12 GUIDELINES FOR LIVING WITH A HYPERACTIVE CHILD *

Most parents with a hyperactive child appreciate advice on how to cope with such a child on a day-to-day basis. Some of the following guidelines may be helpful in your situation.

1. Accept your child's limitations. Life will be calmer when a parent accepts the fact that his child is intrinsically active and energetic and possibly always will be. The hyperactivity is not intentional. A parent cannot expect to eliminate the hyperactivity but just to keep it under reasonable control. Any undue criticism or attempts to change the energetic child into a quiet child or "model child" will cause more harm than good. Nothing is more helpful for the hyperactive child than having a tolerant, patient, low-key parent.

2. Provide outlets for the release of excess energy. This energy can't be bottled up and stored. These children need daily outside activities such as running, sports, or long walks. A park where they can play is helpful. In bad weather, try to have a space where he can do as he pleases without criticism (at least at a selected time each week).

3. Keep home life organized. Clear routines help the hyperactive child accept order. Mealtimes, chores, playing, computer time and bedtime should be kept as consistent as possible. Constructing a timetable can be helpful. Predictable responses by the parents to daily events help the child become more predictable. While structure helps children feel secure, be flexible when they are disrupted by the child or transitions.

4. Avoid fatigue and over stimulation. When they are exhausted, their self-control often breaks down and their hyperactivity becomes worse. Teach your child to breathe deeply if he feels frustrated or out of control. Read his explosive warning signals. Quietly intervene to avoid explosions by distracting him or discussing the conflict calmly. It is helpful for them to have a separate room or a part of a room that is his special area. Simplicity, solid colors, minimal clutter, and a worktable facing a fairly blank wall away from distractions assist concentration. A hyperactive child has trouble filtering out his over stimulation by himself.

5. Keep your emotions under control and positive. Anger is normal. Anger does not mean you do not love your child. Anger can also be controlled. Be calm, keeping your own voice quiet and slow. Loudness and agitation intensify inappropriate behaviors. Recognize and respond to any positive behavior, however small. Separate behavior, which you may not like, from the child's personhood, e.g., "I like you. I don't like your tracking mud through the house."

6. Maintain consistent, firm discipline. These children are unquestionably difficult to manage. However, aggressive and attention-getting behaviors are no more acceptable in the hyperactive child than in other children. Unlike the expression of hyperactivity, aggressive behavior needs to be checked. These children need more careful, planned discipline than the average child. Rules need to be formulated mainly to prevent harm to themselves or others. Keep rules simple and few, and avoid unnecessary rules. These children tolerate fewer rules than the normal child. The family needs a few clear, consistent important rules, with other rules added at the child's own pace. Life will be much more pleasant if you choose to avoid being after the child all the time with negative comments like "Don't do this" and "Stop that."

7. Be responsible in use of medication. Supervise the taking of medication, even if it is routine over a long period of time. Responsibility remains with the parents. Know the name and dose of his medication. Watch and remember the effects of the medication, so you can report to your physician. Openly discuss with your physician any concerns you have about the use of medication.
8. **Buffer the child against overreaction by others.** If he receives a reputation for being a "bad kid," it is important that this doesn't carry over into home life. At home the attitude that will be best is that he is a "good child with excess energy." It is important that parents don't give up on him. He needs to always feel accepted by his family. As long as he has this, his self-confidence will survive.

9. **Give him responsibility.** This is essential for growth. The task should be within his capacity, although the assignment may need much supervision. Acceptance and recognition of his efforts, even when imperfect, is vital. Demonstrate new or difficult tasks using action accompanied by short, clear explanation. Repeat the demonstration until learned. This uses audiovisual-sensory perceptions to reinforce the learning. The memory traces of a hyperactive child take longer to form. Be patient and repeat.

10. **Stretch his attention span.** Rewarding non-hyperactive behavior is one key to preparing these children for school. Increased attention span and persistence with tasks can be taught to these children at home. The child can be shown pictures in a book, and, if he is attentive, he can be rewarded with praise and a hug. The parent can also read stories to him. Coloring pictures can be encouraged and rewarded. Games of increasing difficulty can gradually be taught to the child, starting with building blocks and progressing eventually to dominoes, card games and dice games. Matching pictures is an excellent way to build a child's memory and concentration span. The child's toys need not be excessive in number, for this can accentuate his distractibility. The toys need to be ones that are safe and relatively unbreakable.

11. **Play and pray together.** Childproof your home and reduce clutter, so there can be more freedom for activities. Pay attention to and have fun with your child, which means you may have to inconvenience yourself sometimes. Encourage your child’s creativity, remembering not to over stimulate. Teach about God so he knows that God loves him and values him.

12. **Periodically get away from it all.** Parents need time away from the hyperactive child often enough to be able to tolerate him. Exposure to some of these children for 14 hours a day would make anyone a wreck. When the father comes home after an absence, he needs to look after the child and give his wife a deserved break. Parents need a change to rejuvenate themselves.

* This material was compiled from various sources by Rick Bates for use by Ms.