Helping Your Child Benefit from Neurotherapy and Cognitive Training

A guide for parents

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Neurotherapy and cognitive training are not “stand-alone” cures for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. Both methods work by activating your child and helping them become more aware of focusing themselves on a task. It's important that you notice these efforts. When your child seems a little more focused, a little more “with it,” let them know you've noticed. The effects build slowly — over months, and sometimes years — and how well they take hold depends a great deal on your attention and praise for the small, subtle changes you see along the way.

Recognize and Praise the Small Changes

- Completing assignments at school
- Doing homework with less hassle and less urging
- Spontaneously doing homework without being asked
- Doing something after being asked only once or twice
- Remembering to do something they'd been asked to do earlier
- Becoming less impulsive
- Talking about feelings instead of just acting on them
- Sitting still for longer periods of time
- Talking with interest about school subjects
- Talking with pride about an accomplishment
- Fidgeting less

General Suggestions for Supporting Your Child

Catch them doing well. Notice your child acting the way you want to see them act, and praise them right in that moment. Keep the praise brief and specific. Let these moments bring you closer emotionally — show plenty of love and affection.

Teach good study habits. A regular time and place to study; hardest subjects first, while your child is fresh; a small reward planned for after studying is done. Don't push through fatigue — a short break for fresh air, movement, or a cold drink can help your child reset.

Say what you want, not what's wrong. Try “I want you to…” rather than “you should” or “you shouldn't.” Avoid threats and yelling. Kids with ADHD are still learning impulse control and how to

foresee the consequences of their actions — that's genuinely hard, and it calls for more patience than usual.

Practice active listening. Get your child talking about how they feel about school and home, and about any effort they're making. Dr. Thomas Gordon's *Parent Effectiveness Training* is an excellent resource for these skills — it will help your child talk with you, and help you understand your child.

Avoid punishment, threats, and put-downs. Your child is learning a brand-new voluntary skill. Early attempts will be halting and the results small. They will benefit in proportion to how much encouragement they get for those first small changes.

Help them notice their own focus. Encourage your child to tune into the moments when they feel alert, relaxed, and focused, and to notice how that differs from moments when they don't.

Watch for the medication effect. Your role is to help your child tell the difference between more-attentive and less-attentive moments, and to notice when they're getting better at regulating this themselves. If your child takes Ritalin or another ADHD medication, school performance may already be improving because of it — so the changes you notice at home may show up mainly in the evenings and on weekends, when they aren't medicated.

Protect sleep. Sleep matters a great deal for kids with ADHD. Help your child build a steady bedtime routine, and talk with them about why getting enough sleep matters.

Support organization. Children with ADHD often struggle with organization and follow-through. Help them plan study time and keep track of longer-term assignments.