

# What Your ADHD Child Wishes You Knew: Working Together to Empower Kids for Success in School and Life

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A 2018 Best Book Awards winner in Parenting & Family  
A 2018 Mom's Choice Book Award winner

A veteran psychologist presents a proven roadmap to help ADHD kids succeed in school and life

You've read all the expert advice, but despite countless efforts to help your child cope better and stay on track, you're still struggling with everyday issues like homework, chores, getting to soccer practice on time, and simply getting along without pushback and power struggles.

What if you could work with your child, motivating and engaging them in the process, to create positive change once and for all? In this insightful and practical book, veteran psychologist Sharon Saline shares the words and inner struggles of children and teens living with ADHD-and a blueprint for achieving lasting success by working together. Based on more than 25 years of experience counseling young people and their families, Dr. Saline's advice and real-world examples reveal how parents can shift the dynamic and truly help kids succeed. Topics include:

- \* Setting mutual goals that foster cooperation
- \* Easing academic struggles
- \* Tackling everyday challenges, from tantrums and backtalk to staying organized, building friendships, and more.

With useful exercises and easy-to-remember techniques, you'll discover a variety of practical strategies that really work, creating positive change that will last a lifetime.

Sharon Saline, Psy.D., maintains a busy psychotherapy practice working with children, teens, families and adults with ADHD and other mental health issues. She has spoken and conducted workshops nationally and internationally on ADHD and the adolescent brain. Thousands of parents, teachers, school administrators and mental health clinicians have attended her presentations, trainings and workshops.

### 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 over and over while 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 (such as 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 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.

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

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, kids 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:

self-Control: 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: strength-based thinking and attentive awareness. With strength-based thinking, you focus on your child's capabilities to help them build competence, self-confidence, and pride. Strength-based 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 seven-year-old son is good at building with LEGOs and snuggling with the dog, then those strengths are your starting point. Shawn, that is a fancy house you built with your LEGOs. Look at all of those rooms. It is 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 is 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-year-old 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.

Other Books

Ronya Anak Penyamun,  
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