

Strategies for ADHD in the Time of COVID-19

Working from home can tax the organizational skills and focus of even the most non-distracted person. Now, with everyone home and engaged in different tasks, the challenge is magnified. For those with organizational and attentional weaknesses, we have gathered the strategies below to help support you during this time.

ROUTINE

Routine is always important for those with ADHD and especially when changes in venue (like going to school or work) have been helping to guide routines before COVID-19 surfaced. Re-establishing a routine for all family members is important.

Routines may need to be more flexible at this time to maintain sanity. Making a routine that is too strict may lead you to a constant sense of disappointment if you fall from it. Keep a routine, but build in spare time so that you feel like you and your child are staying on track.

SLEEP/WAKE CYCLES

Maintaining sleep/wake cycles for everyone in the family is critical. The last thing you need is people staying up late and sleeping throughout the day.

SCHEDULE CHECK-INS

Have a check-in part way throughout the day to assess what is working for the day. This gives you the opportunity to make an adjustment if needed to increase a feeling of satisfaction at the end of the day.

BODY SCANS

Daily check-ins should include taking a moment for family members to assess themselves, such as thinking about themselves physically from head to toe to help identify several key things:

1. Are they feeling sick?
2. Do they need to move their bodies?
3. Do they need to stretch their bodies?
4. Do they need to relax their bodies?

Think about which part of your body holds stress and try to relax different groups of muscles at a time.

BREAKS

Build in breaks during the day. Create a list of different activities to keep things fresh. One idea might be to make a deck of

cards or a wheel to spin with ideas like take a walk, run up and down stairs twice, do 20 jumping jacks, etc.

TRY NOT TO HYPER FOCUS

ADHD is not just about having a need to increase focus. Sometimes those with ADHD hyper focus. This might happen with leisure activities, like video games for example. This can also happen with work as the physical boundary between work and home is lost. Some people may find themselves wanting to work more at home than they did in a typical work day. Having a loose schedule or routine and being sure to maintain some limits is critical.

CHANGE OF SCENERY

When possible, change venues for different activities. If you are working in one place, try to take a break in another. If you have enough room, perhaps different topics or tasks can be done in various locations in the house, but remember to wash your hands when changing rooms or coming in from outside.

GET OUTSIDE

We cannot be near each other but we can be outside. Fresh air, nature, or even just walking/running/biking outside can be huge for those with ADHD under any circumstances. Exposure to sunlight can also increase focus, elevate moods, and help keep sleep/wake cycles in place.

MOVEMENT

Movement is especially important for helping to maintain focus and reduce anxiety. Starting your day with exercise is a way to set yourself up for success for the rest of the day. If you cannot go out easily, find an exercise program on television or online.

LOOSEN, BUT STILL KEEP LIMITS ON TECH AND SCREENS

This may be a time to loosen limits on screen time, but you want to be careful that neither you nor your child get swallowed up in screen time.

Given the often negative nature of the news, exposure to it should likely be limited for everyone, but especially for children.

IDENTIFY AND DEAL WITH FEELINGS

The world is uncertain right now. Children with ADHD can see things in black and white. Be careful about making unrealistic promises (i.e. this will only last a few more days). Be clear that you do not know how long this will last but that you feel confident that it will eventually end. If you feel stressed, identify that feeling out loud and then model a way to cope with anxiety.

Breathing is free and is known to reduce anxiety. Breathe in for a count of 5, then exhale for the same.

The impulsivity of ADHD can present as an increased intensity of emotional reactions. Provide strategies for you and your child to identify those feelings when they start to come on, and to separate yourselves if needed to prevent emotional outbursts or to cool down after them.

SOCIAL SKILLS

Children with ADHD frequently have to work on social skills. As they will no longer be able to do this face-to-face, see if they can FaceTime or play a game remotely online with peers. It is best if this is done with someone in a face-to-face component. Meal times are also an excellent time to address social skills with the family.

FRUSTRATION TOLERANCE

Frustration tolerance can be low in those with ADHD. Finding ways to relieve frustration like identifying the feeling and taking a break can be helpful. Allowing everyone in the family to understand and forgive themselves for perhaps not getting as much done as they had hoped can provide added emotional support. Reflecting that you are not alone in this can also help.

TAKING TIME FOR YOUR PARTNER

It is likely that the entire family has not spent so much consolidated time together before this isolation experience. Having children with ADHD can be all consuming. It is okay to schedule some alone time with a spouse, and to ask other family members to respect that need (or to put on a movie for them during this time). For safety reasons, for younger children, this might need to be after they fall asleep.

SENSORY ISSUES AND BREAKS

Breaks don't always have to be gross motor breaks. Using or even making your own fidgets can help.

While working, tools like noise reduction headphones can help quiet the noise from everyone else that is working at home.

MEDICATIONS

If possible, use a 90-day mail order prescription plan. Since getting to and from the pharmacy might be hard, a weekly pill box can help to plan a week ahead when you start to run low on medications and you can make arrangements to get them before you run out. It may take providers longer to get you new prescriptions if they cannot prescribe on line.

EVERY DAY EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

You can use this time to focus on executive functioning in activities of daily living. Set up and scaffold the steps of cleaning a bathroom, doing dishes, or doing laundry. Making, serving, and eating a meal together is something that might often have been difficult in the past with various family members having different schedules. Take advantage of this opportunity to learn life skills and to practice together. A communal meal also enables a time to practice social skills. If you have been together all day and are not sure what can be new to discuss, search a list of 'conversation starters' to get the ball rolling.

Board games can foster fun, community and build patience with turn taking. Consider ideas like scavenger or treasure hunts at home. Make short videos.

LIVING IN A PLACE OF GRATITUDE

Find a time each day for each family member to list three things for which they are grateful.

HELPING OTHERS

Individuals like healthcare providers, sanitation workers, and mail carriers are on the front lines every day. Finding ways to show your appreciation can go a long way to encourage them and also brighten your own mood.

Many people in nursing homes are especially isolated during this time. Sending them notes can help raise their spirits.