for the third time as the clean stuff slowly mixes with the dirty on the floor. You don't want to attend another meeting with your daughter's teacher about her spaciness in class and failure to turn in assignments. And most of all, you don't want to feel incapable and clueless as a parent about how to guide your child to become a fully functioning adult. You, like all parents, want to feel capable and competent.

The goal of this book is to give you a road map to be that capable parent via the voices of children and teens with ADHD. You'll elicit and listen to your child's stories about having ADHD and respond empathically, supportively, and calmly. You'll notice what your son or daughter is communicating to you with their words and actions. You'll

work together toward solutions for everyday challenges. Your son or daughter will learn to see you as an ally. They will be more open to your suggestions because they feel seen and heard. You'll feel less stressed, and your child or teen will begin to thrive.

I call this road map the Five C's of ADHD Parenting:

- 
- **SelfControl:** Learning to manage your own feelings first so you can act effectively and teach your child with ADHD to do the same.

"I lost it with him yesterday before we left for dinner with my parents. After three reminders to put on his shoes, when he still didn't have them on, I yelled, 'Terrell! Shoes!' I wish I had more patience, but I have my limits too."

—Monica, the mother of Terrell, age 8

"I am an emotional person, and sometimes I don't have any control over my feelings. It's like being a volcano that's ready to explode at all times."

—Martina, age 17

- 
- **Compassion:** Meet your child where they are, not where you expect them to be.

"He works so hard to make it through a day at school. It blows my mind how he does that. I try to remember this when we are fighting about doing his homework the way I think it should be done."

—Eva, the mother of Marco, age 10

"I don't like how my parents try to help me because they talk too much and ask too many questions. It pressures me when I don't have the answers, but I don't say nothing because I don't want them to get mad at me."

—Angel, age 11



- 
- **Collaboration:** Work together with your child and other important adults in their life to find solutions to daily challenges instead of imposing your rules on them.

“I coach my daughter’s basketball team, and because she has trouble remembering directions, people end up frustrated or yelling at her, which she doesn’t like. We made a plan: I give her a calm reminder, and she asks for help more often. Yesterday, when she missed the warm-up directions, she quickly ran over, asked someone what we were doing, and got started. No drama! This was huge for her.”

—Eric, the father of Sheena, age 12

“Sometimes there’s some bumps in the road—like in the mornings. Mom said I can play video games if I am ready for school early, but then I don’t want to stop when it’s time to leave and I get really mad. We got a timer now that gives a reminder and final bell. I don’t like it, but I don’t yell so much. She likes that.”

—Jack, age 8

- 
- **Consistency:** Do what you say you will do; aim for staying steady, not for perfection. Nurture their efforts to do their best, and do the same for yourself.

“We use screens as incentives and consequences, but we can’t always stick with a plan. Sometimes we forget or something happens or we just feel tired. I know we give mixed messages, but we are trying our best.”

—Scott, the father of Darren, age 15

“What my mom does, which I really don’t understand, is that she cleans up and complains. She’ll say, ‘I’m going to leave the next mess I see you make and tell you to clean it up,’ and then goes in, cleans it up, and tells me about it. I tell her, ‘Let me do it next time,’ but she never does.”

—Stella, age 14

- 
- **Celebration:** Notice and acknowledge what's working by continuously offering words and actions of encouragement, praise, and validation.

"I want Nolan to do his best effort at school and home, so I get upset when he doesn't. He told me last week what he hears from me is that he's never good enough. I'm surprised that Nolan doesn't hear me telling him how smart he is and could do better because of that."

—Michael, the father of Nolan, age 11

"My mom taught me to think positively. If you can ask yourself questions during the day, like, 'What am I doing right now? What can I do to make this situation a little better?' then you can turn around a crappy situation. When we do this together, she helps me find something good, which I really appreciate."

—Martina, age 17

MY FIVE C's model relies on two things: **strengthbased thinking** and **attentive awareness**. With strengthbased thinking, you focus on your child's capabilities to help them build competence, self-confidence, and pride. **Strengthbased thinking** means identifying traits, or behaviors they excel at and nurturing those skills. These abilities may be either obvious or obscure, but they are there, and your job is to identify them. If things have been tough at home and all you can see is how your sevenyearold son is good at building with LEGOs and snuggling with the dog, then those strengths are your starting point. "*Shawn, that's a fancy house you built with your LEGOs. Look at all of those rooms.*" "*It's so nice how you like to cuddle with our puppy. I know that you really love him.*" Pay equal if not more attention to these qualities instead of how he is a slow reader and a reluctant soccer player. Focus on and appreciate their strengths, however idiosyncratic they may be. "*Wow, you set the table by putting the silverware in the glasses. That's different.*" "*Hey, you cleaned your bathroom and arranged all your makeup according to color.*"

*Looks cool.*” When parents use strength-based thinking, they cultivate self-confidence, resilience, and motivation in their kids because you are working from a place of competency instead of failure.

*Attentive awareness* involves observing, listening to, and acknowledging what your child is saying. This serves as the starting point for any desired changes. If your thirteen-yearold daughter is racing around on Sunday night in a panic because she forgot to do the math project due on Monday, she is showing several things. Not only is she disorganized about keeping track of her assignments and unable to remember them, she is scared, worried, and overwhelmed. Instead of angrily saying, *“How many times have I told you that you need to do a better job doing your homework before the eleventh hour? Your bedtime is in thirty minutes,”* or *“Why can’t you learn to keep up with things and follow directions like your sister!”* use attentive awareness and respond empathically. For example, you might say: *“I see how worried and overwhelmed you are about your math. Let’s slow everything down and figure out what would be helpful. You’ll get through this, and I’ll help in whatever way I can.”* Getting mad at her won’t help either of you. She is emotionally overloaded and needs your support. Attentive awareness guides you to aligning with her in solving the problem.

The next day, when things are calmer, you can brainstorm a different approach to weekend homework. *“I think we need a plan to help you avoid these incidents in the future. What do you think? When can we talk about this?”* Then ask for her opinion about what happened, share your observations, and create solutions together. When a kid with ADHD fails at a task he or she should be able to perform, it’s usually because they don’t know what else to do or can’t access what they know they should do. Dr. Ross Greene, founder of Lives in the Balance ([www.livesinthebalance.org](http://www.livesinthebalance.org)) asserts that “kids do well if they can,” and they prefer to do well if they have the skills to do so.<sup>1</sup>

When kids meet with defeat, it’s because they don’t see other choices for themselves in that moment. This perspective can be hard for our adult minds to grasp. How can it be that your teen son doesn’t see other choices when he shoplifts a Mike’s Hard Lemonade? There are lots of reasons: poor impulse control, peer pressure, denial of real

consequences, fun of risktaking behavior. His thinking brain wasn't available to him in that moment, but that doesn't mean that he likes to do "bad things." Frequently kids with ADHD don't make effective choices because they have missed the environmental, visual, or verbal cues that would help them slow down and figure out an alternative. Sometimes they fail so much that they don't believe they can succeed anymore. Darren, a fifteen-year-old boy in my therapy practice, refused to talk to his biology teacher about his failed exam: *"I failed the class last year, and I'm failing again. What's the point? It won't help."* After some digging, we remembered he had spoken to her recently about a difficult class assignment and she had been helpful. He reconsidered. They reviewed his errors, and she ended up giving him some credit for his corrections.

Strength-based thinking and attentive awareness counteract kids' pattern of failure. Challenges that are frequently frustrating, overwhelming, or isolating become manageable because you have faced them together. Sometimes they approach you for advice or help with a problem. They share their stories, listen to your words, and watch your actions. They see and feel what connection looks like. They realize that they are not as alone as they may have felt because you are sharing in their successes and their flops. At other times, you bring up a trouble spot, often a trickier but necessary part of your parenting job. In these moments, you create the platform for discussing issues by your approach, your tone, and your attitude.

When you put your heads together to invent alternatives and explore new choices about an issue that matters to you, the Five C's Parenting kicks in. You calmly share what you see or hear, your point of view and feedback. By including your child in the process of addressing a problem that you have identified either on your own or together, you are demonstrating basic respect for them—even if they don't always show this to you. That's part of their development into adults. Mutual input is the key, but, as the parent, you obviously have the final say. If your son doesn't think dirty dishes left overnight in his room is a problem, or your daughter refuses to call when she is going

to be an hour late, as the responsible adult, you get to insist on a change.

Many parents stare in disbelief when I talk about this approach to raising kids with ADHD. *“Why do we have to ‘negotiate’ things? Why can’t she just do what I tell her to do? I’m her mother. That’s how I was raised. Do what I say or else.”* For many of us, the “or else” usually included rageful yelling; spanking with hands, belts, or paddles; or time spent in isolation (being sent to our rooms for hours). But this “my way or the highway” style of parenting doesn’t really fit with Generation X or Millennial parents, who don’t want to squelch their kids—either because of philosophical beliefs or rejection of the restraints they felt as children.<sup>2</sup> Fifty years ago, psychologist Diana Baumrind labeled this forceful type of parenting “authoritarian,”<sup>3</sup> and researchers have since found that being punitive and controlling does not assist parents in increasing their child’s cooperation.<sup>4</sup> In fact, it’s the parent/child relationship that motivates kids to chip in and comply. Alfie Kohn, international parenting expert and author, writes:

On balance, the kids who do what they’re told are likely to be those whose parents don’t rely on power and instead have developed a warm and secure relationship with them. They have parents who treat them with respect, minimize the use of control, and make a point of offering reasons and explanations for what they ask.<sup>5</sup>

My conversations with kids with ADHD wholeheartedly support Kohn’s opinion. Teaming up with your child to deal with trouble spots produces better results all around, but the backandforth can be maddening. As parents, you, like your child, are trying to do the best you can given *your* resources. Naturally, all parents want to help kids flourish and will usually do whatever they can to assist them. You teach your sons and daughters life skills, offer suggestions, repeat instructions, and then hopefully watch them move along, sometimes fluidly and sometimes fitfully. Last week, your six-yearold daughter was miraculously ready for school on time on Monday and Tuesday, listening to your

reminders and following the routine. On Wednesday, you were rushing madly to get to work and school on time. While you were hurriedly getting dressed for work, she was supposed to be brushing her teeth and putting on her shoes. Instead, she was hopping around on one foot with a hat over her eyes pretending to be a blind kangaroo. One step forward and two steps back. Sometimes you are amused; other times, you are just disheartened. It's in these moments, when you are stressed, fed up, and demoralized, that you need my Five C's parenting approach.

.....  
 One step forward  
 and two steps back.  
 .....

How many times have you experienced the following scenario? Your thirteen-year-old daughter comes home from school, simultaneously eats a snack, watches TV, does her math homework, and leaves her snack dishes and books on the sofa with the TV on while she wanders upstairs to Facebook her friends. You have probably told her a thousand times not to study and watch TV and not to eat on the sofa. In spite of agreements about house rules, you come home from work and are again greeted by the familiar mess. You likely think, *"What is wrong with her?"* You may lose it and scream at her, *"Pick things up immediately or you'll lose electronics for the next five days."* You may even tell her that she is *"a space cadet and a slob."* You may ask her if she knows anything about the rules of your house, and when she grudgingly says yes, you demand to know why she can't follow them. She has no answer. Maybe she knows but refuses to tell you, or maybe she honestly doesn't know.

What her behavior is showing you is that, given her ADHD and her level of development, she simply doesn't make positive choices consistently. Of course she knows the house rules, but because she is a teenager with ADHD, her impulsive desires, her inability to finish one thing before starting another, and her failure to remember to do things have trumped the rules. Most likely she feels ashamed about that, but you won't see that embarrassment if you are yelling; you will be met by a defensive, angry girl. Any productive conversation has disappeared, and there's no actual listening either. You have hit a wall.

You both need different skills and new ways of behaving and you need them *now*!

My Five C's model of *Self-Control*, *Compassion*, *Collaboration*, *Consistency*, and *Celebration* will help you build on what you do that already works while offering you new ideas and perspectives to help you through difficult parts. The five components, examined carefully in the rest of this chapter, will strengthen your natural parenting skills while building warmer family connections and reducing stress and disharmony.

### 1. SelfControl

"Yesterday at breakfast, I called my dad an idiot when he took out the OJ for my cereal instead of the milk. It was funny. He didn't think so. He slammed the milk on the table, which made it spill, grabbed my arm, and yelled in my face that I had no right to talk to him that way. Then he stormed out of the kitchen and I had to clean up the spilled milk, which wasn't even my fault."

—Carly, age 12

NO PARENT CAN interact effectively with anyone, let alone their son or daughter with ADHD, in the midst of a conflict (or any other situation) if they are momentarily disconnected from themselves, emotionally triggered, or feeling out of control. Most kids are particularly adept at engaging in behaviors that can drive their parents crazy. Kids who have ADHD—with their inherent poor impulse control, forgetfulness, and emotional intensity—repeatedly set off their parents in ways that wear them down. Your ability to function thoughtfully and calmly can stop episodes from recurring. **How many times have you felt as though you are at the end of your rope, feeling the fibers slip through your fingers as you yell at your son again?**

Realistically, you can't deal with any situation effectively until you get yourself under control. Being aware of your feelings and what is

bubbling inside you is the first step toward a positive alliance with your child or teen. Take deep breaths, pause, get in touch with what you are feeling. Any of the following exercises will cool the fire inside you.

### EXERCISE 1: BREATHING

Here are my favorite, *really simple* breathing techniques that kids with and without ADHD seem to love. Together, with your son or daughter, give each one a try and choose your favorites.

#### Nostril Breathing

This comes from yoga. Place your right finger on your right nostril, and breathe in and out with your left one. Then switch. Do this five to ten times. Notice how you feel.

#### Chest Breathing

Place your hand on your chest or the top of your diaphragm, and take a deep breath. Exhale. Repeat this five times. Notice how you feel.

#### Flower/Candle Breathing

One of my clients, Zora, age 16, told me about this third option—“Sniff the flower, blow out the candle”<sup>6</sup>—that she learned in school, and we adapted it. Extend your pointer finger, and hold it about six inches from your face. Take a long, deep breath, as if you are smelling a beautiful rose. Then, exhale it like you are blowing out a candle on a birthday cake. Do this three times. Notice how you feel.

NOW THAT YOU are calmer, you have a chance to figure out a way to handle the situation before you do something that escalates it. This



process of mindfulness is the opposite of losing your temper. Dr. Laura Markham observes:

Being mindful means that you pay attention to what you're feeling, *but don't act on it*. . . . Acting on it mindlessly, with words or actions, is what compromises our parenting.<sup>7</sup>

Choosing mindfulness leads to responding instead of reacting. It keeps a situation from spiraling into a confrontation and leads to the ..... creation of the positive parent/child alliance at the heart of the Five C's approach.

Choosing  
mindfulness leads  
to responding  
instead of reacting.  
.....

We all have times when we say something in frustration and wish we could take it back. Most likely, those words are part of a knee-jerk response when your emotional brain has hijacked your thinking brain. Reacting with explosive feelings and inappropriate actions speeds up interpersonal disconnection and throws kindling on the flames of a growing escalation. As adults, our developed prefrontal cortex—the seat of the thinking brain—is capable of reestablishing *self-Control* and getting our explosive emotions back in check. However, your child and teen, whose prefrontal cortex is still maturing (until at least age twenty-five), lacks this important level of selfregulation.<sup>8</sup> They need guidance with managing their big feelings. For them, the emotional and physical reactions happen fast. One teen boy told me that his anger *“is like a huge wave, a tidal wave. I am doing fine and then ‘POW!’ Suddenly I am struggling to keep my head above water.”* Probably you, too, have felt this powerful wave of emotion at some time or another in your life. But as an adult you have the skills to subdue it and rein yourself in.

Reacting generally involves criticism and blame, followed by regrets. Criticism is an outlet for spontaneous adult anger or intolerance that all children interpret instantaneously. For kids with ADHD, it is the sandpaper that rubs regularly against their skin. *“Sit still like Jamie and Tyler during morning meeting!” “Can you stop leaving your smelly*

soccer socks in the kitchen every day and put them in the laundry where they belong!'" "Why don't you have any capital letters in your report? You can't turn it in like this." Even when you are trying to give them helpful reminders or positive feedback, the tone and delivery can make whatever you say feel like criticism. Many kids—those with ADHD and those without it—question the concept of "positive feedback." But children and teens with ADHD just don't seem to believe in it. As Chloe, age 10, said to me while wriggling upside down in the striped chair in my office, *"There is no such thing as positive feedback. There is nothing good about feedback. It's all bad. I don't know why you adults won't admit that."* It's all criticism to them: a constant reminder of how they've messed up again.

Blame teaches kids that the adult being right is more important than their being understanding: that it is acceptable to put someone down when they have made a mistake and that something wrong is usually someone's fault. Blaming a child reduces their ability to take responsibility for their actions, encourages lying, and breeds fear. When children worry about being blamed, they consciously avoid owning their actions. When her parents found ants in her bedroom, Ruby, age 9, denied eating there because she knew it was expressly against her father's wishes. But Ruby likes to eat when she reads, and she often reads in her bedroom. Finally, she admitted to snacking while reading in her bed:

I just go into the kitchen to get something to eat with my book, and then I wander into my bedroom. I am thinking about the book, not the food. My parents told me that food in my room could bring bugs, but I didn't really believe them. I am really sorry, but apparently parents don't take it that way. They're like, "Oh, this kid messed up our house and it cost us money; she's going to get punished." Why would I tell them?

Blame increases low self-esteem by finding fault with behaviors and choices, even though kids with ADHD sometimes can't control what they do.

Responding is what's called for here, and it can be tough to do. A parent or caregiver needs to acknowledge what their child is expressing, either verbally or nonverbally, in a nonjudgmental way. You cannot be dismissive: *"It shouldn't be a such a big deal to get off your iPod. You've been on it for an hour!"* This only exacerbates tension and negates that it is a big deal for your son to turn it off. You need to marshal all your *self-Control* to be patient and let your words reflect only what you see and hear going on around you. *"I see that it is hard to get off your iPod when you are having fun using it. But the hour we agreed on is up."* By responding instead of reacting, you validate whatever is going on and then, if necessary, open up the space to create an alternative solution: *"I understand that you think it isn't fair and you aren't ready to stop. What can we do about that?"* Talk it over, and set up a different plan for the next day. They may still get upset, but they will likely feel comforted by knowing that their opinions were heard and they are part of the decision-making process. Responding does not mean that you are "giving in," only that you are hearing their feelings and making a plan for the future.

Responding is especially challenging in families where things happen very quickly, often escalating within seconds. Much as you would like to manage everyone's behavior and avoid a blowout, all you can really control is yourself. The big difference in any provocative situation is whether you react or respond. When you trudge into the house after a long day at work with two big bags of groceries that have to be magically transformed into something delicious and your twelve-year-old daughter rushes toward you, emphatically waving a pink piece of paper in your face, shouting, *"You need to sign this so I can go on the field trip on Friday! It's really important, my teacher said so. Can you sign it now?"*, you have two choices. You can react and yell, *"What are you doing?! Can't you see that my hands are full?"* Or, you can respond and say, *"Hey, I see this is important, but my arms are full. Why don't you give me a hand and then we can take care of it?"* If you choose the first option, you will, in all likelihood, be met by an even bigger reaction in return. By

choosing the second option, you will likely avoid an eruption and maybe even get some cooperation along the way.

Willie, age 13, and his dad, David, share how they improved their relationship by practicing thoughtful *self-Control*:

DAVID: Now, we communicate better, and we listen to each other without emotional excitement. I like things a certain way. I have strong opinions. When they aren't that way, I try to control them. Usually unsuccessfully.

WILLIE: Yeah, general communication. Dad's not doing the one thing he used to do a lot, just automatically assuming I am lying. That's how quite a few of our fights got started. He would accuse me and yell, and I would say, "No I'm not" and get mad at him. Sometimes I didn't do what he wanted just to get back at him. I didn't care if I got punished.

DAVID: I am trying to stay calmer and listen more. It's not always easy. I think Willie knows that. I see him not digging his heels in as much or stomping off, so that helps too.

WILLIE: It's simple. Don't tell me I'm lying and then not listen to me. I don't have to get so angry now because he isn't accusing me as much.

Practicing *self-Control* doesn't mean perfection; it's a continuous process. You will still get upset at times—don't beat up on yourself. Just try to bring yourself back.

Those moments when you are most frustrated are the ones when you most need to remember to slow down and use your thinking mind. Take time for two minutes of nostril or chest breathing. Then, you can simply reflect back to your child what you notice is going on. When you observe and listen carefully and exert *self-Control* and steady behavior, you demonstrate to your child that there are other options available for them when they are fired up. As one father of a fourteen-year-old boy told me, "*The power of example is all any of us can do for our kids.*"

## 2. Compassion

.....

“When I get overwhelmed, it’s hard to use words. Like, if I am disappointed in myself, I don’t really say so. Sometimes I do. The thoughts are racing in my head. Then I just lie down and not do anything and pretend I don’t hear anyone. My mom tells me she gets frustrated because I don’t ask for help, but I just can’t.”

—James, age 11

WHAT DOES COMPASSION look like when you are parenting a child with ADHD or teen? The Dalai Lama believes that love and *Compassion* are necessities, not luxuries, for human survival.<sup>9</sup> *Compassion* in parenting means being able to see your child *where they are*: with empathy and patience in the context of their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. When your ten-year-old son is cooperating with you and clearing the dinner dishes, being kind is not really a problem. When your sixteen-year-old daughter is crying in your arms because her girlfriend broke up with her, showing her love and understanding is not really too hard. But when your nine-year-old daughter takes her shampoo and rubs it all over the shower walls to see how sudsy they can get and then sprays water to clean off the bubbles, which spreads the mess all over the bathroom, you are not likely to react to her curiosity with sensitivity. In fact, you’re furious. It’s moments like these when you have to dig deep, remind yourself about the necessity of *Compassion*, and find some.

Like self-Control, the first step in having *Compassion* for others is to cultivate some for yourself. If adults who parent kids with ADHD can accept themselves for who they are, warts and all, it will be easier to accept their children’s foibles. Can you do this? If not, what gets in the way? *Compassion* is a frame of mind that withholds judgment and embraces others for who they are at a given moment, even if it’s not who you want them to be. This is especially true when you consider your children. You can hold on to the possibility that your child will change as long as it’s not an expectation. Expectations often breed disappointment; hope leads to opportunity.

Many of the kids with ADHD interviewed for this book repeatedly spoke about how their parents were their main supports. When asked “What gets you through tough times?,” they replied:

- “I get a lot of support from my family, even when I have been failing.”
- “I think the relationship with my parents; I owe a lot to them.”
- “My mom is the main person I talk about this stuff with.”
- “Having my mom there to keep me on task nicely.”
- “They tell me things like, ‘You’re not dumb,’ not like the negative things that I say to myself.”
- “Me and my dad talk when we do stuff on the farm. Me and him have a pretty open line of communication, which is nice.”
- “My dad helped keep me get organized with school stuff, which is huge because I don’t know how to do it at all by myself.”

These children feel seen and heard by their parents; bolstered by them; understood by them. They do not feel pitied or labeled as “stupid” or “defective.” They see their parents intervening with school on their behalf, sitting with them and wading through their struggles with academics or chores and believe in them, even when they didn’t believe in themselves. Sometimes this means that their parents put aside some of their own desires, frustrations, or disappointments in the service of what serves their children best at a given point in time. At other times, parents have to push their children to reach beyond what they see as their inabilities. It can be hard to know when to hold your ground and when to let go.

A few months ago, in my office, Rick was arguing with his bright fourteen-year-old son, Kevin, about his schedule for ninth grade. The boy did not want to take Honors English as a freshman. Even though his dad said he was smart, English was hard for him, especially writing. Rick acknowledged that writing was hard for his son, but he was concerned that not taking Honors English would look bad for college applications later on. He was even willing to pay for a tutor to help,

although it was stretch financially. But Kevin would not budge. They were going around and around.

KEVIN FUMED: “Dad, I’m signed up for Honors Math. I love math. Why isn’t that enough? You always want me to be perfect. Well, I’m not. I’m nervous about going to high school. Do you get that? Remember what it was like when I started middle school? I couldn’t fall asleep at night.”

RICK PAUSED AND SAID QUIETLY: “I don’t want you to be overwhelmed and anxious. I just don’t want you to give up on yourself. You are a smart kid. I want you to have opportunities that I didn’t. If you take Honors English, you will learn to write well, and that’s an important skill in life, one I wish I had more of.”

Kevin looked at his father. “Well, I’m not you. I can learn to write fine in regular English, which is hard enough for me.”

RICK SIGHED: “That may be true. I will talk to your guidance counselor about that. But I still think having another Honors class is important on your transcript. What about an Honors science? You like science.”

KEVIN REPLIED: “If Honors classes are so important to you, I guess I could just take Honors Biology. Then you could help me, not some guy we have to pay.

Rick considered his idea. “That seems fair. If we can switch you to Honors Biology, that’s okay. And let’s see how English goes. If the writing portion isn’t sufficient, maybe we’ll get you help anyway.”

KEVIN SMILED. “Works for me.”

Kevin and his father each altered their ideas to create a new plan that met both of their needs. Rick led the way: he met his son where he was—a kid who likes math and science but is scared about the transition to high school. Summoning up empathy and personal insight, Rick focused on what was most important—his son having challenging classes and a strong transcript that reflected his intelligence. He

listened carefully to what Kevin was saying, offered a different solution to the problem they faced, and then decided to talk to the guidance counselor to get more information. They stopped arguing. Ultimately, they came up with an alternative schedule that supported Kevin and reflected Rick's parental goals too.

*Compassion* also encompasses forgiveness. The ADHD brain, with its focus on the present, doesn't tend to hold grudges: what happened yesterday or last week is long forgotten in the face of what is going on right now. As a parent, your adult mind remembers incidents that your child has happily left behind. One week later, you may still be annoyed about cleaning up that bathroom after its spontaneous redecoration with shampoo, but your daughter is focused today on whether you are going to get her the sparkly sneakers that she wants. Forgiveness, the companion to *Compassion*, necessitates being able to move on. You don't stuff your feelings down until something else occurs so they can come roaring out; you genuinely move on. I bet you are wondering, "How in the world can I do this in the face of all the irritating and unresolved incidents that pop up each day?"

Parents know that it can be hard to forgive or move on when there is little or no accountability from their kids or genuine apologies. Their kids want to get it over with, say a quick sorry, and move on. The best option for you is to have a conversation with your son or daughter in a quiet moment, within their twenty-four-hour memory window, about what happened. Say what you need to say, see that it is heard, and ask for some accountability. When the conversation is over, you are finished; you reset and move forward.

*Compassion* creates alliances that are the heart of successful parenting. Drs. Edward Hallowell and Peter Jensen, in their book *Superparenting for ADD*, emphasizes its importance:

It is the feeling of positive connection, a feeling of being cared for no matter what, a preverbal sense of belonging to something positive that's larger than yourself.<sup>10</sup>



This bond makes up the foundation for feeling close as a family and cooperating to face anything that comes your way.

### 3. Collaboration

“It doesn’t work when my parents take things away because I will keep on asking for it or do other things that annoy them. Now that I’m in high school, I wish they would trust me more so we could talk about stuff.”

—Jackson, age 14

COLLABORATION, AT ITS core, involves listening and mutual respect. This is not the feedback that children with ADHD usually receive. Typically, they are told that they are doing something wrong and they should do something else instead. Like all of us, kids with ADHD do not like it when other people tell them what to do, yet this is what they experience most of the time at school, at sports, at home. They don’t really want other people’s solutions to their challenges. They would rather avoid thinking about their problems if they can; they just want to get through them and be like everyone else. But they know they need help sometimes, and despite their protests, they probably want you to work with them to figure out what to do, how to make lasting changes.

When you collaborate with a youngster with ADHD, you are approaching problems with a “we” attitude instead of a “you” attitude. You are working together to address concerns that you both have. This means that you and your ADHD son or daughter acknowledge a problem but you, the parent, are not going to dictate the solutions. Here’s what the “we” looks like in real life. You and your ten-year-old daughter agree that she has difficulty getting off the computer when her allotted thirty minutes on a school night are over. She is supposed to help you set the table when she is done. When you tell her that her time is up, you frequently have a major battle. She keeps asking for another minute to finish something while you are rushing around trying to finish

cooking dinner and the table is still not set. You end up yelling at her, she screams and cries, and the meal arrives cold on the table. Sometimes the rest of the evening goes poorly too; bath and bedtime are stressful and unpleasant. You are both unhappy about this sequence of events. What can you do that is *Collaborative*?

The first thing is to have a conversation at a planned, specific time: a talk during which you both share what is happening in your family. Describe your frustrations, and then ask your child for her perspective. You share your unhappiness with yelling and your desire to have a nice, warm meal for the family. She tells you how hard it is to just get off the computer when she may not have finished the level of her game. You each talk, and you each listen. Identify areas of agreement about what isn't working. Then brainstorm ideas (hearing all of them without judgment), and choose one or two changes that you both think are possible to try. Perhaps you both agree that a timer, with a two-minute warning, would be a better signal than having you tell her several times to get off the computer. Perhaps she would like you to come and get her when the timer goes off and give her a hug when she stops. Perhaps she wants to make setting the table a game or a race to make it more fun. Together you agree to go to the drugstore and buy a cheap timer. You are willing to try these things for a week; then review them and see how they are working.

A family collaborative model of solving problems with kids with ADHD invites participation from your kids that fosters their cooperation. When you include your child in the process of addressing challenging behaviors and listen to what they are saying both verbally and behaviorally, you become their ally, not their adversary. They feel seen, heard, and valued. They are more likely to buy into whatever you are trying to accomplish because they are part of the process. Of course, there are crisis moments when safety and health concerns mean you step in and make the decisions. If your newly licensed teenage son comes home Saturday night after the curfew of the state's Cinderella driving laws, then you have to make a choice about giving him the car next weekend. If your six-year-old daughter wakes up in the middle of

the night and watches television, then you have to intervene. These moments call for you to be the parent and adult that you are. I am not suggesting giving a youngster with ADHD authority over house rules or allowing them to determine the parameters of acceptable behavior.

Your children need you to be their parents, not their friends. They want limits, and they need direction. They learn about moral and ethical behavior from you and your values. The point here is to involve your child with ADHD in the process of creating solutions to challenges in their lives and in your family. You ask questions and listen to their answers, even when you don't agree. When your seven-year-old son tearfully tells you in the car on the way to school after another disastrous morning departure that mornings go better with Mama because she helps him more than you do, his complaint has valuable information. He is not just criticizing you. He is telling you that he is overwhelmed and can't follow through on what he knows he is supposed to do when you are in charge. Your job is to uncover exactly what your wife does that works better and decide if you can do something similar. This is more important than taking the remark personally, as a slight on your parenting skills. Then you negotiate a plan with him that allows him to feel supported and nurtures the independence you want him to have. You are conveying to him that his opinion and feedback matter. Together, you face the demons of disastrous mornings and create solutions that work.

4. Consistency  
.....

“We have a list on the refrigerator of our chores, but if my mom doesn’t remind us to look at it, then sometimes we forget. How can we remember if she doesn’t? Then she gets mad at us, which doesn’t seem fair. Everybody forgets things. It’s not such a big deal.” —Chloe, age 10

CONSISTENCY MEANS DOING what you say you are going to do over and over again—as best you can. It entails responding similarly to recurring

behaviors and standing firm in the face of pressure to change. It doesn't mean being perfect or shaming yourself when you can't do it. It means writing yourself reminders about family agreements or ground rules if you need them and not giving consequences that you can't enforce. *Consistency* lies in sticking with a plan more often than not—while allowing for flexibility when you have no other options.

How do you build the foundation for *Consistency*? Start by establishing clear guidelines for behavior with your son or daughter that mean something to them and to you. *"When you come home from school, you have to eat your snack, as we have agreed on, and do your homework before computer games. Otherwise, your work doesn't seem to get finished."* *Consistency* depends on reliability. Kids with ADHD like to know what is coming, and predictability helps guide their choices. They learn from their experiences and start to understand that their actions have consequences. (This cause-and-effect relationship is exactly where their executive functioning skills can be weak.) If your daughter knows that she will lose her phone for the evening if she doesn't clean up her room by 6:00 p.m. per your earlier agreement but then you let her keep it because you want to be able to reach her, there is no *Consistency*. What she learns is that you don't mean what you say and that her actions have no consequences.

Consistent parents return to the plan when there are setbacks. Setbacks are part of any learning process and are not permanent derailments. They are teaching and learning .....  
 opportunities for both you and your child. A .....  
 setback occurs when a plan has been work- .....  
 ing and then—oops, there's a bump in the .....  
 road. It happens when your sixteen-year-old daughter forgets her lunch after bringing it every day the week before. It's when your nine-year-old son refuses to pick up the LEGOs that are all over the living room after doing well with cleaning up for the past two weeks. These moments are not failures. They are days when you say: *"Oh well, no one is perfect. You can try again."* This is as true for them as it is for you: when there's a lapse, you all regroup instead of throwing out your game plan and declaring defeat.

Setbacks are part of  
 any learning process.

Exceptions to *Consistency* differ from being inconsistent. Exceptions are used when you want to send a clear message or when an accepted family rule can be broken because of an unplanned occurrence or an emergency. They don't permanently alter anything and don't mean that you are resorting to an erratic parenting style. Let's say that your seven-yearold daughter is allowed to watch thirty minutes of television each day while you make dinner. Yesterday, you accidentally dropped a glass on the floor, which needed to be cleaned up and prolonged the meal preparation, so you told her to watch an extra thirty minutes while you cleaned up and finished cooking. Then you told her why you made this choice. That's a purposeful exception and doesn't interfere with the general rules around television. When you give her an extra thirty minutes because you are tired of dealing with her and listening to her whining about how unfair your rules are, you are not making a purposeful exception. You are teaching her that pestering you enough can get her what she wants and that family rules can be easily broken.

Consistent limits are loving teaching tools. Kids learn how to tolerate disappointment, build resilience, and understand predictability.

..... Consistent parents are compassionate but  
Consistent limits are firm. Even though it may be hard to teach  
loving teaching your kids what you struggle with personally,  
tools. you do the best you can. Maybe you put your-  
..... self on the same program and work along-  
side them on a shared challenge. When you child is unhappy with your  
decisions, consistent parents acknowledge their feelings but do not give  
into them unless it's an exceptionsituation. You maintain your boundar-  
ies and stay the course because you know, in the long run, it's the only  
way to nurture a competent, independent adult.

5. Celebration

.....

"I like dancing, cheerleading, reading, knitting, and crocheting. There's so many other things that I do that are productive and good about me. I

love my family and my friends. I don't let ADHD get in the way of that anymore. My parents tell me when I do something good, and I can see that they are really happy for me. They also help me when I mess up. Now I say 'Okay, I'll just try harder next time,' and I move on."

—Ana, age 16

HAVE YOU EVER noticed how your child or teen with ADHD remembers the negative things people say to them more than the positive? While all humans are wired for remembering the negative more than the positive, (psychologists call this the negativity bias),<sup>11</sup> the minds of youngsters with ADHD are particularly vulnerable to holding on to what is "bad" about them, especially when they hear it from adults. Most likely, this pattern evolved over years of having been criticized for not remembering things, not doing things properly, not controlling themselves, etc. While our ancestors needed the ability to learn and remember lessons from tough experiences for survival, people today also need to learn how to retain lessons and feedback from good experiences to build morale and selfconfidence. This is especially true for children and teens.

Self-esteem is a pivotal issue for young people with ADHD. Low self-worth contributes to depression and anxiety and leads to giving up, not caring, and failing. Positive experiences and rewarding relationships nourish inner strengths. In order for those good memories to outnumber the bad ones, they have to take up permanent residence in the brain's neural structures. Typically, this process begins with holding on to that good stuff in what is called your "working memory" long enough for it to be picked up by your short-term memory and then consolidated into your long-term memory. Since people with ADHD usually struggle with working-memory impairments; their brains often can't seem to hold on to information, positive or negative, long enough to transfer into long-term storage. With lots of repetition, time, and physical development, however, material can be effectively moved down the memory line. This is how learning occurs. For youth with ADHD who receive so many corrections and suggestions about what they could be doing

differently, the negative messages often dominate their sense of who they are. Ideally, these would be offset by positive ones.

In more than twenty-five years of working with kids and teens with ADHD, I have seen one sad constant emerge: every single person has a deep-seated sense of shame about having ADHD and/or being “different” from their peers. Sometimes this shame is obvious: your daughter can’t seem to make friends, can’t write as well or easily as her peers, and spaces out at her desk at school. Sometimes it is more hidden: your son boasts about his accomplishments at video games and basketball but hides his tests from you or procrastinates endlessly before starting his homework. Either way, this shame often starts early in life and continues into adulthood. Many of them expect to hear negative comments about themselves. When I asked Kyle, age 12, in a family session how he would like to receive feedback about his behavior, he interrupted before the words “good” or “constructive” came out and said, “*I don’t. I don’t want to hear it. I get sick of hearing it.*”

*Celebration*—positive feedback about what your child or teen is doing well in a given moment—can reduce this shame and build self-esteem. This is not fake praise or insincere positive comments that you dredge up because you know it’s good for them to hear. *Celebration* is not cheerleading: it does not consist of superficial compliments or overemphasizing every good thing your child does. *Celebration* is based on observations, authenticity, and sensibility. It entails reframing what is seen as negative into something positive and noticing the small successes that your kids with ADHD may brush aside as unimportant. Ellis, age 17, explains how his family’s encouragement assisted him:

They are as patient as they can be. It definitely gets hard, and I’m sure my parents are mad at me a lot, for doing things I didn’t intentionally mean to do. But they understand where it’s coming from most of the time and just to help me along the best they can. They are never really mad at me, which would turn me off and make me not want to do something. It’s always like, “Okay, here’s what you did; let’s improve it.” That way I don’t get too mad at myself.

*Celebration* entails giving positive comments that are direct and precise about something they have done. Dr. Barbara Fredrickson claims that experiencing positive emotions in a 3:1 ratio helps people lead more satisfying, productive lives.<sup>12</sup> Changing the ratio of positive statements to negative ones that you convey will set the foundation for this improved self-worth.

Pay attention to what you say and when. Praise works best when it is used for both efforts and accomplishments and is delivered immediately. Specific details are critical for making it meaningful to kids with ADHD because they often think concretely about things. It's more effective to say, "*You did a good job getting ready for bed tonight. I like that I only gave you two reminders,*" instead of "*Good job going to bed.*" The former statement tells your child exactly what they did well and why; the second just tells them you liked what they did. There's no learning for them. Sometimes, just to facilitate that your positive comment is retained in their memory, you can ask them to repeat what they heard you say.

PARENT: "I really want to make sure that you understood what I said. Can you please repeat it?"

CHILD: "Do I have to?"

PARENT: "Yes."

CHILD: "Okay. [*Long sigh.*] You said you appreciated that I hung up my coat when I got home."

This type of exchange helps to build the neural pathways in working memory you are seeking to strengthen while at the same time fostering the parent/child connection. It's a double win.

*Celebration* also means encouraging your child to follow what interests them and brings them joy. One reason that video games are so appealing to kids with ADHD is that the goals for success are clear and attainable. Your son moves happily from one level to another, knowing what is asked of him and being able to achieve each challenge. Negotiating the ins and outs of school, after-school sports and activities, and jobs can be more convoluted and, at times, less



rewarding. Identifying things that they enjoy (no matter how small) is crucial to building their self-esteem. If your fifteen-year-old likes acting, that's easy. If your ten-year-old son only likes Wizard101 online, that's more challenging. Try to find a silver lining in their ideas about what's fun if you don't really like them. For example, does your son want to have his friend over to play Wizard 101? If so, this activity may not be your first choice for him but at least he's being social. Maybe you could play Monopoly with him after his hour of screen time is up. Some day your son might create his own computer game. Every child is passionate about something; some just need more assistance expressing it.

### The ADHD Parenting Journey

The Five C's parenting approach described in this chapter helps strengthen understanding, personal responsibility, and connection among all family members. It has helped hundreds of families run smoother and get along better. It's a model based on the stories of children and teens who have told me what helps them and what limits them—both at home and beyond. They show how, when one member of a family is in distress, the whole family is affected and often distressed too.

As you read this book, you will learn how to establish a family in which self-regulation, empathy, and rewarding relationships are the norm, not the exception. Using calm, honest, and direct communication, including real listening, you will glean ways of working together to discover lasting solutions that appeal to everyone. Your ability to follow through on what you say and agreements you make, notice when things are going well, and support activities that appeal to kids with ADHD will improve dramatically as you integrate the Five C's model into your daily life.

PRE-ORDER TODAY!

**BARNES & NOBLE**  
BOOKSELLERS

INDIE  
BOUND™

A red, hand-drawn style bird logo with spread wings, positioned between the words 'INDIE' and 'BOUND'.

**amazon.com**

The Amazon logo's signature orange arrow pointing from 'a' to 'z'.

Google play

The Google Play logo, featuring a colorful triangle icon to the left of the text 'Google play'.

**kobo**

The Kobo logo, which includes a stylized blue and purple book icon below the text 'kobo'.