

ADHD: Supporting Your Child at Home

A guide for parents and carers

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First, hold this truth: your child wants to do well. When things go off track, it is usually a gap in skills or support, not a lack of effort. Your calm presence plus the right scaffolding makes a real difference.

The 5 Cs at home

- **Self-control:** start with you. Pause, breathe, and steady yourself so your child can borrow your calm. A simple script: "I am going to take two slow breaths, then we will figure this out together."
- **Compassion:** for your child and for yourself. Swap "won't" for "can't yet." Notice effort, not just outcomes.
- **Collaboration:** plan with your child, not for them. Ask "What makes this hard, and what might help?" Then try one small change as an experiment.
- **Consistency:** simple, predictable routines lower stress. Same order, same cues, same language.
- **Celebration:** each week ask "What went well?" Name wins, however small. This shifts attention away from the brain's negative bias.

Routines that reduce friction

- Create a daily schedule your child can see — use pictures, photos, or one-line checklists.
- Set clear expectations for homework: short blocks, clear start and end, planned breaks.
- Manage screens on purpose: decide when, where, and what. Use timers and a calm, predictable handover routine.
- Build in exercise and play every day. Movement first often makes thinking easier.
- Gamify chores and low-interest tasks using timers, "beat the buzzer," treasure hunts, or first-then cards.
- Hold a short weekly family meeting: share wins, worries, and one small change.

Scaffolding executive function skills

Executive function skills do not appear by magic — they are taught and practised.

- Break tasks into two or three steps. Point to the step they are on.
- Externalise everything: visual lists, timers, calendars, sticky notes.
- Use "first, then" and "when, then" language: "First teeth, then story."
- Offer a warm start: sit nearby for two minutes while they begin. Body-doubling helps.
- Make time visible — use analogue clocks, timers, and gentle countdowns.
- Plan transitions: five-minute warning, one-minute warning, then a clear first step.
- Keep supports when they work. Removing help too soon often causes a dip.

Regulation, energy, and the nervous system

- Slow things down. Learn a few co-regulation tools: long exhale breathing, alternate nostril breathing, hand on heart, a sip of water, ten wall push-ups.
- Create a reset plan for tough moments: a quiet space, noise-reduction headphones, a weighted cushion, a favourite fidget.
- Help your child read body signals: "Tummy tight could be hunger, worry, or excitement — which fits right now?"
- Expect an after-school crash. Offer decompression time before homework or chores.

Health foundations

- Regular meals and snacks with protein, fibre, and water. Pack a snack for the journey home.
- Daily movement — mix calm movement (stretching, yoga) with big movement (running, cycling, trampolining).
- Sleep routines that are kind and repeatable: same wind-down order, low light, screens away before bed.

Working with motivation

- Interest powers attention. Add novelty, choice, movement, and meaning.
- Offer choices with limits: "Maths at the table or on the floor?" "Read to me or read to the dog?"
- Use brief, specific praise: "You started when it was hard. That is persistence."
- Expect pushback, especially in adolescence. Stay steady, keep your humour, try again later.
- After a blow-up, repair and review: "What helped a little? What will we change next time?"

Teaching your child about their brain

- Introduce executive function in simple terms: "These are the brain's planning and switching skills."
- Map strengths and challenges together. Build on strengths first.
- Practise self-advocacy. Scripts to try: "I focus best when I can move a little. Can I stand while I work?" "I need the steps one at a time please." "A five-minute warning helps me switch tasks."

You do not have to do all of this at once. Choose one tiny change, try it for a week, and celebrate any progress. Steady, kind, and consistent beats perfect every time.