

from the editors of

ADDITUDE

The ADHD Guide to Making & Keeping Friends

**Practical advice and strategies to help
children make friends, improve
social skills, and defeat bullies.**



ADDITUDE SPECIAL REPORT

A trusted source of advice and information for families touched by attention-deficit disorder—
and a voice of inspiration to help people with ADHD find success at home, at school, and on the job.

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Introduction

The ADHD Guide to Making & Keeping Friends

Your son storms in. His bedroom door slams shut. He's had another tough day—picked last in gym class, excluded from dodgeball, or laughed at behind his back. Maybe the older kids on the bus were teasing him again, or maybe no one said a word to him at all. Regardless, it hurts you almost as much as it hurts him—which is a lot.

The social challenges our kids face are heartbreaking—in no small part because we know they are keeping so much hidden, bottled up inside, because they're embarrassed or ashamed or tired of feeling vulnerable. We wish we could do more to prevent or stop the mean remarks, the rolled eyes, and the bullies, but when they are at school, our kids are on their own and they have got to learn how to handle these situations independently. We know this is true, but that doesn't make it any less agonizing to see them hurt.

The fact of the matter is that children with ADHD are routinely alienated and targeted due to their behavioral challenges. Some struggle to decipher social cues. Others act much younger than their peers; the social maturity of kids with ADHD can lag by two years or more. And others suffer because of their impulsivity—blurting out hurtful comments or interrupting rudely without intending to. Whatever the reason, kids with ADHD are at greater risk for bullying and for loneliness.

How can you help your child form lasting friendships with kids who will appreciate his greatest attributes and support him when he needs it most? This eBook contains strategies for building up your child's social skills, reining in problem behaviors, teaching him how to act like a good friend, and responding to bullies. None of these is a quick fix, but together they will set your child on a path to positive relationships that last a lifetime.

CHAPTER 1

Why Making Friends Is So Difficult

Chapter 1: Why Making Friends Is So Difficult

Is there anything more painful than watching your children try to make friends, and fail? Our natural instinct is to protect and help them, but we're quickly reminded that we can't make friends for them.

Perhaps your child is like seven-year-old Sophie, who hangs back by herself at the edge of the playground all afternoon. On the way home, when you ask her why she didn't play, she says, "I wanted to join the other girls, but I didn't know how." Or maybe your son comes home from school in tears because a classmate whom he thought was a good friend handed out birthday party invitations—to everyone else. Or perhaps your teenager spends his entire weekend playing computer games in his room, talking to no one. As kids get older, social interactions become more complicated.

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Finding likeminded kids and forming friendships with them requires hundreds of skills not typically associated with ADHD. Staying focused on a conversation, listening without interrupting, sharing toys without a fuss, empathizing with how others are feeling—these just don't come naturally to our kids.

Seeing your child endure such painful rejections is enough to bring you to tears. So why not just forgo friendships altogether? You know from experience that kids can be mean. It's probably best to just shield your child from that pain, right?

Wrong. While it's tempting to withdraw from social circles—especially if you were the victim of bullies as a child—experts can't overstate the importance of friendships. Studies show that children who develop strong social skills—learning to share and cooperate as early as kindergarten—are more likely to obtain a higher education and hold full-time jobs as young adults. And then there's the obvious stuff: Friendships mean your child has someone to play with at recess, someone to share missed assignments with, someone to listen to when life gets hard and your child feels anxious or hurt. For children with ADHD, friends can also help teach better social skills. "Friendships are not a luxury," says Richard Lavoie, a special-education consultant in Barnstable, Massachusetts. "They're a necessity."

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The good news is that you *can* help. But first you must understand why making friends is hard for a child diagnosed with ADHD. Only then can you begin to help your child overcome his or her particular area of struggle. Here are some common challenges, exposed.

Poor Impulse Control

The woman in front of you in the express lane just unloaded a whole grocery cart, ran off to grab a forgotten item, and you have to pick up the kids in 10 minutes. You want to explode, but you think about the consequences of your actions, use your self-control to rein in that emotion, and stop yourself from giving her a piece of your mind.

It's not that simple for our kids. Scientists believe that lower levels of dopamine, a neurotransmitter in the brain, lead kids with ADHD to respond immediately and reflexively to their environments. Without thinking, they let loose a physical outburst, an idea, or an insult. They find it hard to control their impulses.

The prefrontal cortex is the region of the brain responsible for attention, concentration, and working memory. When it works well, children focus and give sustained attention to one task. “However, when this region is not sufficiently activated, your child will be unable to focus on your instructions, understand what he or she is reading, or think before acting,” says Vincent J. Monastra, Ph.D.¹

“Interrupting, blurting out, grabbing things, throwing things—these kids don’t always mean to be bad; it’s part of their neurobiology,” says Cindy Goldrich, a board-certified ADHD coach. “Their brain often operates by the motto, ‘Ready, *fire*...aim.’”²

In the ADHD brain, with its impaired prefrontal cortex, impulsivity usually overpowers self-control. This is why our kids act, talk, and blurt without thinking. And they suffer socially as a result.

Hitting

Even if your child is caring and sensitive 95% of the time, that small fraction of the day when he is unruly or aggressive can easily overshadow the good. When he is impatient in the lunch line and shoves the child in front of him, teachers take notice and impose consequences. When she hauls off

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and hits the girl behind her who got marker on her favorite sneakers, her classmate remembers that—not all the times they colored happily together.

Kids with ADHD seem to ignore warnings like, “Keep your hands to yourself.” In reality, they are dealing with a brain that naturally overrides these rules and obscures future consequences, making it incredibly hard to keep a lid on “bad” behavior. Experts argue that aggressive behavior is linked to intense impulsivity. Not being able to control impulses, combined with the stress and frustration of wrestling ADHD symptoms every day, leads some children to lash out physically and verbally.

Aggression against classmates, teachers, or parents is often an example of displaced emotions. A child feels frustration over a problem he can’t effectively talk about. Perhaps an undiagnosed learning disability makes reading the cafeteria menu a challenge. Or maybe being picked last for a team in gym class has made her feel protective of her special sneakers.

“We’re not talking to the child about hitting. We’re not talking to the child about screaming or swearing,” says Ross Greene, Ph.D. “These are the things the child does in response to unsolved problems that need to be fixed. The child is having a difficulty, does not have the skills to deal with it, and has a severe response.” Trouble reading or feeling socially excluded may create the feelings of frustration that lead to physical outbursts.

“Here’s what’s happening,” says Kirk Martin, founder of Celebrate Calm. “Kids think, ‘I’m anxious, I’m overwhelmed, I’m frustrated, I’m upset so I’m going to hit, kick, yell, bite, scream, or throw things.’ They need a tool, and an understanding of how to calm down.”

Without behavioral training, and strategies to control anger in the moment, physical aggression is a natural manifestation of ADHD frustrations.

Interrupting

Teachers and classmates cringe at the student who calls out an answer without raising his hand, or jumps in when someone else is talking. The toughest part is that your child might not realize he is doing it, or that his behavior is upsetting other people.

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Who Interrupt
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Many children with ADHD don't notice when impulsivity is overriding the rules of the classroom. In addition, a lack of focus can mean that they drift off during a conversation, and jump back in immediately when their attention snaps back, regardless of who is talking. Some children are afraid they will lose the thought before they have a chance to say it, so they barrel into the conversation without waiting for an appropriate time.

"It becomes a situation of, 'Speak now or forever hold your peace,'" says Ari Tuckman, Ph.D. the author of *More Attention, Less Deficit*, and *Understand Your Brain, Get More Done*. "The person with ADHD gets an idea based on what the other person is saying and has difficulty holding that idea in the back of their mind while the other person is talking and comes to a natural stopping point. So the person with ADHD gets excited, and puts it out there because if they don't say it right away, they might not remember it later, which has social repercussions."

What's more, when other kids frown or give other non-verbal signs of disapproval, kids with ADHD have trouble understanding and interpreting these signals.

"Some children, adolescents, and adults with ADHD can't read others' social cues, and don't perceive how their body language and tone of voice are read by others," says Larry Silver, M.D., author of *The Misunderstood Child*. They may be shunned as a result.

Saying Rude Things

Admonishing a child for "rude behavior" assumes that child can control what comes out of his mouth. As we parents know, that's not always the case.

"Parents of kids with ADHD know that social problem-solving skills and disinhibited behavior go along with the disorder," says Mary Fowler, author of *Maybe You Know My Child* and *Maybe You Know My Teen*. "These kids generally act first and think later, if at all. While our kids may know how to act in a civilized, courteous, couth manner, they're not always able to do what they know. That's a classic executive function and impulse-control problem."

People who don't understand the condition can misinterpret impulsive blurting as intentional meanness. They don't know about the *speak now, think later* characteristic of ADHD that can cause disinhibited behavior. This

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happens even among children who know how to act courteously; they understand but aren't able to put what they know into action in that moment.

“Rude” comments can slip out before a child takes a moment to consider whether her words are inappropriate. In some cases, mean comments are a reaction to frustration or rejection. If our sons and daughters feel repeatedly rejected by their peers or chastised by a teacher, they might respond negatively by hurting others before they can be hurt.

“The minute my daughter feels threatened, she lashes out,” says Mary Fowler. “That’s a protective method, misguided for sure, but nonetheless an attempt at self-preservation—‘rude’ or ‘mean’ to some, but in reality, a neural short circuit.”

In this way, lashing out can be a protective mechanism of self-preservation. When kids feel they can’t change what is making people mad at them, a downward spiral of violence may follow. We need to give our kids the verbal tools to interject and stand up for themselves while feeling safe and supported.

Inability to Read Social Cues

In the middle of an argument with your spouse or colleague, you may cross your arms, frown, and speak in a stern or terse tone of voice. These changes in your body language signal displeasure or frustration. For children with ADHD, gestures and facial clues are lost in translation. Our kids have an impaired ability to receive and process visual and auditory social cues. That can be a major obstacle when kids are trying to make and keep friends.

“Communicating with friends involves more than words,” says Dr. Silver. “We communicate with facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, posture, and tone of voice. These make up nonverbal communication. Current studies suggest that nonverbal communication is a fully developed language, different from verbal communication (words) and processed in different areas of the brain than visual or auditory communication. Nonverbal communication is not taught. It is learned through observation, interactions, and feedback from others.”

Tone of voice and body language are the first clues to a person’s true feelings. Kids with ADHD may not notice these clues in others, or may be

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<http://additu.de/l9>

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unaware of how their own nonverbal cues make other people feel. Their nonverbal communication problems can be auditory or visual.

Kids who struggle with auditory communication may use the wrong tone of voice, rate of speech, volume, or word emphasis. For example, they may speak too loudly or use a tone that doesn't seem to go along with the emotion they want to convey.

Kids who struggle with visual communication may not be able to recognize the emotion that connects to a facial expression or posture; they may also violate others' personal space. This child may not understand an annoyed face, may stand too close while talking, or may hug a stranger. Alternatively, her body language might convey hostility when she wants to convey friendliness.

Knowing When to Stop

On the playground, Jack starts talking about Minecraft to a playmate, and gets so excited he goes on and on. The little boy he's talking to gets bored and begins to look around or try to change the subject. Then, he walks away without saying anything. Jack is devastated that his friend left him mid-sentence. The little boy was giving signals that he was losing interest, but Jack didn't notice, so he didn't stop.

The ADHD brain “focuses on the connections and relationships between things more than on specific bits of information,” says Lynn Weiss, Ph.D., author of *Embracing ADD: A Healing Perspective*. So during conversations, kids “are likely to drift away from a single thought into a complex web of feelings and ideas.” That means, they can ramble on without paying attention to the other person in the conversation.

In this example, Jack may be speaking too fast for his playmate to squeeze in a word edgewise, and tell Jack that he doesn't want to talk anymore. Or Jack does not understand that when his playmate looks around, it is a sign he is losing interest in the conversation.

Invading Personal Space

Isabella may run up to everyone she knows, yell hello, and give them a long hug. Or Charlie may stand so close to a classmate while telling a story that their heads are nearly touching. When the other child pushes away, your child may feel hurt and rejected. Often because they don't understand how

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to decipher gestures and tone, kids with ADHD may not understand how actions like standing too close, speaking too loud, or talking too much make others uncomfortable. The concept of a “personal bubble” is foreign to them.

“Some kids with ADHD are clumsy and unaware of normal spatial boundaries compared with non-ADHD kids,” says Robert Melillo, Ph.D., creator of the Brain Balance program. “They find nonverbal and social communication hard, and may act in ways at school that attract the attention of bullies.”

In this example, Isabella and Charlie are violating people’s space in a way that makes others feel uncomfortable. They don’t grasp the “social distances” that people use when interacting with various levels of acquaintances and friends. They don’t receive the signals that help them understand that physical contact makes many people feel uncomfortable.

Reacting Appropriately

Tom gets tagged out during a baseball game, and loses it emotionally. Jeremy falls down during the potato sack race, and is tearful for the rest of the day. Teammates who encountered the same setbacks—they are the rules of the game, after all—are annoyed that Tom and Jeremy can’t keep their emotions under control.

“Challenges with emotions start in the brain itself,” says Thomas E. Brown, Ph.D., author of *Smart but Stuck: Emotions in Teens and Adults with ADHD*. “Sometimes the working memory impairments of ADHD allow a momentary emotion to become too strong, flooding the brain with one intense emotion. At other times, the person with ADHD seems insensitive or unaware of the emotions of others. Brain connectivity networks carrying information related to emotion seem to be somewhat more limited in individuals with ADHD.”

That means our kids can fly off the handle over what seems like a minor upset, and have a major meltdown or tantrum from something other kids take in stride. This is what Dr. Brown calls “flooding—a momentary emotion that can gobble up all of the space in an ADHDer’s head like a computer virus can gobble up all of the space in a hard drive.”

“Some children who have ADHD struggle when it comes to social interactions,” says Cindy Goldrich. “They may have a difficult time taking turns, respecting personal boundaries, and controlling their emotional reactions.

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**17 Rules for Controlling
ADHD Emotions**
<http://additu.de/195>

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Remember, ADHD is a neurologically based problem of *emotional regulation*.³ With a little help, kids can learn how to respond appropriately to social situations—which will help them make friends, and navigate life.

Lack of Empathy

We know that our kids' hearts are enormous, but poor impulse control and short attention spans can make them seem aloof or self-centered. At times, they don't respond lovingly because their focus fails them. Some also argue that kids accustomed to receiving instructions or admonishments don't learn appropriate responses of gratitude. They hear, "This is your last warning," more often than they hear, "Thank you for doing that." So, when other people do nice things for that child, a response of gratitude may not flow naturally. A lack of thanks may disappoint or offend a friend who's done something nice for your child, making him or her less likely to do so again.

In addition, kids with low self-esteem and a poor sense of self-worth are less likely to show compassion for others. Parents can help build up self-esteem by giving regular praise for acts of kindness—no matter how small.

"To feel good about themselves, children need two things: the sense that they're successful, and unconditional love from their parents," says Larry Silver, M.D. "If either ingredient is missing, a child will have a hard time."

When kids feel good about themselves, they are more likely to want to make others feel good, and imitate the same mood-boosting techniques that worked for them.

Poor Cooperation and Group-Dynamic Skills

Kids with ADHD may veer off-topic easily, miss deadlines, or reject advice from others. In classroom group work, or the craft circle at Girl Scouts, these behaviors frustrate and anger other kids.

Symptoms of inattention make it difficult for your child to focus on different group members simultaneously. "At times it can be very overwhelming for both children and adults with ADHD to participate in a group situation," says Michele Novotni, Ph.D., author of *What Does Everybody Else*

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[*Loving Without Spoiling*](#)
by Nancy Samalin
(McGraw-Hill)

EXPERT WEBINAR REPLAY

Why Don't I Have a Best Friend?

<http://additu.de/best-friend>

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Know That I Don't? “The number of distractions increases as the number of people increases, and many people with ADHD have difficulty filtering out distractions even in a one-on-one setting. Also, transitions in conversation can move at a fast pace in a group, and many with ADHD find it hard to keep track of conversations. Another difficulty can be the need to wait longer for a turn to speak.”

Working cooperatively toward a common goal does not come naturally to many kids with ADHD, and weak understanding of social conventions exacerbates this. In addition, too many kids with ADHD are routinely excluded from groups and social circles. So rather than risk more rejection, these kids learn to do things on their own, and they don't learn group dynamics.

“All children need to feel accepted by their peer group,” says Larry Silver, M.D. “If the years of having ADHD (and possibly a learning disability) have resulted in poor social skills and limited success with friends, early adolescence may be painful.”

Delayed Social Maturity

“How old are you?” This otherwise innocuous question, when asked of a child with ADHD, often sounds more like a complaint: “Why can't you act your age?” Many kids with ADHD lag behind their peers, in terms of social skills, by two to three years. Why? ADHD is a developmental condition that delays brain maturation. Kids might miss social cues, become overly focused on small details of a social interaction, or have trouble transitioning between activities, which can hurt their relationships with peers.

“They're driven by whatever is on their radar screen in the moment,” says Sharon K. Weiss, M.Ed., author of *From Chaos to Calm*. “Behaviorally, this translates to, ‘I'm having fun, so you must be having fun.’ ‘I think this is funny. You'll think this is funny.’ ‘I think it's entertaining. You'll think it's entertaining.’ The impulsivity, accompanied by social immaturity, means they say whatever comes to mind. It's an attitude that results in the same behavioral infractions over and over again.”

Then, when kids feel left out and want attention, they may act outrageously, try to be funny, or say negative things, thinking it will gain them attention and respect. Unfortunately, they are usually ostracized by peers and singled out by teachers for this, which further damages their self-esteem.

“Friendships with younger kids allow your child to take on a leadership role.”

—CAROL BRADY, PH.D.

CHAPTER 2

How to Help Kids with ADHD Make Friends

Chapter 2: How to Help Kids with ADHD Make Friends

If your child were having trouble in school, you would step in and help her study, or arrange for after-school tutoring. If your child were sick, you would take her to see the doctor. If your child were hungry, you'd make sure he had a snack. Taking responsibility for our kids' needs is what we parents do.

"Your child needs friends as much as he needs food and exercise," says Fred Frankel, Ph.D., author of *Friends Forever*. "Success in life is influenced by a combination of academic achievement and skill in being friendly toward others. You can help your child find friends."⁴

Making friends is like any other skill—sometimes a little boost from Mom and Dad makes a world of difference. When other children hurt our kids, it's easy to be hurt, shocked, and shunned by the rejection. But the key to overcoming the friendship hurdles that ADHD creates is recognizing the skill your child lacks, and devising a solution to address the specific deficiency.

"The ADHD child frequently exhibits characteristics that seem to get in the way of friendships," says Cathi Cohen, LCSW, the author of *Raise Your Child's Social IQ: Stepping Stones to People Skills for Kids*. "These are characteristics like having trouble reading social signals and understanding body language or facial expressions of other kids. At the same time, kids must know how to convey their own feelings appropriately, being able to say what they mean and have other children understand them the way that they want to be understood."

Teaching Social Thinking

Teaching a child with ADHD to interact socially with others is a complex two-part process. First, he must learn social thinking. Then he must use social thinking to develop new social skills.

FREE DOWNLOAD

14 Ways to Help Your Child with ADHD Make Friends
<http://additu.de/14-friends>

RESOURCE

Socially Curious and Curiously Social
by Michelle Garcia Winner,
M.A.
(North River Press)

ADDITUDE | SPECIAL REPORT
adhreports.com

CHAPTER 2 How to Help Kids With ADHD Make Friends

“Social thinking is the ability to consider your own and others’ thoughts, emotions, beliefs, intentions, and knowledge. This helps you interpret and respond to the information in your mind and possibly through your behavioral interactions,” says Michelle Garcia Winner, M.A., author of *Socially Curious and Curiously Social*. “Social skills are the ability to use social thinking to adapt your behavior effectively based on the situation and what you know about the people in the situation, so they can react and respond to you in a manner you had hoped.”

When most people enter a social interaction, they do so with a goal in mind. They might want to come across as funny, smart, or a tough negotiator. They adapt their behavior based on others’ verbal and physical reactions as they try to achieve the end goal. Likewise, a child with ADHD might crack a joke in class because he wants his classmates to think he is funny and cool. What he might not understand is the damage he can do if his humor is used at the wrong time or in the wrong place. Social skills cannot be memorized or drilled on flash cards—they change based on context.

A child with ADHD might think, “You shouldn’t feel that way because I didn’t want you to feel that way, I didn’t intend to make you feel that way.” She might not understand that her intentions don’t dictate others’ reactions. It’s not enough to tell her to pay attention to other kids’ reactions; you must teach her what the abstract concepts of negotiation, respect, cooperation, politeness, and attention mean—and how to interpret social clues effectively.

In the social thinking model, Michelle Garcia Winner, M.A., teaches the difference between a “thinking about you” person and a “just me” person. A “thinking about you” person considers what is going on around her, and what she needs to do to adapt to others. A “just me” person only considers her own needs. Kids need to learn to improve:

- Situational Attention: “Where am I?”
- Social Attention: “What do I know about the people in this situation?”
- Social Self-Awareness: “What am I expected to do when I compare myself to others?”

This may mean watching the teacher’s eyes to see whom she is speaking to, and to avoid interrupting in class. It can mean explaining that looking someone in the eyes signals paying attention, while facing out or looking around

RESOURCE
SocialThinking.com

CHAPTER 2 How to Help Kids With ADHD Make Friends

signals disinterest. Asking these three questions will help tremendously to improve your child's social problem-solving skills—her ability to process and respond as needed in the moment. How your child behaves affects how she makes other people feel, which, in turn, affects how those people feel about her. This affects impacts her self-esteem and sense of self-worth.

Using Role Play to Teach Social Thinking

Role playing allows kids to test out different ways of acting in a safe, consequence-free environment, and to learn how their own actions can make others feel. It can help almost any verbal child work through social troubles with a caring, patient adult.

When a social challenge occurs, practice role playing by talking through what happened. Define the problem. Then acknowledge how the situation made your child feel bad. Discuss the possible ways to respond to that particular social situation, like saying “Please stop it.” And when your child is armed with several socially appropriate ways to respond, let him play the role of both sides in the disagreement. Switch sides, and switch the script to explore different ways the scenario could play out.

You might videotape the practice session to review with your child and reinforce the things she did well. Then, when she comes home and says she used one of the strategies, celebrate that small success. Over time, practicing—and being prepared—makes a big difference.

Poor Impulse Control

In the previous chapter, we learned why our kids run into social trouble. Here, we share strategies for teaching them the skills they need to overcome their biggest social challenges.

Impulsive behavior is caused by a difference in the ADHD brain that makes it difficult to exercise self-control. Luckily, behavioral training and role playing can help build this social muscle. Our kids can learn to rein in hitting, interrupting, and rude outbursts.

Larry Silver, M.D., suggests explaining impulsivity to kids this way: “Our brains have lots of thoughts and ideas running around in them. Some

ADDITUDE RESOURCE

How to Use Role Playing to Build Social Skills

<http://additu.de/19w>

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thoughts are helpful; some aren't. It is important to think about all of them and to pick the right ones to act on. To do this, our brain has a part I call the pause button. When you press it, you tell your brain to wait until you have considered all of the ideas floating around in your head. If your pause button is not working well, you act on your first thoughts. Only later do you realize what you have done or said, and wish that you had thought more about it."

Practicing mindful meditation and yoga helps many children (and adults) learn to slow down and take a deep breath before responding in an emotionally charged moment. Some experts also recommend playing "The Freeze Game," "Red Light, Green Light," or other games that reward self-control. For older kids, create an environment at home where self-control is encouraged and consistently rewarded. If your child can wait patiently (and perhaps even help!) while you shop for groceries, he can earn extra screen time when you get home, for example.

If your child's impulsive behavior—interrupting or constantly jumping from one thing to the next—gets in the way of his making friends, ADHD medication can help. Work with your child's doctor to find the right dosage, keeping in mind that the hormonal changes during puberty may change how children metabolize medication.

What follows are parenting and discipline ideas geared to the most common impulse-control challenges we see in children with ADHD.

Hitting

At recess, Liam calls your child a doodle head. His feelings are hurt and he shoves Liam. It's not a premeditated act of violence; it's an impulsive reaction to an intense emotion. ADHD symptoms are clearly at play here, but still our kids seem to spend their lives in time-out or in trouble. Here is how to help your child gain control over his emotions.

1. Be empathetic.

If your child tells you she hit Emma at school, your first reaction is probably not a calm one. But by speaking even-handedly and firmly, and showing that you understand your child's feelings, you can teach her new ways of coping. Say things like, "It sounds like you were upset because Emma didn't pick you for her team" or "I know it makes you

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angry when Emma teases you, but hitting damages friendships.” Listen to your child’s reaction, and try to give support. Ask her what she thinks she can do differently next time Emma isn’t nice.

2. Solve the root problem that is sparking the outburst.

Use Dr. Ross Greene’s [Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems](#) to determine the underlying cause of your child’s aggression. Work together with your child and teacher to strengthen the skill(s) your child is lacking; this is the best preventative strategy, though not a quick fix.

3. Show how to take responsibility for your emotions.

If you snap at your children or spouse when they are behaving badly, apologize. Say, “I shouldn’t have said that. It’s not OK, and I’m sorry.” This can show kids that the smart response to escalating emotions is to take a break and own up to your actions. It also reminds them that apologies are powerful things, if given sincerely.

4. Walk away.

If your child is prone to aggressive or violent outbursts, have a policy of removing yourself and others from the situation. If your child is younger, put her in a safe, quiet room where she has no access to playmates or rewards. Teach other family members to get up and leave the room after an outburst. It can help break a pattern of lashing out for negative attention, and translate to better playground behavior.

5. Get moving.

Anticipate explosive situations that may incite an impulsive reaction from your child, and offer another outlet for those emotions. At school, create a plan with teachers and aides to give your child a special job such as “monitor” or “coach” during situations that lack structure. This can help her stay focused and maintain self-control. At home, when you see your child ready to blow, use movement to defuse the situation. Ask your child to join you in coloring, or, if you’re in public, drop down and do five push-ups. Encourage your child to join in, and redirect the energy that might have been used to throw punch or to shove.

“You’re giving him a physical activity to do when he’s frustrated rather

TEACHER STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS HITTING

Recommended reading for educators

[Dealing with Threats or Violent Behaviors From Students with IEPs](#)

[Hands Are Not for Hitting](#)

[Managing Aggressive Behavior in Young Children](#)

[How to Teach Frustration Tolerance to Kids](#)

[Intervention Strategies for Aggression: Hitting](#)

[Hitting or Threatening a Teacher](#)

[Addressing Challenging Behavior in Early Childhood: Strategies for Teachers](#)

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watching him hit, bite, or scream,” says Kirk Martin. These activities show kids how to calm down using physical activity without an outburst.

Hitting Q&A

Q: My child responds with aggressiveness or hitting when other kids treat him poorly. He feels insecure. What should I do?

A: Your child is experiencing frustration, and he deals with it by hitting. If you give kids other tools to cope with this feeling, they can think about frustration before happens. If they're more prepared, they're less likely to be impulsive and fall back on aggression. One technique that works is to ask a distracting question like, “Do you have the time?” when they are being called a name. It can catch other kids off guard, and stop the teasing in its tracks.

Sometimes kids say mean things, like “You suck,” when they are playing a game and your child made a mistake. Sometimes it helps to say, “I’m working on it. That was my best kick.” Just acknowledge it and move on; don’t react. Whenever possible, teach kids to walk away.

—Cathi Cohen, LCSW

Q: When my eight-year-old ADHD son gets angry with classmates in an unstructured environment (like a playground), he will immediately push someone. I have offered just walking away or putting his hands in his pockets and taking a deep breath. What other steps can I suggest as an alternative?

A: Unstructured situations can be a challenge for children with ADHD. Your suggestions for alternative behaviors sound excellent. In addition, you may want to help him learn to internalize better control and be better able to go on “automatic pilot” when a difficult situation pops up in such an unstructured setting.

It may be helpful to write down on a chart what he gets angry about each time to see if you can restructure or resolve any of the challenges issues.

You may also want to practice in advance through role play or visualization, so that appropriate responses become more automatic. When you practice something repeatedly, it is more likely to occur

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when the situation pops up. Perhaps you could use cue cards with him before playing to serve as a prompt to help him remember to control his anger.

Work together to find a venting strategy he can use when he comes home, such as hitting tennis balls or punching a punching bag or pillow. Another strategy would be to help structure those unstructured situations as much as possible, or at least minimize the amount of time he spends in those situations for now.

—Michele Novotni, Ph.D.

Interrupting

Our kids may burst in, unable to resist blurting out the answer before the speaker gets to it. Or they cut off another child because their attention has wandered and now, suddenly, it has snapped back and the child has something to say. In either scenario, interrupting is off-putting to adults and kids who don't understand that its root cause is inattention, not rudeness or blatant disregard for others. Nip this behavior in the bud by instituting the following impulse-control exercises at home.

1. Try “No Interrupting” training. Say you need to make a phone call after dinner. Explain to your child that you can't be interrupted while you're talking. Give him an activity to do while you talk, and take breaks every few minutes to walk over to your child and praise him for not interrupting. Add an incentive with a small reward your child can earn after a whole week of not interrupting.

2. Teach your child to count to five in his head before making any comments or responding in a conversation. This five-second margin will reduce inappropriate blurting, and help him become a better listener.

3. Create a non-verbal signal that your child can use when she wants to interrupt. At home, teach her to squeeze Mom's hand when she is itching to break into a conversation between adults. A squeeze back from you can let her know that you know she's there, and that she will be able to respond soon.

4. At school, give kids a picture reminder not to interrupt others in class or group work. “If they're blurting out, ask the teacher to take a

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picture of your child raising her hand and say, ‘Now, this is what I want you to do when you need to tell me something,’” recommends Chris A. Zeigler Dendy, M.S., the author of *Teaching Teens with ADD, ADHD & Executive Function Deficits*. “Tape that picture on her desk so that she has an external visual reminder.” Eventually, the practice will rub off into social interactions.

5. Help your child feed the urge monster. When an irresistible idea comes to mind, teach your child to draw a picture of the idea so he doesn’t forget to share it later. The promise of telling someone later is often enough to discourage breaking in. Also, teach your child how to ease into a dialogue that’s in progress by saying, “I’m sorry to interrupt, but I don’t want to forget this thought.”

6. If your child’s attention wanders frequently, teach her how to re-enter conversations without changing the subject. Practice things your child can say if she forgets what she is talking about with her friends like, “Could you repeat what you just said? I started thinking about what you were saying, and I don’t want to miss anything.” Or, she can try repeating to herself what the other person is saying to keep her mind on the conversation flow.

7. Emphasize the importance of saying “Hi” or “Bye” when greeting friends to avoid barreling into the middle of conversations.

8. Find fidgets that help. “Doing two things at once, it turns out, can help focus the ADHD brain on a primary task,” says Roland Rotz, Ph.D., a nationally known expert in ADHD. In this case, that task is a conversation. Fiddling with a bracelet or bouncing a ball while talking to friends keeps your child alert and paying attention to whomever is speaking, making him less likely to zone out and then interrupt.

ADDITUDE RESOURCE
Stop, Listen, Understand!
<http://additu.de/ot>

Interrupting: Teacher Strategies

Scientists believe that lower levels of [dopamine](#), a neurotransmitter in the brain, leads children with ADHD to respond immediately and reflexively to their environment—whether the stimulus is a question, an idea, or a treat. That’s why children with ADHD often act or talk before thinking, and suffer as a result. They don’t always realize that they are interrupting or that

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their behavior is disturbing to others. Telling these kids that their behavior is wrong doesn't help. Even though they know they're acting out of turn, their *impulsivity overrides their self-control*. Many children with ADHD *can't understand nonverbal reprimands*, like frowning, either. Instead, try these strategies to limit classroom interruptions:

“Even though they know they’re acting out of turn, their impulsivity overrides their self-control.”

1. Use a secret signal.

Decide on a gesture or signal that will convey to the student that he is interrupting and needs to stop. For example, one teacher had success with a “wind it down” hand signal in the shape of a descending spiral staircase.

2. Post a list of rules.

Be sure each student is familiar with the [class rules](#) and can clearly see them from his seat. Try highlighting “No Interrupting” on the list for an added reminder.

3. Have an on-desk reminder.

Tape a note to the child's desk with the letters “N.I.” written on it to stand for “No Interrupting.” None of the other students needs to know that the initials don't mean something like “New Inventions.”

4. Keep a visual count.

Show the student how much he's been interrupting by calling attention to it through visuals. One teacher uses an abacus where she silently slides over a bead every time her ADHD student talks out of turn. No one else knew what she was counting and this repetitive visual cue helped the ADHD student curb his behavior.

Interrupting Q&A

Q: Is it normal for children with ADHD to prefer a small group of friends? My child finds it too difficult to interact in a large group because of the chaos and quick pace of activity.

A: Yes. At times it can be overwhelming for children with ADHD to participate in a group situation. The number of distractions increases as the number of people increases and many people with ADHD have difficulty filtering out distractions even in a one-on-one setting. Also, transitions in conversation can move at a fast pace in a group, and many with ADHD have difficulty keeping track of conversations.

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Here are some suggestions for group situations:

- Work on moving the conversation along by asking questions related to what someone was saying.
- Rather than thinking about what you want to say in a large group, learn to listen, relax, and enjoy all the energy and chaos of a group.
- Practice conversation skills in a very small group first (two or three people) and gradually expand the size of the group.

If kids do like to talk in a large group setting, be careful that they don't dominate the conversation.

—Michele Novotni, Ph.D.

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Understanding Your Child's Behavior
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Saying Rude Things

Our kids' minds go so fast that words begin streaming out of their mouths before they can stop and think about how something may sound or feel to others. This can lead to hurt feelings—especially at home. When kids with ADHD come home from an exhausting day at school, they too often take out their frustrations on siblings and parents. Or they may unintentionally say upsetting words to friends. The following strategies can help avoid conflict on all fronts.

1. Do not to respond with anger or sarcasm.

Parents and children need to wait out the emotional storm. Once it has passed, take time to think about and explain how it made you feel. Use phrases like, “When you said X, it made me feel Y.” Try coloring or taking a walk together while talking. Keeping her body busy will better prepare your child to discuss her emotions.

2. Monitor and review playground behavior.

When your child is playing with friends, stay nearby and step in to resolve any arguments that emerge. After the friend has gone home, talk gently with your child about where she may have gone wrong. Use role-playing exercises to help practice situations that may come up again. She won't stop blurting out rude things right away, but, with practice, she can learn to wait and to use better words.

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3. Remind your child that it's never too late to try again.

When your child realizes she needs a second chance, help her learn to ask for a do-over rather than lash out. “A do-over can fix all sorts of sticky social situations—including those involving close friends and family members,” says Michele Novotni, Ph.D. Minor missteps, like a careless remark or forgetting a birthday, is easily smoothed over by admitting the wrong and re-doing the moment.

Saying Rude Things: Teacher Strategies

In addition to the strategies listed about for stemming interruptions, teachers can do the following to prevent rude comments from slipping out of students' mouths:

1. **Be explicit about good behavior.** Instead of telling a child to “be nice,” tell her to explicitly stop, take a breath, and ask herself whether a comment is kind and constructive before saying it.
2. **Hold students accountable for their actions.** Keep punishments short and appropriate, but let them remind your student that he is responsible for his own behavior.
3. **Discourage a problem behavior by “charging” for each infraction.** This strategy rewards your child for not engaging in an inappropriate behavior:
 - a. Determine, roughly, how many times a week a child blurts out rude comments or interrupts the class. Fill a jar with that number of marbles.
 - b. Tell the student that the marbles are hers to exchange for a reward at the end of the week, but that you will remove one each time she breaks the classroom rules.
 - c. As the behavior begins to diminish, reduce the number of marbles you put in the jar at the beginning of the week.

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Social Success Strategies
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Saying Rude Things Q&A

Q: My daughter blurts out hurtful things to her classmates at school, and to me, when she gets upset. She has only one friend, and she is sad about it. She doesn't get invited to birthday parties or other social events.

A: For many students with ADHD, whatever is on their mind comes out of their mouth. They are frequently worn down by the world, and they feel safe with family—so they take it out on us. That does not make it acceptable. We must parent differently and, as the saying goes, “Don’t sweat the small stuff.” Things may not be ideal, but your child did not ask to have ADHD.

Don’t respond in anger or sarcasm. Wait until the storm has passed and explain how it made you feel. Discuss what can be done to avoid it next time. Keep working with her to get closer to the desired behavior.

—Pam Esser, executive director at Attention Deficit Disorders Association

For many students with ADHD, whatever is on their mind comes out of their mouth. They do not stop to think about how it sounds or feels to others.

Emotional Outbursts

“Children with ADHD are challenged with emotionality,” says Elaine Taylor-Klaus, co-founder of ImpactADHD. “Often they have either a limited tolerance for frustration and that shows up as a short fuse or emotional outbursts, what we like to call meltdowns. Sometimes it shows up as difficulty regulating emotions.” Children will have intense overreactions and inappropriate responses to typical life circumstances.

Penelope forgot to unpack her lunchbox yesterday, so the expectation is that she has to make her own lunch today. Instead of dumping out the old food, and putting in a new sandwich, her first reaction was to scream at Mom. Carrick missed a goal in a soccer scrimmage. He was so upset he punted the ball into the woods, and threw himself on the ground.

Emotional control is a key skill for success in friendships and life. Relationships rely on the ability to manage emotions and communicate feelings effectively. Children with ADHD have two challenge areas—emotionality and impulsivity—that trigger each other. Disappointment, frustration, anger, and sadness are all difficult emotions for children to learn to manage, and when kids respond impulsively, they can do or say things they may

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regret later. It becomes a vicious cycle. Parents can help minimize melt-downs and manage emotional intensity with these strategies from Elaine Taylor-Klaus and Diane Dempster, co-founder of ImpactADHD:

1. Understand without judgment. It's important to make children feel accepted, and to grasp that strong feelings are part of having ADHD.

2. Manage yourself the best you can. Don't take your child's feelings personally. The anger, frustration, or rudeness expressed is about him. Even if he is screaming at you, the problem is managing his intense emotions or frustrations. So keep your focus where it belongs—on stopping the situation from escalating. Say something like, "Do you have another way to say that?" Your calm can make your child stop, apologize, and come back with a calm response. Show self-control, so he can see it and learn to imitate it.

3. Help your child calm down. Recognize what your child is going through, and acknowledge it. Say, "I see that you're angry right now. I see that you're frustrated. I get that this is really hard for you. I imagine you might be really upset by this." It legitimizes their experience, and makes them feel understood.

4. Get curious. When your child is having trouble, pay attention to what is really going on, and what could be causing that strong emotion. Be certain you're not blaming her for simple mistakes like spilling or breaking things. Instead of trying to problem-solve and fix it, be a detective.

5. Practice mapping. Have your child write in a journal whenever he starts yelling or totally loses it. These moments of reflection establish a pattern of causes for his strong feelings. Sometimes he's just really tired or hungry. To help your child learn to manage emotions, give him the tools he needs to understand what's going on when it's happening.

6. Prevent meltdowns whenever possible. Create a plan to anticipate and avoid triggers once you have found them. Put consistent systems in place so that your child can anticipate what's happening and plan for it. Then, plan ahead for transitions. If hunger is a trigger, keep snacks in your child's backpack. If running late causes an explosion, wake her up a half hour earlier.

FREE WEBINAR REPLAY
Calming Intense ADHD Emotions
<http://additu.de/emotions>

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7. Create 24-7 reminders. Sometimes wearing a special bracelet or carrying a stone in her pocket will remind your child to keep emotions in check. Sometimes this is enough to force her to think, “OK, I’ve got this bracelet on, and it’s going to remind me that I’m trying to stay calm. I’m trying not to react, and I’m noticing what my triggers are.” Increased awareness can make a difference.

8. Use a code word that signals to your child that she needs to calm down, or a private signal for your child to use when she gets upset. Sometimes the words “no” and “stop” are enough to push an emotional child over the edge. Using a code word like “bubble gum” can help bring them back to reality without triggering a meltdown.

ADDITUDE SPECIAL REPORT

A Parent’s Guide to Effective ADHD Discipline
<http://additu.de/19x>

Emotional Outbursts Q&A

Q: When I ask my 10-year-old son, who has ADHD, to do something that he doesn’t want to do, he complains and whines. I talk to him calmly, but what else can I do to avoid meltdowns?

A: A display of dramatics is not exclusive to children with ADHD, but the condition can make meltdowns more extreme and more frequent. To reduce the number and severity of his outbursts, try these strategies:

- Breathing techniques to help your son calm down
- Positive self-talk to enable him to develop self-control (“I can handle this and work something out with Mom or Dad.”)
- A diary where he writes down the moments of discontent, along with potential solutions when he has to face them again.

Parents can anticipate situations that make meltdowns more likely. Don’t agree to an activity until you have a plan to avoid trouble spots. Say, “I know you won’t want to leave your friend’s house at the end of the visit, so what would help you leave on a happy note?”

—Carol Brady, Ph.D.

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Missing Social Cues

You watch your child on the playground, and see Jackson roughhousing with his playmate. The boy says, “Stop it,” but Jackson laughs and continues, oblivious to his friend’s irritation. When you ask Jackson about what happened on the playground, he says, “He likes to play a little rough.” The next week at school, Jackson doesn’t understand why that friend is teasing him and calling him a jerk.

Jackson thought he and his friend were having fun, and didn’t pause to notice the verbal and nonverbal cues suggesting otherwise. His friend interpreted his behavior as irritating and mean, so he lashed out by calling him names as retribution. But a child with ADHD may not have any idea that he is failing to listen or interpret social cues, so, to him, a friend’s rebuff feels out of left field.

Here’s the good news: You can help your child learn to read social signals.

1. Identify two or three ways she gets into social trouble and when they happen. “Some children have little awareness of their difficulties and may deny their problems or blame others for them,” says Larry Silver, M.D. “Once the individual begins to accept the problem, the second step is to help the child develop new strategies for interacting with others.” Then, practice these new strategies. For example, if drifting off in conversations is a challenge, practice making eye contact while talking at home.

2. Explain how to look for clues that friends are getting angry or upset. Review playground or classroom interactions that went badly. Then talk about what came before a mean taunt or punch in the arm. If it happens again, ask your child, “Did she press her lips together and squint? Did his voice get higher-pitched? Did she cross her arms? Did he stop responding to your questions?” Explain how kids can reverse a tough moment before it reaches an explosive stage.

3. Use social cue flash cards. Gather pictures of faces making different expressions. Say, “This one is a happy face. What makes it look like a happy face? This one is an angry face. What makes it look angry?” Ask your child to pick out images that show certain emotions, or ask her to draw a face expressing a certain emotion.

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4. Identify what common body language can mean. Cross your arms, move away from your child, scowl, or make angry eyes. Ask your child what these could mean. Explain how emotions related to physical, nonverbal cues.

5. Enlist the help of a best friend. Ask a close playmate to tell your child—in explicit words—when she says or does something offensive, instead of only sending physical signals.

6. If you suspect your child has a severe nonverbal communication problem, **consult with a mental health professional.** Educational experts highly recommend the following programs: [Project ACHIEVE's Stop & Think Social Skills Program](#); [Skillstreaming the Adolescent](#), developed by Arnold Goldstein and Ellen McGinnis; and ["Social Skills Autopsy,"](#) developed by Rick Lavoie.

Social Cues: Strategies for Teachers

"Most kids with ADHD can't read the social nuances of body language and tone of voice," says Penny Williams, the author of *Boy Without Instructions*. "Many ADHD kids hear their friends as though they're a computer-generated voice behind a blank screen. They don't see posture and facial expression, and they hear something like a monotone voice with no inflection. You can't infer the mood of a person from that."

Boost your students' abilities to recognize and understand common social cues with these strategies:

1. Verbalize the expressions you see.

When a student crosses his arms and furrows his brows, pull him aside and say, "You look upset about something. Would you like to tell me what's the matter?" Or, "You are grinning from ear to ear. Tell me what is making you smile."

2. Encourage eye contact.

"Eye contact is a critical social skill," says Michele Novotni, Ph.D. "Studies show that if you don't make and maintain eye contact when talking with people, they will find you less likable." Give your student a cue—verbal or with a note on her desk—that reminds her to focus on

ADDITUDE COMMUNITY
Read Penny Williams's
advice to readers in
ADDConnect
<http://additu.de/connect>

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your face when speaking to you. Stop what you're doing, and show how you want the child to pay attention when you talk.

"It's easy to get distracted," says Noël Janis-Norton, the author of *Calmer, Happier, Easier Parenting*. "We need to look at our child to show that we are listening. It helps to make listening noises, words, and phrases, such as, 'Hmmm,' 'Oh,' 'Really,' 'Goodness.' These responses make it easier for a child to register that we are listening and that we care how they are feeling."

"To get your child's undivided attention, help his focus by having him stop any activities he's involved in and put away anything he's carrying, so that his hands are empty." —PETER JAKSA, PH.D.

3. Create an activity that teaches body language and verbal cues.

Have your students act out the storyline of a novel or play. Then ask the class to explain what the students are communicating using gestures and different voices. Or, while watching a video in class, pause at certain points to ask how characters are feeling based on how they look. Have the class close their eyes. Play part of the video, and ask students to guess what the character is feeling based on inflection, pitch, and tone (see [YouTube as Coach](#) for video ideas).

4. Ask the class about how they behave in different situations.

Have a group brainstorming session. Do you talk to your friends at your locker the same way you do to the cafeteria attendant? What about your parents? What about the principal?

5. Incorporate role play into lesson plans. Pair students with partners who have a strong grasp of social cues. Ask them to mime different situations, and analyze each other's body language and expressions.

Social Cues Q&A

Q: How do I explain that my child needs to change his physical behavior?

A: Try the Hula Hoop group exercise. Put a Hula Hoop around the outside of a child. Then, have another child in the group move closer while she is talking to the child in the Hula hoop. Eventually, have the child move inside the Hula Hoop with the other child.

Each time they get closer, the child should say, "How are you feeling now?" Then, inevitably, the child in the Hula Hoop understands when the other child gets inside the hoop with him or her, that it's

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not appropriate. It's too close. The Hula Hoop functions as a visual space that people really require. Getting too close is a behavior your child might not be aware of that frustrate other kids. Kids need to practice maintaining an arm's distance from a friend.

Another common challenge is physical affection. It's OK to be huggy when you're five, but when you're 10 or 11, boys generally don't like to be hugged. Parents need to go over these rules with children, and figure out when it's OK to be affectionate. There's a time and there's a place. It's OK to be affectionate with your family, but it's not OK to hug friends at school at a certain age. Those are all behaviors that your kids really can learn to move away from, which may be contributing to your child being teased.

— Cathi Cohen, LCSW

Q: Our problem is that our daughter is bossy, but she thinks it's OK because she does it politely. How can I explain this to her?

A: It can help to highlight the child's reaction because kids with ADHD are often not aware of when their behavior makes others uncomfortable. They feel like what they want to do is the best thing to do. They can't imagine that anyone else feels differently.

If you feel like your child will get defensive, use a question. For example, "I just want you to look at your friend's face and we can talk later about what your friend's face is saying." Slowly, you're planting seeds. It's a subtle process of tuning into the other person's facial expressions and body language and tuning into the self and tuning into the other person and into the self. That's how these skills develop.

— Cathi Cohen, LCSW

Q: When my son's friends come over I have to remind him constantly to stop wrestling, pushing, and being so hands-on. I've heard some of his friends say, "Calm down, man," and I've tried to explain to him that he's going to lose some of his friends if he doesn't stop this behavior, but he doesn't see it. He says, "They like it, Mom."

A: In this case, you can set up a rule in advance of a social situation. You can say, "We keep our hands and feet to ourselves in this house."

FREE WEBINAR REPLAY
Raise Your Child's Social IQ
<http://additu.de/19y>

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That's just a rule that we keep." Say, "This is what we do. It's not OK to be rough with others." You know that your child, once he gets into a tussle, can't calm down like a typical child. ADHD kids get very revved up and they don't have the ability to settle back down again. They can then get out of control and it leads to more aggression or behavior that is not OK. In that situation, because it's a behavior that you can set as a house rule, you can fall back on the house rule.

—Cathi Cohen, LCSW

Lack of Empathy

Empathy is a concept that can't be explained in words; it must be demonstrated at home. Make your child feel supported and loved, and build up his or her low self-esteem due to failed social interactions with the following strategies.

RECOMMENDED READING
More on Teaching Empathy
Everyday
<http://additu.de/mh>

1. Say thank you often. "It goes without saying that children learn from what they see and experience at home," says Carol Brady, Ph.D. "If you'd like to raise a caring, helpful child, be sure to express gratitude for jobs well done by every member of the family."

Say things like, "Thanks for setting the table" or "You were so well-behaved while I was on the phone today." Be sure to thank children who don't have ADHD as well, to make sure everyone in the family feels recognized and appreciated.

2. Demonstrate body language that shows you are paying attention to your child. Remind him to look you in the eye while you're talking, and to nod sometimes. When you are practicing social scenarios, call attention to what you're doing and ask your child to try it, too. Mirroring attention and body language to friends helps him feel valued and understood.

3. Help your child learn from her mistakes by changing the way you respond to problem behavior. Instead of saying, "I told you to stop, and look what happened when you didn't," try, "What do you imagine caused this situation?"

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4. Show how to help others. Actions speak louder than words. Bring your child along when you donate clothes to Goodwill, or help a relative with home repairs. Soon your child will learn to help another child who has dropped her books in the hallway instead of zooming by.

5. Notice when your child is compassionate. When you see your child responding to other people's needs, call it out, and tell him what a good job he did. For example, "It was so nice when you gave that older woman your seat on the subway. I'm sure she was really tired." Or, "When you pet that kitten so gently, she purred really loudly." Edward M. Hallowell, M.D., author of *Driven to Distraction*, reminds parents, "Giving your ADHD child words of praise is like offering him a ticket out of the fear and self-doubt that plague him." Praise is especially important for kids with ADHD because they often receive so little of it.

"To help my child learn how behavior impacts others, I use empathy. I say, 'Remember how you felt when...'"

—DEE, MAINE

Lack of Empathy Q&A

Q: "Whenever my nine-year-old sees anyone else get praise, he winds up feeling bad about himself or he puts the person down. How can I help him improve his attitude?"

A: Sounds like a good time to have a discussion about the Golden Rule. Your son must learn that, to make and keep friends, he has to be a friend. That means looking for the good in others and giving compliments. Competition drives us to do our best, as long as it's tempered with compassion. Does your son play a sport? Ask his coach to reinforce your efforts on the home front with a pep talk about being a team player.

—Sandy Maynard, M.S., ADHD Coach

Poor Group Dynamics

Some kids with ADHD retreat into their own worlds. Repeated past failures cause them to give up on trying to make new friends. So, they go it alone. "In their heart of hearts, these kids would prefer to be interacting with others," says Tom Bauer, director of Camp Buckskin. "But they view themselves as less worthy, and they lack the skills to initiate those interactions."

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Use these strategies to help your child break into social gatherings in an acceptable way.

1. Explain how to make a new acquaintance and join others who are playing. Advise your child to stand near two kids who are playing a game she would like to join. She should look at them and say nothing, just listen. If the two children start looking at her or invite her to join them, she can graciously accept. If they don't look at her, they want to be alone. She should just walk away.

2. Role play the give-and-take of a conversation. Melissa Orlov, author of *The Couple's Guide to Thriving with ADHD*, recommends the following exercise to practice social skills at home: Start up a conversation, and after your child finishes a thought, encourage her to ask you, "What do you think?" Prompt her to listen carefully to your responses, so she knows where to pick up the conversation when you finish talking. This can be difficult for people with ADHD, who don't always focus on the other person's words. Be certain to reverse roles, inviting her to share her thoughts as you listen closely to her responses. This will help her understand that a conversation is a give-and-take process.

3. Identify hot spots and brainstorm strategies. If Sophie gets excited during group work and talks too loud—giving classmates the impression that she's angry—encourage Sophie to pause and take a deep breath before saying anything else. When classmates see Sophie working hard to control herself, they will come to realize that she didn't intend to be rude and they will see her in a different light.

4. Find organized activities in your neighborhood. Consider these three main categories of activities: classes (dance, ballet, karate), groups (scouts, camps), and team sports. Fred Frankel, Ph.D., goes by this guideline to avoid overload, "Never sign up your child for more than two activities at a time, to leave time for one-on-one play dates."

5. Encourage same-sex friendships. Single gender activities can enhance self-esteem more effectively than can co-ed activities, says Fred Frankel, Ph.D. He notes that such activities prepare kids for recess because, "Children generally segregate themselves by gender in the schoolyard."

"I tell my child to stop for two minutes and take deep breaths with me. This break allows him to restart the situation. This usually calms him down and gets him to take a different approach."

—HELEN, ARIZONA

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6. Teach rules of social etiquette in group activities. No child will make a good impression or gain friends if he doesn't follow these basic guidelines. *Don't be disruptive to the group*—that means avoiding making faces or silly sounds during instructions. *Be quiet and listen to instructors.* Don't interrupt during instruction periods when everyone needs to be paying attention. *Avoid disrupting other children's activity.* That means staying out of another child's area on the field, or grabbing a craft material another child is using. *Don't say mean things.* Remind your child that if he doesn't have anything nice to say, he should say nothing.

7. Intervene in the moment. If your child breaks one of these rules, pull him aside immediately and remind him of the rule. Ask him to promise to obey it. If your child follows the rules, be sure to praise him.

8. Choose coaches or instructors wisely. Not all coaches know about ADHD, or understand how it can affect social situations. Explain your child's behavioral challenges to coaches, and sit in on a class to make sure the instructor lets every child play without too-high expectations, praises all children, and lets all children have fun.

9. When choosing an activity, consider your child's challenges and strengths. "Some children with ADHD have difficulty with losing. Try to assess whether a team sport, in which the child can absorb a loss with teammates, or an individual sport is best," recommends Colleen Russo, community programs coordinator and professional educator-mentor at the Monarch School.

"We urge our son to try to hear, in his mind, what he wants to say aloud. If he's at all unsure about whether he should say it, he shouldn't. We also tell him if it isn't something he would say or do in front of God or his grandmother, it's a definite no." —KAREN, WISCONSIN

Group Dynamics: Strategies for Teachers

Activities designed to teach cooperation and respect give kids an opportunity to practice group norms. Use these strategies⁵ in your classroom to promote group collaboration:

1. When working with students who struggle with group dynamics, start slow with short, structured lessons. Emphasize taking turns and giving each student a chance to speak, and clearly define each group member's role and responsibilities.

2. Take it one group at a time. Break the class into several small units, and give each a discussion topic. Let them spend five minutes brain-

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storming a speech. Then, pick a group to engage with the topic while the rest of the groups look on. After the group is done, talk about what worked well, and any problems the group ran into. Have each group rotate through discussing, and build on, what it has learned about group dynamics from watching others.

3. Create classroom rules. After teaching appropriate group roles, and letting kids practice them, work with the class to create guidelines for future group work. Students can contribute ideas like, “We treat everyone in the group with respect, even if we don’t agree with their idea.” Or, “We explain our opinion to the whole group.”

4. Assign each group member a job, such as note-taker, organizer, group speaker, or interviewer. Discuss the responsibilities of each job. For example, the note-taker writes down important information like instructions. The group speaker makes sure that everyone understands the team’s conclusions. The interviewer asks questions for the group. The organizer creates a structure for how the group will function. Make sure that students rotate through different roles throughout the year.

5. Debrief after group work. Give students an opportunity to discuss how their group worked together and which skills they used to solve problems. This could take the form of a reflection piece that explains how the group worked to complete the task.

FREE WEBINAR REPLAY
Addressing ADHD
Behaviors in the Classroom
<http://additu.de/19z>

Poor Group Dynamics Q&A

Q: What if it’s the ADHD-inspired behavior of kids in groups that seems to make them targets?

A: What we’ve found from working with hundreds of groups is that there are a few things that commonly trip kids up. If they can avoid these particular behaviors, it minimizes the likelihood that they will be teased. One thing that kids with ADHD do that sometimes frustrates other kids is bringing up random subjects. Kids will be discussing a topic and your child might be thinking about one aspect of the conversation that gets stuck in his mind. Meanwhile, the conversation continues and the child brings up something that was talked about 10 minutes before.

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Another challenge for ADHD kids is suddenly changing the subject to talk about something that's more interesting. A group is talking about football, which reminds your child of a sunny day, so he talks about a sunny day instead of continuing with the conversation about football.

—Cathi Cohen, LCSW

Social Immaturity

“Children with ADHD take longer to develop some of the social skills needed to interact successfully with peers their own age,” says Sandy Maynard, M.S., a founding board member for the Institute for the Advancement of ADHD Coaching (IAAC). Here are strategies for helping your child close the gap.

1. Look for younger friends—at first. Because many kids with ADHD lag behind their peers in social skills, they tend to appear more immature. As a result, your child may feel more comfortable playing with younger children. With those playmates, she can practice friendship skills without being made fun of. As a bonus, younger friends tend to be less sensitive to restlessness, and will most likely look up to their older buddy. Higher self-esteem and confidence often follow, making it easier for her to begin making friends with peers.

2. Immaturity is not contagious. “Some parents are reluctant to encourage friendships with younger children, worrying that their child will start acting—or continue to act—immature for his age,” says Carol Brady, Ph.D. “But, as I’ve assured many worried moms, friendships with younger kids allow your child to take on a leadership role, a dynamic that peer relationships might not allow for. It’s perfectly OK to encourage your child to play with children at his social-development level.”

3. Find special interest groups and clubs. Children may find it easier to strike up conversations with kids they don’t know if they already share a common interest, like rock collecting or horseback riding. It can be a great way for your child to ease into same-age friendships.

ADDITUDE RESOURCE
Helping Socially Immature Kids Make Friends and Success at School
<http://additu.de/socimm>

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Social Immaturity: Strategies for Teachers

ADHD is a developmental disorder in which brain maturation is delayed—and sometimes uneven. Students may behave appropriately in some situations but not in others, leading some adults to believe “they can behave when they want to.”

Understanding the developmental level of your students with ADHD is critical. While a child’s academic performance may be up to par, he or she may lag several years behind the rest of the class socially. Here are some strategies to level the playing field:

1. **Do not expect the child to behave as responsibly or rationally as his classmates.** Thinking of him as two or three years younger than the group will help you better understand and respond to his needs.
2. **Never embarrass or humiliate a child in your classroom** for off-target social behavior. Whatever their maturity level, children with ADHD don’t learn social skills “naturally.” These skills have to be taught.
3. **Work privately with the student to provide appropriate words and phrases** to use with peers, and practice them one-on-one repeatedly. Give opportunities to the student to work with small groups, and monitor interactions closely to minimize difficulties with peers.
4. **In some special-needs classes and schools, teachers post “emotion” drawings or photos on the wall**, displaying a variety of facial expressions with words describing what they mean (“Angry,” “Sad,” “Surprised”). These visual reminders help students interpret situations that occur in life. The rest of the class does not have to know that the drawings are mainly for your students with ADHD.
5. **Praise the child in front of peers for work that’s well done.** Increased self-esteem and peer recognition occur when a student’s special skills or talents are highlighted and shared with the group. The child will not have to resort to antics and off-target remarks to get the attention he needs.

JUST FOR TEACHERS

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Social Immaturity Q&A

Q: My 13-year-old son, who has ADHD, prefers to play with children who are seven or eight years younger. He told me he relates better to them than to his peers. Is this appropriate?

A: Age-gap friendships are not unusual for children with ADHD. Nor are social-skill deficiencies. Your son prefers to be with younger children because he feels more “at home” with them than with peers. Younger children give your son an opportunity to shine in a social setting.

Showing off his social skills lifts his self-esteem. Help your son build on this, while developing his leadership skills. Look into organizations that offer mentoring to younger children.

To develop peer relationships, encourage your son to participate in a sport or after-school club. If relating to his peers is a problem, look for activities that don’t require a lot of teamwork—track, chess, martial arts, and other individual sports are all good choices for children with ADHD.

— Mary Fowler, an ADHD educator

YouTube As Coach: 16 Videos That Teach Social Skills

We love cat videos and carpool karaoke just as much as the next guy. But the power of YouTube goes much, much deeper. Here, Anna Vagin, Ph.D., a licensed speech/language pathologist with more than 30 years of experience, and the editors of *ADDitude* explain how videos can help kids with ADHD learn to decode nonverbal information and grasp the feelings underlying social relationships.

WATCH. LISTEN. LEARN.
Tune in to our ADHD video channel
<http://additu.de/videos>

Learning About Social Relationships

Many children pick up what they need to know about relationships and interacting with other people by watching and absorbing what others do. They’re exposed to it; they look at it; they take it all in. Certainly parents may say, “This is the time to say thank you” or “Remember to say please.” And when kids get older, their peers give feedback that they take in, integrate, and use to make modifications in how they’re reacting. Without a lot

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of teaching, they somehow end up being able to have relatively fulfilling, ongoing social relationships.

But that doesn't happen for all children.

Especially for children with ADHD, exposure to social interactions doesn't always result in social performance. Before we expect kids to behave in the classroom or on the playground, we need to take time to explain what that means, let kids discuss it, and give examples to start those discussions.

Struggles with Social Cues, Empathy & Focus

Kids with ADHD often have difficulty processing and scanning relevant social information, especially in the moving environment of real, in-the-moment social interaction. To build their ability to cue into what is important, we must help them read the feelings and nonverbal information others are giving them—a crucial step in establishing and maintaining relationships.

Also important is remaining flexible when working in a group or having a conversation. This requires taking another person's perspective, understanding what they might be thinking, and changing our own plan according to what is happening around us. Staying focused on the conversation, balancing a give and take of speaking, and staying focused on other people's interests can all be challenging.

Kids with ADHD may also struggle with emotional regulation and outbursts. We need to build their resilience for when things go wrong.

Using Media to Teach

Watching a video of social interactions helps a child identify a character's social mistakes and victories without focusing on their own faux pas. Talking about characters can help build a comfort level for kids who struggle with relationships and, over time, strengthen the child's ability to self-reflect.

After watching a couple of examples, the child might think, "Maybe that has happened to me, and maybe I'm ready to talk about that." Then parents and teachers can move on to practicing and reviewing to support interactions at the dinner table or on play dates, and be able to talk about how things went afterward.

EXPERT WEBINAR REPLAY
Screen Time Limits and Transitions
<http://additu.de/stl>

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Why YouTube?

YouTube is magnificent for this type of social learning for these reasons:

- 1. Engaging material:** Kids who have participated in talk or behavior therapy may feel it's getting old. YouTube is new, slick, and interactive.
- 2. More like real life:** Worksheets and pictures are static. The component of movement in videos lets students practice processing social information as it happens, keeping up.
- 3. Pause and rewind:** Kids can freeze the social interaction to look at how the faces changed, and identify the facial expressions. You can take sticky notes and write the thoughts and feelings of the character and put them on the screen so kids can develop a deep understanding of the interaction.

Use YouTube to enhance social skills in four main areas: feelings, inner voice, cooperation, and dealing with conflict.

Cautionary Notes

Be careful, conservative, and responsible with the videos you show. If you're showing a video in a classroom or therapeutically, how does it fit with your students' experiences and challenges? Why are you showing it? What visual supports are you going to use? How are you going to make this work for the kids involved? Never show anything questionable.

The following is a list of fabulous, beautifully realized animations and videos I recommend as social learning material. However, they appeal to a wide range of kids, so all videos are not appropriate for all children. Please preview carefully and use your judgment in selecting the best ones to use. Also, beware of commercials that precede some YouTube videos—many of them are not child-friendly.

How to Teach Feelings

Feelings are at the core of relationships. Start by asking your child, "What kind of feeling words do you know?" Make a list, and use it as your baseline for your child's feeling vocabulary—then talk about which feelings are comfortable and uncomfortable. Watch one of the following videos on YouTube:

- [Ormie the Pig](#)

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Watch free, on-demand
webinars for teachers
<http://additu.de/school-webinars>

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- [Mariza the Stubborn Donkey](#)
- [The Game of SPLEEF](#)
- [Embarked](#)

Follow the video by asking, “What feelings did you notice the characters had?” For visual support, ask your child to write the feelings on sticky notes, or draw a quick sketch. Ask, “Have you ever felt like that? Can you tell us about that?” Children often need a list or visual prompt when they are building their emotional vocabulary. Sketches, lists, and sticky notes can help.

How to Teach Inner Voice

Start by asking, “I have a voice in my head. Do you? What does it say?” Tell your child that sometimes the voice in our head is supportive, “You can do it! Come on.” But sometimes the voice can be very critical, “I can’t believe I did that. That was so stupid of me.” Give examples from your own life, and watch one of these YouTube videos:

- [Cat’s Meow](#)
- [Egg Hunt](#)

Now, watch it a second time, and stop at moments when you think something is happening in the character’s head. Ask, “What do you think the character is thinking? How do you think he feels when his voice says that?” Use several different videos. Ask your child to come up with ideas for what could be helpful self talk for the character, like “Don’t worry, try again.”

How to Practice Inner Voice

Try playing a board game. Start by explaining that games can have tricky moments when you might feel terrible, frustrated, happy, sad, mad, and excited. Ask, “If you have one of those uncomfortable feelings, what can you do to make the feeling smaller?”

Draw thought bubbles on Post-Its such as, “It’s OK, next time I can try again.” “Bummer, maybe next time I’ll get more than one.” And “It’s OK, it’s just a game.” When a child has a bad roll, you can cue them, “Do you need to think a thought bubble?” It’s a visual that is easy for them to refer to.

EXPERT WEBINAR REPLAY
Screen-Smart Parenting
for Children with ADHD
<http://additu.de/screen-smart>

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How to Teach Cooperation

Cooperation is a complex concept. It's not just working together; it's a complicated web of feelings and actions—being patient and trusting others, not giving up, listening, going with a group idea, clarifying ideas, managing strong feelings, understanding other people's ideas, being flexible, sharing a job, and combinations of these things. YouTube videos like these can show different examples of each aspect of cooperation:

- [Monkey Cooperation and Fairness](#) (being patient and trusting others)
- [Oktapodi](#) (sticking with it and not giving up)
- [The Power of Teamwork](#) (listening and going along with group)
- [Bridge's Story](#) (clarifying an idea)
- [Monkey Spoon](#) (taking a breath and going along with another's idea)
- [Pigeons](#) (managing strong feelings)
- [Mariza the Stubborn Donkey](#) (understanding other people's ideas)
- [Egg Hunt](#) (being flexible)
- [Student Groups Divide Work](#) (sharing a job)

After watching the video, ask your child, “Wow. Do you ever get stuck on an idea? Can you come up with an example of when you might have gotten stuck?” Ask them to sketch it. Ask them to include thought bubbles and label how they have been feeling.

How to Teach Conflict Resolution

Start by telling your child, “This is a video about conflict where things are not going very well.” Watch the YouTube clip [Wild Dogs](#) and ask, “What do you think this person is feeling? What do you think they are thinking?”

Help kids to recognize that behavior is tied to choice. You can choose to act one way, or choose to act another way. You can choose to stop and think about it.

Ask your child to criticize the characters by saying, “Boy, he really blew it. Do you think both characters are responsible?” Then you can bridge to your own self. “You know what? I think sometimes I've actually contributed to arguments that you and I have had.”

ADDITUDE RESOURCE
8 Great Social Skills Apps
<http://additu.de/3f>

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Make Social Learning a Daily Dialog

Lead by example. When you watch a YouTube video together, make your own drawings, and talk about what you noticed. Label your own feelings in situations, especially the uncomfortable ones (e.g., sad and mad). Use more sophisticated labels like “frustrated” and “annoyed.” Repeat these exercises when you are reading books and bedtime stories.

Be specific when you notice good social thinking—“Wow, that was great how you helped Grandpa up even though you had just sat down,” is much clearer than “Thanks!” When you need to discuss those not-so-great choices, draw what happened. Supplement abstract discussions with concrete pictures, labeled feelings, and talk/thought bubbles.

4 Toys That Teach Social Skills

Still wondering “How can I teach my child to play nice, to treat his friends like friends?” Jenn Choi, a toy expert, and founder of toysaretools.com, reviews her favorite games and toys for bolstering your child’s social skills.

ADDITUDE RESOURCE
More Great Toys for Kids with ADHD
<http://additu.de/gift-ideas>

Perplexus Rookie

(\$22.99; playmonster.com)

BENEFIT: The maze helps kids understand how they affect others.

At first, it was hard for me to understand how playing with the Perplexus Rookie helps kids understand how their actions affect others. The Perplexus Rookie is a 3D maze encased in a transparent sphere. A child begins at the starting line and maneuvers a ball on a long, winding track. The child has to move the ball at the right speed or it will fall off the track, forcing him to go back to the beginning.

Jonathan Lauter, M.D., assistant professor of psychiatry at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, enlightened me. “Playing with a maze helps a child become more self-aware by learning about his own skill sets,” says Lauter. “He needs to think, ‘What do I need to do now? How do I slow myself down?’”

Being aware of cause and effect, which this game promotes, allows a child to realize that he makes an impact on the world. “When you are

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engaged in a process that causes you to be self-reflective and think carefully about your actions, you become more civilized and more thoughtful about people around you,” says Lauter. And that extends to the playground and to play dates.

Tegu Discovery Set

(\$70; tegu.com)

BENEFIT: Make-believe play helps kids understand how others feel.

Kids with ADHD love to build things, and their visual-spatial skills are usually sharp. Kids who build houses and buildings with the Tegu magnetic block set often “create” people to live in the structures. My kids make a person out of two cubes and two short planks. This representational play happens intuitively because of the organic feel and appearance of the Tegu blocks. And if a “person” comes apart, it is very easy to put him back together.

“A child wants to say, ‘Oooh, I’m the teacher and Mommy, you’re the student,’” says Heather Goldman, Ph.D., a child psychologist and a consultant to The Quad Manhattan, an educational center for gifted kids with and without mild special needs. Goldman gave me an example of how make-believe play sharpens social skills.

“Children experience things in school and situations with their parents and friends,” says Goldman. “And then, in their play, they recreate those scenarios with play people, and gain an understanding of what is going on.”

Tall-Stacker Mighty Monkey Playset

(\$29.99; playmonster.com)

BENEFIT: The Playset encourages kids to be silly on their own indoor “playground.”

Another pretend-play toy that taps into an ADHD child’s desire to build is this jungle-themed playground set. It represents a playground, a scene that is infrequent in preschooler play sets. Yet professionals say that playground play sets build social skills in very young children.

“Many children can express themselves through play when meaningful discourse is not possible.”

—ELLEN KINGSLEY

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“I think play sets are beneficial for children because kids are so familiar with the playground,” says child psychotherapist Christa Murphy, LCSW, of Queens West Health, in New York, who takes her small clients to playgrounds to give social skills guidance. Murphy feels that using monkeys as the main characters in this toy inspires silly play. That is what our kids want to do, but are not allowed to do, because it is either unsafe or socially unacceptable.

When I took my preschooler to the playground, I would either be stressed out about his getting hurt or I would worry about what other parents thought of my child. I found it so difficult, and unfair, that I couldn’t let him play “his ADHD way.” While our children may prefer to be sillier and daring in their real-life playground, the Mighty Monkey Playset is an excellent way to explore swinging, running, riding, and playground relationships safely at home.

Yo Baby Kick Flipper

(\$14.95; garagecotoys.com)

BENEFIT: This cool board teaches kids to take turns.

For most kids with ADHD, spending time on a playground doesn’t offer enough structure, and offers too much face-to-face interaction. This causes a preschooler with ADHD to feel overwhelmed.

The Yo Baby Kick Flipper—a plastic skateboard deck, without wheels, used for teaching kids the basics of board sports—is an awesome social-scene helper. I have found that practicing tricks in the park is an icebreaker for kids. Think about purchasing two Kick Flippers. The second one can be offered to any curious kid who wants to try it out. What will likely follow is a natural turn-taking process, where kids go from sneaking peeks at each other’s tricks to stopping to watch while waiting to show what they can do. It encourages friendship.

Could there be an easier, more entertaining way to encourage turn-taking? I really can’t think of any.

CHAPTER 3

Secrets to a Better Play Date

Chapter 3: Secrets to a Better Play Date

For many children—with and without ADHD—one-on-one play dates are more harmonious, healthy, and full of learning opportunities than are raucous parties or sleepovers. Inviting your child's classmate over for a few hours is a good start, but success requires much more than showing up and serving a snack.

Ryder was excited to have his second-grade classmate, Luke, over for a play date. The moment Luke walked in the door, Ryder told him the games they would play, and the rules for the day—rules that he had invented. When Luke won a game, or broke Ryder's guidelines, Ryder yelled at him. When Luke's mom picked him up and asked if he had fun he said, "I'm never playing with him again."

That's the worst-case scenario many parents (and some kids) fear when a play date is proposed. It rarely goes down that badly. But the fact is that even the kindest classmate or teammate will not want to book a second play date if the first one is plagued by bad behavior. But if your child has made mistakes with friends in the past, he should not give up hope. Even the bossiest child can become a gracious host; it's a matter of practice and early intervention from adults who know how to recognize a red flag when they see one.

Scheduling the Play Date

Setting the stage for a play date is a two-part process: finding a friend and transitioning that child from a school friend to an extracurricular friend.

EXPERT WEBINAR REPLAY

**Forever Friends for
Children with ADHD**
<http://additu.de/ee>

CHAPTER 3 Secrets to a Better Play Date

Part 1: Finding a Friend

Help your child “play detective” to find common ground or shared interests with prospective friends. For example, a child obsessed with Harry Potter can seek out another fan of J.K. Rowling during library class. They can talk about the books and movies at lunch or recess to start the foundation for a friendship. If your child loves Minecraft, for example, registering him in a coding class could introduce him to likeminded kids in other schools. Encourage your child to branch out and find more than one child for future play dates, just in case the first friend isn’t a match.

Explain the basic rules of conversation and use natural moments like dinnertime and other gatherings to practice those rules with your child, says Sandra Rief, M.A.

1. Teach your child to treat conversations as a trade. “The most fundamental rule of good conversation is to trade information and find common interests,” says Elizabeth A. Laugeson, Psy.D.⁷ In initial conversations with a new friend, your child should ask a question for every question he answers. The idea is for your child to learn about his new friend, while also sharing important things about himself. This rule can remind a talkative child not to be a conversation hog, and to demonstrate his interest in making new friends.

2. Set boundaries for what to talk about—at first. Teach your child to regulate her intimacy when she first meets a potential new friend. “When we’re first getting to know someone, it’s important not to get too personal too quickly,” says Elizabeth A. Laugeson, Psy.D. Revealing deep secrets early in a relationship can make the other child uncomfortable.⁸ Instead, your child should start small, sharing a small secret to see if it’s reciprocated. If it is, she can go on to share more. If not, she should take a small step back.

3. Don’t be an interviewer. Make sure your child is not *only* asking questions. “Once you’ve determined the interests of your conversational partner, it’s important to share something related about yourself,” says Laugeson.⁹

4. Work with your child to set attainable goals. Make the goal simple and specific like, “I will say hi to Aiden at lunch tomorrow.”

“Having good conversational skills becomes critical to social success on reaching adolescence and remains so throughout life.”

—ELIZABETH A. LAUGESON, Psy.D.⁶

CHAPTER 3 Secrets to a Better Play Date

Stage a test phone call. Encourage your child to call a friend to chat, while you listen in quietly. “This process teaches our kids how to say ‘hello’ and greet an adult/parent, then ask for a friend,” says Dr. Liz Matheis, a licensed clinical psychologist and certified school psychologist. “Even kids raised on texting will need to call someone somewhere.” After the call, review the things your child did well, and the areas she should work on for her next talk. This can also help you gauge the other child’s interest in a play date. If your child is received with enthusiasm, she has picked the right peer. If she is greeted blandly, it might be time to move on to another potential friend.

Part 2: Transitioning the Friend

At this stage, **begin networking with other parents** to set up play dates. Make sure you’re comfortable with these parents watching your child. Chat with them at school pick-up, events, and extracurricular activities. Volunteer at fundraisers or parent meetings, or introduce yourself to other parents at the park or Girl/Boy Scout meetings.

“Do this in a low-pressure kind of way,” says Fred Frankel, Ph.D. “You don’t want to make the other parents feel like you are pressuring them into a play date. First, just introduce yourself, ‘Our kids play together; I just wanted to say hi.’ That’s it.” If they engage, talk with them more. If they are not receptive, go off and do something else.

The next time you see that parent, **begin a warm chat.** Talk about things you have in common—like your children, the teacher, or wherever you are meeting. If things go well, slowly introduce the idea of a play date saying, “Lauren would love to have Carlie over to play sometime.” One to two hours is optimal for a first play date.

At first, **host the play dates at your own house.** There, you can make sure your child is not making social errors before you send him into the care of other parents who may not know how to handle an altercation.

If your child is too old for play dates, make your home an appealing place where teens will want to hang out. Offer junk food. If you don’t normally allow chips and soda, stocking up the snack drawer will be an incentive for your child to invite friends over. Then, when you drop in with more Cheetos you can see how things are going—subtly, of course.

“Best friendships and cliques often develop out of social groups, perhaps because friendships are based on common interests and common interests are at the very core of social groups.”

—ELIZABETH A. LAUGESON,
PSY.D. [10](#)

CHAPTER 3 Secrets to a Better Play Date

Hosting a Great Play Date

No play date stands a chance if your child doesn't learn how to be a good host, avoid conflict, and make her guests feel welcome at your house. We need to teach our kids these rules, then supervise and make sure they are following them.

Before the Play Date

1. Find out what the other child likes to do and doesn't like to do.

Encourage your child to use the question technique to uncover common interests. Then, she can plan activities for the day, and start off on the right foot when her guest arrives.

2. Choose activities that allow for flexibility. Even with the best planning, your child's guest might not like a game she has chosen. To ensure success, Fred Frankel, Ph.D. recommends that kids play "activities where there's fluidity, where they can go with the flow, and your child can accept her friend's wishes more readily to change the activity so that they are doing something that both of them like."

3. Avoid obsessions or provocative games. If your child has one toy he plays with faithfully and prefers not to share, that is not a good choice for a play date. Your child will be less sensitive to taking turns or changing activities if his favorite toy is not in the mix. Don't allow your child to play things that could spark aggression like shooting water pistols or Nerf guns.

4. Don't allow solitary or parallel activities. The point of a play date is friendship-building interaction. Your child should not read books, watch TV, or play video games while a friend is over. Avoid any screen time, which may allow your child may retreat into his own world. Choose games and activities that encourage talking like doing a puzzle or roller blading.

"Screen time is fun, but it's not appropriate when you have a real, live human with whom you can interact," says Dr. Matheis. "When's the last time your Wii laughed out loud?"

PLAY THERAPY

4 play therapy toys, techniques, and therapies for kids with ADHD

<http://additu.de/26>

CHAPTER 3 Secrets to a Better Play Date

5. Set up for the play area. Immediately before the play date, hide any toys that are off limits—video games, toys that could cause conflict, and favorites your child can't stand to share. Lay out the games your child spoke about on the phone. If your child is worried about keeping video games off limits, let him blame it on you and say, "Sorry, but my parents don't allow it." Do whatever it takes to keep the games out.

6. Practice politeness. Go over phrases your child can use if things start to go astray. Instead of abruptly ending a game when he gets bored, your child can practice saying, "After this next turn, can we do something else?" or, "How about we play Connect 4?" Your child should be prepared to negotiate disagreements in a nice way.

7. Plan an alternate activity for siblings. Take precautions to prevent a sibling with more developed social skills from swooping in and dominating the play date. Try planning simultaneous play dates in different areas of the house, "You can't go in this room, you can't go in that room." Or arrange for a special outing that will allow your child to host the play date in a quiet house. Older siblings typically respect parents' instructions not to disturb a play date.

Rules for a Successful Play Date

Help your child follow these guidelines to become a good host and enjoy the visit without obsessing over rules or letting disagreements spiral out of control.

1. The guest is always right. If Riley wants to play Uno, but your child would rather play Monopoly, she should concede to her guest's choice. If your child doesn't have fun, she doesn't have to invite Riley over again, but she can't be rude while company is still at the house.

2. Avoid criticism. If your child notices something she doesn't like, she should keep it to herself and operate by the rule, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." Set up a points system, and reward your child for good hostess behavior with a trip to the zoo or an extra 30 minutes of screen time later.

3. Be loyal to the guest. Play dates are one-on-one activities. If another child calls or stops by the house when a guest is over, you or your child should answer and say, "You know, I am busy right now. I will

"Live by the motto that the guest is always right. This rule neutralizes bossiness and is easy to enforce. If there is an argument—about the rules of a game or which game to play—tell your child that the guest is right."

—FRED FRANKEL, PH.D.

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get back to you later. Thanks for calling/stopping by.” Playing with or talking to a third child can make your child’s invited guest feel left out and forgotten. When three kids get together, one usually ends up with hurt feelings.

4. Remain available to monitor the play date. Don’t hover in the same room, but remain within listening distance to catch any conflict or violation of the good host rules before it becomes a major explosion.

5. Intervene when the social error happens. “Encourage problem solving, turn taking, and compromising,” recommends Dr. Matheis. “Get involved and model it for your kids in the moment.” The moment of a social faux pas is a teachable moment.

Pull your child subtly into another room so he is not embarrassed in front of his friend, and talk to him about the error you witnessed. “Other kids are good about waiting because they would much rather have a nicer playmate after a brief timeout than keep playing in a very disagreeable way,” says Fred Frankel, Ph.D. Have your child apologize and promise not to do it again, and coach him so he doesn’t repeat the error or alienate a potential friend.

After a Play Date

When the play date ends, interview your child and debrief her about the experience. Ask these questions:

- Did you like the kid?
- Did you have a good time?
- Did anything happen that made you upset?
- What did you enjoy most about having your friend over?
- Do you want to invite him or her over again?

Help your child pick up the mess after the play date. “We don’t insist that anybody clean up during a play date. We want them to have fun,” says Fred Frankel, Ph.D. Instead, volunteer to clean the guest’s half of the mess with your child. She shouldn’t clean the whole thing herself; that could discourage future play dates.

“MOM, I’M BORED!”

Reader-inspired ways to survive rainy days

<http://additu.de/bored>

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Following the play date, encourage your child to call his friend to say how much fun he had, and thank him for coming over. Try to politely postpone invitations to friends' homes until you have had three or four conflict-free play dates in your own home. If another parent invites your child over, delay accepting until a later date, and offer to pick up and drop off their child for play dates at your home.

CHAPTER 4

How to Stop Bullies and Bullying

Chapter 4: How to Stop Bullies and Bullying

Nearly 4,500 children and adolescents commit suicide in the United States every year. In roughly half of these cases, bullying is at least partially to blame.¹¹ This is heartbreaking to anyone; for a parent, it's beyond frightening. These statistics remind us that our children, no matter how big or tough, are fragile. Bullying is a serious and potentially deadly threat. Our kids are not impenetrable or immune to pain, though too often they'd like us to believe they are. This—and shame—is why they don't tell us when the other kids circulated that embarrassing photo on Snap Chat, or started false rumors on Facebook, or invoked the silent treatment for two straight weeks at lunch.

Perhaps your child feels it's pointless to report the bullies because they'll never stop. Or maybe the bullies have threatened to do even worse things if your child snitches. Maybe your child feels she deserves the bad treatment, that she's not worthy of friendship. Or it could be that acknowledging and recognizing the abuse is too painful; “out of sight, out of mind” works better for her at home.

Whatever the reason, it's likely that your child is not telling you everything that happens at school. This means you've got to work hard to draw out information, and be on high alert for the red flags that could signal serious social problems at school.

Is Your Child Being Bullied?

The National Center for Educational Statistics reports that roughly 28 percent of teens in the United States are the recent victims of bullying. This number nearly doubles in size to 54 percent for teens with special needs.¹² A personality quirk or impulsive remark in class, so common among kids with ADHD, can draw the unwanted attention of a bully. Clumsiness, poor understanding of personal space, and being overly affectionate also increase the chances of social rejection. But the biggest problem for kids with ADHD is accurately reading social cues, which requires them to tune into the world around them, interpret behavior, and then respond appropriately—a tall order!

“Children with ADHD may believe they bring bullying on themselves with their inappropriate behavior, or that there is nothing they—or their parents—can do about it.”

—STEVEN RICHFIELD, PH.D.

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Our kids are usually socially isolated, which makes them easy targets. “If you have friends, they protect you against bullies. It’s very hard to bully a kid who’s in the middle of a group of friends,” says Fred Frankel, Ph.D.

Even if your child knows that she can safely confide in you, she may be hesitant to talk about an experience with a bully. Your child could be embarrassed to talk about it, feel that no one will believe her, or worry that, if adults get involved, it will make the bullying worse. In his book, *Friends Forever*, Fred Frankel, Ph.D. recommends looking for the following signs of distress:¹³

1. Your child’s schoolwork begins to slide.
2. Your child shows much less interest in schoolwork than usual.
3. Your child does not want to go to school or starts having frequent stomachaches or headaches on school days.
4. If your child walks to school, she changes her usual path to an out-of-the-way route.
5. Your child’s books, money, or other belongings are missing without explanation.
6. Your child begins stealing or requesting extra money for lunch.
7. Your child begins to have unexplained injuries or torn clothing.

If you notice any of these, gently question your child about the social scene at school. Casually ask for the names of her friends, and the names of children she avoids or dislikes. Ask if she is happy with her social life at school. Your child, who may be slow to recognize social cues (see Chapter 1), may not even realize she is being targeted until you begin the conversation.

Mom: How was school today?

Ryan: Fine.

Dad: Did something happen with the kids at school that you want to tell me about?

Ryan: No.

Mom: OK.

BULLYING RESOURCES

- StopBullying.gov
- NCAB.org
- TheBullyProject.com
- StompOutBullying.org

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After a silence, your child may start talking again and reveal something like, “Blake is picking on me at recess.” Ask more questions, for example:

What does Blake do?

Was it just Blake who called you a stupid head?

What do you do when Blake teases you?

Does that end the teasing? Do you want to try something different?

Does anyone else tease you besides Blake?

Is that the only thing Blake says when he teases you?

Does Blake get into fights with other kids too?

An open dialogue with your child can help you determine the type of bullying he is facing, where the teasing takes place, why it might be happening, and the best ways to address it. Try to avoid making your child feel any worse by admonishing her for hiding the bullying or for her responses to it.

Keep in mind that boys and girls exert social control differently, which means they bully differently. Girls tend to use relational aggression, while boys are more commonly physically aggressive. Girls often control or dominate by socially excluding a friend, withdrawing a friendship, not inviting a friend to birthday parties, or giving her the silent treatment. Boys tend to be more direct in expressing anger. They can be verbally aggressive, calling names like “stupid” or “idiot,” and physically aggressive by hitting, shoving, and playing sports too rough. Boys tend to get over disagreements more quickly, while girls tend to carry anger longer.

If you suspect your child is being bullied, ask teachers and other school staff to keep an eye on him during recess. Ask if your child’s social skills may be contributing to any problems they notice, and whether the other children involved have a history of bullying.

“The power equation for bullying is usually on the side of the bully. That’s why it is necessary for parents to take charge of this situation and act decisively so that the victim feels confident that something can be done to improve his or her situation,” insists Fred Frankel, Ph.D.¹⁴

ADDITUDE EXPERT Q&A
Putting a Stop to Bullying
<http://additu.de/bully2>

CHAPTER 4 How to Stop Bullies and Bullying

How to Discourage Bullying

“Children with ADHD face more than academic challenges,” says Dr. Robert Melillo. “They find nonverbal and social communication hard, and they may act in ways at school that attract the attention of bullies. Some kids with ADHD are clumsy and unaware of normal spatial boundaries compared with non-ADHD kids. All of these challenges make kids with ADHD prime targets for bullies.”

It is possible for your child to reduce his risk of being bullied. First you need to discuss with your child how bullies work, and investigate with him the behaviors or situations that could have made him a target.

Get to the bottom of bullying. Gather as much information as you can about a bullying incident. Ask your child questions about what was happening right before the bullying started. This can help identify triggers and opportunities for changing behavior.

Explain that ADHD is not wrong. Some kids understand ADHD symptoms, and how they affect their actions and words. Others have no idea that their social behavior is any different from anyone else’s.

Find out where bullying occurs. If it is happening in one concentrated area, like a playground, bus, or cafeteria, the solution could be as simple as arranging for more supervision. Bullies don’t want to be caught in the act.

Then, **advise your child to stay in eyesight of the adult in charge.** Help your child get an adult’s attention in ways that won’t make bullying worse. Giving your child a strategy like yelling, “Ouch! Stop that!” can help bring an adult over to investigate without being labeled a tattletale. Alternatively, help your child find a welcoming group to join during unstructured activities like recess. Bullies are less likely to pick on a large, conspicuous group.

Explain how to keep a low profile. “Without excusing the bully’s behavior, identify some of your child’s actions—talking too much, clowning around at inopportune times, blurting out ill-chosen remarks—that might draw negative attention,” says Steven Richfield, Ph.D., the author of *The Parent Coach: A New Approach to Parenting in Today’s Society*. You can say, “There are things you’re great at, and things you’re behind in. Let’s work together on those!” A child who doesn’t understand why bullying is

REAL LIFE ADVICE

5 Ways to Beat School Bullies

<http://additu.de/kz>

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happening might feel hopeless, like she is disliked for no reason. She might feel powerless to change it. Discuss strategies like speaking quietly, keeping responses brief, and staying tuned into others' responses. These can help kids become more aware of how others perceive them, and fend off bullies.

Explain good social skills. Teach your child to balance talking and listening to others in conversations. Teach her to avoid bad attention by going with the flow. For example, if other kids are playing kickball at recess, don't steal the ball and start a soccer game. Teach your child non-physical ways to show her affection like asking kids to play and giving compliments. Role play what being annoyed looks like to make your child aware of peers' feelings and reactions. Teach her not to tattletale or get involved in other kids' business—like announcing that Jack is on page 22 when we're supposed to be on page 26.

Talk to your child about the difference between destructive bullying and benign teasing. Demonstrate examples of friendly teasing where your child is in on the joke, and teach him how to laugh at himself in situations that pose no threat. A child with a sense of humor is much less likely to be bullied than a kid who takes everything to heart.

How Teachers Can Influence Behavior

Children with ADHD are often labeled unruly or aggressive because of their impulsive physical and social interactions. Though these kids are often caring and sensitive, their impulsivity overshadows their good qualities too often. Teachers can help students improve ADHD-fueled behavior that might attract the attention of bullies with these strategies.

Why Bullies Target Kids with ADHD:

Children with ADHD act—and speak—before they think, often unable to control their initial response to a situation. The ability to “self-regulate” is compromised; they can't modify their behavior with future consequences in mind, even if that behavior has led to bullying in the past. Some studies show that differences in the ADHD brain are partly responsible for this symptom.

“That ‘magical protective shield’ that we all wish for our children must be built over time. While no single technique can eliminate the teasing words or actions that hurt feelings, there’s a lot that parents and teachers can do to help.” —CAROL BRADY, PH.D.

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The Obstacles:

Many children with ADHD seem to spend their lives in time out—in trouble for outbursts that attract the attention of bullies as well as teachers. Lack of impulse control is perhaps the most difficult symptom of ADHD to modify. Progress takes years of patience and persistence.

Solutions in the Classroom:

- 1. Some children need “behavior cards” taped to their desks** (“Raise hands before speaking,” etc.). If privacy is an issue, tape the cards to a sheet of paper that remains on the desk during class but can be stored inside the desk.
- 2. Write the day’s schedule on the blackboard and erase items as they are completed,** to give students a sense of control about their day. Alert the class in advance about any revisions to the daily routine.
- 3. To avoid meltdowns due to transitions (another stress point), give the class a five-minute warning,** then a two-minute warning of a transition, so that kids have adequate time to stop one activity and start another.
- 4. Have a plan ready** in case lack of structure or another circumstance sets off an impulsive reaction. Perhaps the child can be given a special job, such as “monitor” or “coach,” to help him stay focused on self-control.
- 5. Discipline can and should be used in certain situations.** ADHD is an explanation for bad behavior, but it is never an excuse. ADHD may explain why Johnny hit Billy, but ADHD did not make him do it. Children with ADHD need to understand their responsibility to control themselves.
- 6. Discipline should be immediate, short, and swift.** Delayed consequences, such as detention, don’t work for those who find it hard to anticipate future outcomes. Consequences must be instantaneous: If he pushes another child on the playground, recess is suspended for 10 minutes.

ADDITUDE RESOURCE

Get our free email newsletter for educators: <http://additu.de/newsletters>

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7. Give immediate, positive feedback, and attention when kids with ADHD behave well. Catch them doing something good. Specifically state what they are doing well, such as waiting their turn.

8. With younger children, establish behaviors you expect and post them in the classroom (“Respect Others,” “Talk Nicely,” “Use an Indoor Voice”) as visual reminders.

9. Younger children often respond to a “point system,” in which they earn pennies or stickers for a positive target behavior. They can redeem their points at the end of the week for a prize.

REAL LIFE STORY

How My Daughter’s Teacher Helped Her Accept Her ADHD

<http://additu.de/19u>

How to Address Bullies

Encourage your child to stand up to a bully’s teasing, without crossing over the line of overreaction or hurting someone, using these strategies.

Make sure ADHD symptoms are under control. The best way to help your child succeed socially is to make sure her treatment plan—including ADHD medication and/or natural therapies—is doing its job. Medical, educational, and behavioral interventions can improve skills.

Teach your child to stay calm. Equip your child with techniques to defuse the tension in the moment. This may include counting to 10 or taking a few deep breaths before responding. Give him a one-word response to use, like, “Whatever,” and coach him to exit the situation before he blurts out something he may regret.

Role play the appropriate way to respond. Brainstorm smart comebacks with your child and words that could preempt taunts like, “What are you going to tease me about today?” or, “You’re the winner, I guess.” The key is to remain emotionally detached and non-confrontational. Sometimes humor or sarcasm can neutralize a bully’s plan to inflict pain.

Help kids learn to laugh off the teasing, or deliver a well-timed, “Who cares?” or “Thanks for noticing.” Empower your child to call the bully on his bad behavior, and say, “Why did you say that?” Having multiple responses can help your child feel in control with alternative strategies at the

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ready. Bullies like to argue, so the best response is one that shows indifference, or eliminates the possibility of a back and forth. Give your child a chance to play the role of the bully, and then model effective responses.

Explain how to look strong, even if that's not how he feels. Encourage your child to stand up straight, make eye contact, and speak in an authoritative tone. If it's helpful, videotape your child during a play date and play it back so that he can suggest and understand body-language changes that might make a positive difference.

Teach kids positive self-talk. Give your child a mantra to repeat when a bully is getting her down. This could be, "I got an A on my math exam!" or "I'm kinder and smarter and tougher than you" so it's not the bully's voice inside their heads. Positive mantras thwart the bully's main goal of destroying confidence. You might encourage your child to participate in individual rather than team sports to avoid locker-room bullying, and to build her individual strengths. Connecting your child with kids who share interests can be a huge buffer against bullying.

Ask for a daily progress report. Check in with your child every afternoon or evening, and offer lots of encouragement if things didn't go well at school. Discuss the situation, and devise ways to solve it. These regular discussions can make your child feel less alone and more empowered because you're working together to solve the problem.

Prevent cyber-bullying. First and foremost, limit screen time. Keep the computer in a public spot where you can casually pass by and see what's on the screen. Tell your child that you will periodically check her friend list, browsing history, and profiles. You must have the usernames and passwords to all social-media accounts. Help your child develop good online etiquette, so you know she isn't acting in a hostile way. If your child is being cyber-bullied, and you know the offender, get school personnel involved and solicit help from the bully's parents.

Above all, **be supportive and patient.** Let kids know it's OK to ask for help. Let them know that you are there for them, and love them. Enroll your child in activities where he can be successful. Share your stories of times in your life when people weren't very nice to you, and how you dealt with it.

FREE RESOURCE

Cyber-bullying: Is Your Child Safe Online?

<http://additu.de/cyber>

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Teaming Up with the School

“No child should have to spend entire days at school feeling ashamed, afraid, or embarrassed,” says Steven Richfield, Ph.D. To stop bullying in its tracks, you must communicate openly and frequently with your child’s teachers and school administrators. Never assume that bullying will “work itself out;” that is a dangerous and outdated frame of mind. Instead, follow these guidelines to get the school involved:

Report bullying to the school. Most schools have a zero-tolerance policy for bullying, but you should make sure you have all the facts and details—when the bullying happened, where it happened, what was said, and the names of any kids who witnessed it—before reaching out. If the bullying is happening in the classroom, alert teachers and the principal. If it’s happening in the cafeteria or the playground, loop in the lunchtime aides as well. Make sure that your child is not questioned in the same room at the same time with the bully. She may be intimidated by the other child’s presence. If you think that ADHD is a factor in the bullying, mention it. Ask school officials to contact the bully’s parents.

Alert teachers about under-the-radar bullies. Some kids are savvy bullies. They appear to be friendly and popular students who conceal their taunts and teasing from adults. Teachers might not notice transgressions because they consider them “nice kids.” Find out where the bullying occurs—the playground, bus, or cafeteria—and arrange for appropriate supervision.

Work on anti-bullying rules. If they aren’t already in place, work with the school administration to create anti-bullying rules and guidelines for bystanders. Many kids see what is happening but do not report anything because they fear retribution. A guidance counselor can empower the student body to take action and stick up for your child without fearing consequences.

Talk with the teacher. Ask if she can pair your child with another, friendly child to work on classwork and projects together. It will keep your child from feeling left out and unconnected, and will encourage her to practice social skills during school hours.

“Alert your child’s teachers and school principal about any bullying at school, and let the school take care of the situation.”

—GAY EDELMAN, FREELANCE JOURNALIST

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Contact the bully's parents. To stop a bully's behavior, you can't assume his parents or guardians know what's going on. Strike the right tone when contacting them, stating that you are on the same team and calling out of good will. Mention that you would want to be similarly informed if any parents complained to the school about your child. A neutral, problem-solving tone will work much better than a protective, offensive tone.

“Parents of bullies are in the best position to stop bullying behavior, but only if we stand up and let them know about it.”—STEVEN RICHFIELD, PH.D.

How Teachers Can Shut Down Bullying at School

Between 15 and 30 percent of all students are either bullies at school, or the target of physical, verbal, or cyber abuse.¹⁵ It's a common problem, and teachers can make a real difference by noticing early warning signs, intervening, and making students feel safe in the hallways, classroom, and school grounds.

When adults swiftly and repeatedly stop bullying behaviors, it sends a clear message to the bully that this is not acceptable, and to the child being targeted that she has support. Taking a strong stance can help kids feel safe at school. To intervene appropriately, follow these guidelines.

DO:

- 1. Practice prevention.** Before bullying starts, have a class discussion about what constitutes unacceptable behavior, what harm it can cause, and ways to prevent it. Tell them what steps to take if they observe another child being bullied.
- 2. Create cooperative projects that** teach children how to work toward a common goal, and problem-solve when they encounter conflict—without resorting to being mean.
- 3. Intervene immediately,** at the time bullying occurs, explain the unacceptable action, and impose consequences. Get another teacher or aide to help if needed.
- 4. Share details of the situation** with other school personnel whom interact with the children involved. Let the bully and the target know that all of the adults at school are aware of the situation.
- 5. Stay calm.** Show the behavior that you want students to use when dealing with conflict by remaining cool, respectful, and collected.

“Young people take cues from those around them. Compassion may not be the strongest suit for many preteens, but school can be an ideal setting for changing this paradigm.”

—CAROL BRADY, PH.D.

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6. Move the children apart. During recess, make sure they are on separate ends of the playground. In class or in the cafeteria, move their seats far apart. Assure kids they are safe from retaliation.

7. Send a child to the nurse's office or to a guidance counselor if he has any medical or mental health challenges that need attention. Give both the bully and the bullied child space to share feelings and recognize their own behavior.

8. Notify the children's parents. Contact both sets of parents, and be receptive to their concerns. Work with the parents to create a plan to prevent future incidents at school.

9. Give the bully constructive outlets for building leadership skills. Help the bully to use his social skills for good, like leading a cleanup crew after an art project or recruiting students for a volunteer project.

DON'T:

1. Mislabel bullying. When teachers downplay serious victimization, it can make students feel helpless and empower bullies. Take a zero-tolerance stance.

2. Assume kids will work it out on their own. Bullying is much more serious than kids being kids. Ignoring it will escalate the situation.

3. Try to get to the bottom of it while the bully and the target are together. Mediation with both children can be upsetting for the victim, who may feel intimidated—and with good reason. Talk to the kids separately, after they have both cooled down, in a private space. This prevents aggression from escalating, and keeps other students from seeing the bully as a hero or the target as a victim.

4. Publicly put other kids on the spot. Take note of anyone who witnessed the incident, and speak to him or her privately where they won't fear the bully's retribution.

5. Insist on immediate apologies. If kids patch things up because they are told to, it is usually just lip service to avoid getting in trouble. It could create greater resentment.

“Reporting someone to a teacher or parent is generally considered tattling—the kind of thing you do in elementary school. But reporting a bully is not. When a bully harasses you, he or she is trying to hurt you physically or emotionally. Abusive behavior is not tolerated in the adult world. It shouldn't be tolerated in middle school or high school.”

—BLAKE TAYLOR

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GET IMMEDIATE HELP WHEN:

1. A child has a weapon
2. Hate speech is involved—like racism or homophobia
3. There is a serious injury or the threat thereof
4. There is sexual abuse
5. Anyone participates in an illegal act such as robbery, blackmail, or extortion

Adapted from [Bullying Guidelines for Teachers](#), [Stop Bullying on the Spot](#), and [Bullying and Cyberbullying: Six Things Teachers Can Do](#).

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How I Beat the School Bully

By Blake Taylor

I am 11 years old, and in the middle of sixth grade. My family recently moved to California. It's Monday, my first day at my new school. As you would imagine, I dread being the new kid, especially when I'm not making new friends yet.

But, in particular, I'm feeling anxiety because I have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and I'm afraid it's going to show up in front of a large roomful of classmates.

After my mother and I go to the school office to fill out the paperwork, I am led to English, my first class. The teacher, Mr. Mackenzie, looks up from his desk and smiles at me. "OK, everyone, be quiet for a second. This is our new student, Blake Taylor." He manages to draw all the attention to me, creating an embarrassing situation. All eyes scrutinize me, and then a general "hello" echoes throughout the classroom.

The desks are clustered together in groups of four to allow students to interact. I sit with two girls and a boy named Brian. "Hi," I greet my table partners, as I accidentally knock my notebook and loose-leaf binder off the desk. The anxiety and nervousness of being new is at its height.

Although my classmates watch me with confounded eyes, they don't yet know me well enough to either ask or ridicule me about the reason for my awkwardness. I have that advantage for now. Eventually, I will tell some classmates that I'm an ADHD kid, as a means of explaining my behaviors.

Over the next month, Brian becomes my first friend. I learn about how he builds remote-controlled cars from scratch, flies gas-powered model airplanes, and repairs lawn sprinklers. His zeal for constructing things, however, has won him the reputation of being a nerd.

The Bully Rearr His Ugly Head

In February, Mr. Mackenzie rearranges the table assignments, as he does every two months, and Brian and I are moved to a table next to a boy named Phillip.

ADHD AND BULLYING

How to Stop the Teasing at School

<http://additu.de/nw>

ADDITUDE RESOURCE

How to Create Seating Plan for Children with ADHD

<http://additu.de/19v>

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“Today, we will begin our poetry unit,” says Mr. Mackenzie.

“What should I write about?” I ask Brian happily. I’ve started to feel comfortable in my class.

“I don’t know. A car?” he suggests.

“Oh, how about a snake? Yeah, that’s what I’ll do.” I start scribbling down words in my large handwriting, which resembles scratches on a page. I push out my elbows to balance myself on the desktop, and books and colored pencils spill onto the floor.

“I’d be surprised if you can write a poem about anything while dropping everything and making a scene,” Phillip interjects slyly. Brian and I exchange looks, trying to understand the reason for this verbal attack. “Is something wrong?” I ask Phillip. He doesn’t bother answering, but, instead, looks over at Brian and then back at me.

“You know, your friend here,” he says, pointing at Brian, “is the weirdest nerd I’ve ever seen.” Apparently, Brian and Phillip have known each other since elementary school. “Just shut up, Phillip,” Brian replies.

Before Phillip can think of another mean comment, Mr. Mackenzie announces that poetry time has ended. We won’t have to suffer any more of Phillip’s insults for now. However, we have eight more weeks of this seating arrangement and, therefore, eight more weeks of having to endure Phillip.

With time, Phillip’s comments become increasingly frequent and spiteful. Phillip turns toward Brian. “So, have you made any new friends lately?” he taunts. Brian doesn’t respond and, instead, looks down at the desk in dismay. “Oh, that’s right,” says Phillip, sarcastically answering his own question. “You can’t make any friends. You’d rather fix cars and sprinklers.” Brian seems helpless.

“And I’m sure you would make friends, with the way you talk,” I reply.

“Like you would know, shake-boy,” Phillip begins to taunt me by jerking his head around in imitation of my tic. “Hey, look, I’m Blake. I can’t stop shaking my head.” He is the only one in class laughing at his joke.

TIC DISORDERS
Overview and Facts
<http://additu.de/tic>

CHAPTER 4 How to Stop Bullies and Bullying

I adjust my glasses, readying myself for battle. “Seems like everyone’s laughing,” I answer. We are fighting a war of sarcasm. “Just leave us alone, Phillip,” Brian says.

“You’re so stupid,” Phillip says to Brian. I find this comment ironic, considering Brian’s engineering abilities. Before the argument can escalate any further, English class is over.

The faculty at my middle school pride themselves on helping to resolve differences between students. For a public school, the behavior rules are unusually strict. The slightest hint of harassment—physical or verbal—is not tolerated, provided that the teachers see or hear the infractions. Fights seldom break out in school. The strict detention system, which penalizes you for chewing a piece of gum, threatens harsh consequences for those who even think about starting a fight.

As a result, undercover verbal harassment is the weapon of choice among the middle-school’s students. And this harassment is common, because, unlike a fight, where there is ample evidence, like cuts and bruises, spoken words simply vanish into the air without a trace. Phillip is keenly aware of how to circumvent the school’s disciplinary policy, knowing that no one can obtain proof of his mean-spirited language—or so he thinks.

After more than three weeks of verbal attacks, I ask Brian, “So what do you want to do about Phillip?” I take a bite of my turkey sandwich.

“I don’t know. He’s a real jerk,” says Brian.

“If we tell Mr. Mackenzie, I guess, we would be tattletales, and that would be humiliating,” I say. “Your reputation would be ruined,” Brian says. “And Phillip would make fun of us about that, too.”

“We can’t fight him,” I add, “because then we’ll be blamed, even though he’s the one who started it with his trash talk.”

Setting Up the Sting

I tell myself that there has to be a way to outsmart Phillip. I get an idea and decide to run it by my mother after school. I have been talking to her about the Phillip ordeal ever since it began, and we’ve been brainstorming ways to defuse his comments.

CHAPTER 4 How to Stop Bullies and Bullying

We have discussed using a combination of humor, answering back, and ignoring him. I can tell that my mother is troubled, worried about my fitting in. I make her promise that she will let me handle the situation, because I do not want her contacting Phillip's parents and ruining my reputation at school.

"I want to record Phillip on a tape recorder," I say.

My mother takes a thoughtful breath. "OK..." We go upstairs to her office, and, after searching through the desk drawers for a few minutes, we find her miniature tape recorder.

Now, I need to find a place to hide the tape recorder, a spot where Phillip will not see it, but where it will still be close enough to record his insults. I decide that my nylon pencil case, attached to the inside of my binder, is the ideal place to house it.

Collecting the Evidence

"Today, we're finally going to get Phillip," I say to Brian the next morning. I describe how I'm going to use the tape recorder.

"Oh, that's cool; let's do it!" says Brian, smiling widely, feeling relieved, liberated, and excited all at the same time. Brian and I go to our table, followed by Phillip. I put my binder on top of the table and stick my hand inside the black pencil case, where the tape recorder is hidden. I press down the record button.

"So, have you been shaking your head lately?" Phillip says with a sneer. The first piece of evidence is gathered. Brian almost starts laughing.

"You're so stupid, you can't even answer a question," Phillip says to me. Then to Brian, he chides, "What are you laughing about, nerd?"

Brian attempts to draw Phillip out further. "Hey, Blake, I built this cool remote-control car."

"Yeah, that's all you do, fiddle with cars. That's why you have no friends," Phillip responds. "You, too, Blake. You don't have friends either. You're not popular. And you don't dress the right way."

"The main ingredient of resilience is a sense of humor."

—PETER JAKSA, PH.D.

CHAPTER 4 How to Stop Bullies and Bullying

The tape recorder is getting all of this. I am amazed that my plan is working so well. Phillip is incriminating himself.

“This English class is so stupid,” Phillip begins again. “I have more important things to do than sit here with the two of you—one a nerd, the other an ADHD case.” He is baiting us, but we don’t respond, and, luckily, he keeps on talking.

“I have a lot of friends, and I have a lot of fun with my friends. We do cool stuff, like burning things. We burn lots of things, and we don’t get caught. You know, I have a life.” Phillip prattles on. I almost open my mouth in shock, hearing that Phillip is not only a bully but also an amateur arsonist. But I restrain myself, hoping he’ll keep going.

“Well, I don’t enjoy destroying property,” I answer.

“Well, that’s your problem,” says Phillip, happily using my response as a springboard for an insult. “You don’t do anything that’s fun. And you shake your head. You’re always dropping things and bumping into people. That’s why no one likes you.”

I shut off the recorder and put my pencil case away. I don’t want to risk having Phillip find the tape recorder. After English class, Brian and I play back the tape, and, to our relief, Phillip’s voice is loud and clear.

When I return home at the end of the day, I play the tape for my mother, and we agree that the next step is to go to the school principal, Mrs. Chun. We ask Brian and his mother to join us.

I think to myself, “I can defeat the bully and still preserve my reputation at school.” I am not, after all, being a tattletale. I am just the messenger. Phillip has provided all the words. My classmates will view me as intelligent and courageous for bringing this bully to light.

Spilling the Beans

“So, what’s been going on?” Mrs. Chun asks when she meets with us.

“Well,” my mother begins, “one of the students, named Phillip, has been harassing Blake and Brian on a daily basis for the past five weeks.”

“If your child is being bullied at school, alert the teacher and school principal, providing as much detail as possible, as well as the names of any witnesses.” —STEVEN RICHFIELD, PH.D.

CHAPTER 4 How to Stop Bullies and Bullying

“Yes, I’ve heard the same from Brian,” says Brian’s mom.

“What does he say to you?” Mrs. Chun asks me.

“Well,” I say, as I reach into my backpack to pull out the tape recorder, “he says a lot of things. And some of his comments are recorded here.” Mrs. Chun looks with amazement at the tape recorder.

“Very cunning,” says Brian’s mother.

I place the tape recorder on Mrs. Chun’s desk and rewind the tape to the beginning. Phillip’s words spill out: “You’re so stupid, you can’t even answer a question.... Yeah, that’s all you do...and that’s why you have no friends.... You don’t dress the right way.... I have a lot of friends.... We burn lots of things, and we don’t get caught.”

After she’s heard the recording, Mrs. Chun responds, “Well, your case is very strong.” It’s more serious than she had initially thought. “I’ll talk with Phillip and his parents about this,” she says. The next day, Phillip is gone from school. In fact, he is gone for three days. It is pleasant in English class for the first time in weeks.

When he returns, he looks sullen. His eyes are downcast, and he avoids looking at Brian and me. He is no longer on the offensive. He is humiliated, knowing that he was outsmarted in a very public way. Outside of English class, Phillip approaches me.

“Blake, I’m sorry I was such a jerk. I picked on you because of your problem. I was also jealous of you. Jealous of your grades and that you could do better than me in school.”

I am taken aback by Phillip’s plain honesty. I am silent.

“It’s OK,” I finally respond. There is nothing more to say. Phillip had insulted me because of my ADHD, but in the end, he’s been forced to respect me—ADHD and all.

This piece was excerpted from Blake Taylor’s book, ADHD & Me. Reprinted with permission by New Harbinger Publications.

RECOMMENDED READ

[ADHD & Me](#)

by Blake E.S. Taylor
(New Harbinger)

CHAPTER 5

What To Do When Your Child Is the Bully

Chapter 5: What To Do When Your Child Is the Bully

Kids with ADHD are nearly 10 times more likely to be the *target* of a bully at school. They are also four times more likely to *bully other children*, according to a study published in the *Journal Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology*.¹⁶

We live in fear of learning that our child is being teased or victimized for ADHD symptoms she can't control. But it's a special sinking feeling we get when we learn it was our Emma who was taunting Olivia at lunch. Or that Noah gave little Logan a black eye on the basketball court. Incredulity. Disbelief. Dismay.

If it were our child being bullied, we would jump into action—telling teachers, talking to parents, arranging more supervision. But what's the best strategy for shutting down bullying when your child is the one causing the problem?

First, take a breath. You are probably feeling helpless and upset. But this behavior is not the result of anything you did. You're not a bad parent, but you do need to take action—now. Follow these strategies to stop the cycle of hurt and educate your child about better ways to communicate and demonstrate emotion, and enforce real consequences for bad behavior.

Carol Brady, Ph.D. says, “When children with ADHD first come to see me, it is common for them to ask, ‘Am I bad?’ It's heartbreaking every time. Whether it is due to their hyperactivity or impulsivity, these kids sometimes take roughhousing too far and hurt others unintentionally. Although a child should always be held accountable for hurting another child, these kids aren't usually reacting in anger; they're offending by exuberance.”

ADHD AGGRESSION

Teach Your Child Not to Bully

<http://additu.de/eu>

CHAPTER 5 What To Do when Your Child is the Bully

How to Stop Problem Behavior

The key to managing problem behavior at school is communication. If you believe that your child didn't mean to touch too forcefully, say that mean thing, or lash out, refrain from using labels when talking to your child. Start the discussion by talking about his good qualities, with the goal of devising a plan to improve his self-control.

Don't yell, or accuse your kids of bullying. Instead, present the facts that you heard, and ask about his behavior. Say, "I just got off the phone with Oliver's dad. He said you called Oliver names on the playground. Can you tell me what happened?" Your child might deny it. He might say nothing. He might not appear to be sorry. "You should remind him of how he felt the last time someone was mean to him," says Robert Sege, M.D., Ph.D., professor of pediatrics at Tufts University School of Medicine. Also remind him that lying about it will make the problem 1,000 times worse.

Gather the facts. Call the teacher. Get in touch with school staff. Find out where and when your child is having problems. Then, create a situation-based solution.

If the incident happened on the playground, ask recess attendants to put your child in charge of collecting balls and cones 10 minutes before returning to class. If too much spare time between classes is the problem, ask a teacher to have your child deliver a message to the office between periods. "Bullies are natural leaders," says Robert Sege, M.D., Ph.D. The key is to give them a positive outlet for those skills.

Ask for additional supervision in "hot spots." If your child taunts another child on the school bus, get her assigned to a seat close to the bus driver. In the classroom, ask for a seat near the teacher's desk. On the playground, limit your child's play to an area near recess attendees. Then staff can intervene and help to resolve any issues as soon as they start.

Brainstorm ideas with your child. Ask Mia to come up with a list of ways to control her emotions. You might be surprised at the ideas she lists. If she needs help getting started, suggest these trusted solutions from Carol Brady, Ph.D., "walking away, 'freezing' like a statue for a second or two, reading a book, or using positive 'self talk.'" Then, let your child decide which item on the list would work best at different times. Print out a little

RECOMMENDED READ

[*Socially ADDept*](#)

by Janet Z. Giler, Ph.D.
(Jossey-Bass)

CHAPTER 5 What To Do when Your Child is the Bully

card she can carry in her pocket to remind her of coping strategies when she gets excited.

Sometimes kids with ADHD lash out when they feel threatened, or are teased in a good-natured way by others. If this is the case, **use role-play techniques to help teach your child to regulate feelings** without teasing others. “Say, ‘I love you and think you’re wonderful, but I’m going to taunt you as part of a game,’” says Alan Kazdin, Ph.D., director of the Parenting Center and Child Conduct Clinic at Yale University. “No matter what I say, ignore me and don’t get aggressive.’ Then you might say, ‘You’re weird.’” When your child walks away without reacting, praise her. Give your child different strategies for different type of scenarios when he finds himself getting upset.

Children with ADHD are criticized more than enough. It’s important to hold them accountable for bullying or aggression, but it is equally important to teach them they are not “bad kids.” Giving kids the help they need to control behavior can help them understand that they can work to change.

Don’t feel like a bad parent. Instead, focus on working with your child to find constructive solutions to problems. “The more secure your child feels, the less likely he’ll bully others,” says Laura Flynn McCarthy, a writer specializing in parenting.

How Teachers Can Proactively Intervene with Bullies

When one student targets another student, it’s usually not just because he doesn’t like Carter’s hairstyle. Rather, it’s a personal issue that’s manifesting as aggression or hostility. Lily has undiagnosed dyscalculia, and despite being gifted in other subjects, she keeps failing math tests. Grayson’s parents are getting divorced, and he’s in the middle of fights at home. Zoey’s older sister has been abusing drugs and alcohol, and acting weird.

Children become bullies for different reasons:

- They are looking for attention they aren’t getting elsewhere.
- They are experiencing some frustration they don’t know how to solve.
- They are imitating someone they look up to who is a bully.

ADDITUDE RESOURCE
6 Strategies to Improve Social Skills
<http://additu.de/19w>

CHAPTER 5 What To Do when Your Child is the Bully

- They don't understand social rules, and don't realize they are acting inappropriately.

Boys tend to bully in different ways than girls. Boys typically are more physical—they will shove, or punch. Girls more often target other children with social exclusion.

The good news is, bullying is often a learned behavior or coping mechanism that can be unlearned or will become unnecessary when the frustration goes away. To get to the bottom of why kids are bullying, ask questions like these that will help you to discern the root cause:

- Did you make fun of Evelyn because it made you feel smarter or better?
- Did you shove Henry because your older brother shoves you when he's mad?
- Did you exclude Owen on the playground because the cool kids did?
- Did you tear up Aria's test with an A because you really wanted to get an A instead of a C?
- Did you realize that Sebastian doesn't like to roughhouse?

Depending on the type of bully you are dealing with, the way to respond can vary. Regardless of the reason, be sure to treat all bullies with compassion and kindness, and help them understand why their behavior is hurtful.

If a student in your class is bullying others, contact the bully's parents to help you figure out what is going on, and use the [guidelines recommended by the American Psychological Association](#).

How to Shed the Bully Label

Labels—especially the negative ones—have a way of sticking in the minds of teachers and classmates. If you hear from a teacher or through the grapevine, that your child with ADHD is a bully and you feel that label is unfair, it's time to talk to the teacher and school staff. Carol Brady, Ph.D., recommends taking these steps:

- Explain to them that your child's aggressive behavior is not always rooted in anger and is rarely intentional.

“When I get upset or disapproving, she misbehaves even more because she is now feeling blamed and frustrated. At that point, any attempt to explain to her what she did wrong is futile.”

—LOVETHYSELF, ADDCONNECT USER

CHAPTER 5 What To Do when Your Child is the Bully

- Come to the meeting armed with books or magazine articles about ADHD.
- Let them know what you're doing to improve your child's self-control.
- Tell the teacher how she can help—by tapping him on the shoulder when he gets loud during group work or placing him at the front of the line when the class is walking to the lunchroom.
- Ask the teacher to praise your child when she sees him “leaving the scene” or using another solution from his self-control plan.

Grown-ups' acknowledgement of positive characteristics is a powerful reinforcement for any child who worries he may be “bad.” Kids can also take steps to show adults and classmates that they are working on turning over a new leaf. To change a bad reputation, Elizabeth A. Laugeson, Psy.D., recommends following these guidelines:

- **Law low.** Your child should fly under the radar for a few months to let the upsetting behavior fade from memory.
- **Follow the crowd.** Try to fit in as much as she can to avoid calling extra attention to herself.
- **Change your look.** Altering an outward appearance is akin to showing people, physically, that you have changed.
- **Own up to your previous reputation.** When other kids comment about the changes, your child can say, “Yea, I used to do that, but not anymore.” Or, “Yea, I'm different now.” Instead of, “I didn't do that,” or “You don't know me!”
- **Find an accepting social group.** Once teachers and classmates see that your child is working hard to control himself, they will see him in a different light.¹⁷

“Teachers make or break the student.”

—LW814, ADDCONNECT USER

CHAPTER 5

Friendship in Real Life, Personal Stories

Chapter 6: Friendship in Real Life, Personal Stories

More often than not, it's our readers' real-life stories that best convey the heartbreak a parent feels when her child is ostracized, teased, or otherwise socially hurt. The following stories convey a rainbow of emotions, and offer tested strategies for helping your child learn to make friends who will love and support her.

Someone to Play With: Finding Friendships for My Child with ADHD

My son is not socially gifted. Friends don't come easily to him—or to me. But together we're figuring it out.

By Jane Doe

Parents are often the last to know when a child has attention deficit disorder. Not because they're unintelligent, but because their love blinds them to certain realities that others easily perceive. If you've been wondering whether your child has ADHD, it might help to ask yourself: "Does my child have friends? Does he get invited over to play with other children?"

Although my son, James, has developed all the other skills in the job description for childhood, friendship has eluded him. This thing "normal" children create so effortlessly must be painstakingly taken apart, analyzed, and synthesized by my child's brain, each step of the way.

I can look back on James's early childhood and see all the signs—of his distress and my oblivion. It started with a call from the day-care center: James wouldn't nap, and he was disturbing the other children. I murmured some vague disclaimer, all the while thinking, "Good for him!"

As a child, I hadn't gone in for napping, either, and my mother had eventually been forced to take me out of nursery school. I was in complete solidarity with my son.

"This thing 'normal' children create so effortlessly must be painstakingly taken apart, analyzed, and synthesized by my child's brain, each step of the way."

CHAPTER 6 Friendship in Real life, Personal Stories

Smiling at His Highjinks

The next call from the day-care center elicited some not-so-nice emotions from me (I can't believe I used to wonder where my son got his belligerence). Gravely, the director informed me that James was knocking over the other children's blocks. When I heard this, I had to suppress a laugh.

The image of James taking a swipe at a tower of blocks seemed comical. I admired the nerve of this boy, his willingness to brook the disapproval of his peers. Besides, what could I say? That I'd speak to him about it? He was barely three years old.

The next call was not funny, even to me. The director asked my husband and me to come in for a talk. She could no longer keep James in the program, because he was scaring the other children. She advised us to enroll him in the public school's early-intervention program. We sat gaping, stunned by this rejection. It was the first of many rejections that lay ahead.

Being Sorry Didn't Matter

Still, it took a few more ruptured relationships before I was ready to appreciate the extent of my son's difficulty with other children. I remember the afternoon James was playing outside with a friend's three children. The girl did something that made James mad. He picked up a rock and threw it at her head. Luckily, she escaped with only a bump, but her mom chewed me out: How could I have let this happen? My feeling was, how could I not? James had picked up that rock and thrown it before I could so much as yell his name. My sincere contrition counted for nothing. I was a parent who put other children in harm's way.

The next incident involved a couple we'd seen often before our boys were born. We invited them for the weekend, envisioning our four-year-olds playing happily for hours. At first everything seemed fine. James offered to take the boy down the hill to his "secret spot" in a stand of fir trees, and they set off while I made lunch. It was early summer, and we left the door open in case the boys needed anything.

Then came a wailing sound. The other boy's mom bolted from the table and ran down the hill. She returned with her sobbing son and announced that they were leaving immediately. I got up, mystified and hurt, trailing them to the front door, asking what had happened. The mother just shook her head as she strapped her son into his car seat.

CHAPTER 6 Friendship in Real life, Personal Stories

The next day, my husband got the story, man to man, from the boy's father. Apparently, once the boys were far from the house, James had said in a flat, chilling tone: "You're all alone now." Who knows what he had meant.

My Son, Myself: Finally—a Friend

In fourth grade, James finally made a friend—or so I thought. He chose a great boy—funny, generous, affectionate. The boy's mother worked two jobs, and I quickly offered to fill in as babysitter. The boys had a couple of sleepovers and they made up a rock 'n' roll band.

Ecstatic, my husband and I invited James's friend to come for a week at the beach that summer. A few days before our scheduled departure, I took the boys to a local park for a swim. I sat reading the paper, warmed by the thought that my lonely only child had finally come out of the cold.

At one point the boys asked me for paper and pen, and I obliged, surprised, perhaps, but incurious. That night, I got a call from the park warden. Two boys had dumped campfire ashes inside a truck parked by the lake. The boys had scrawled obscenities on a piece of paper and placed it atop the ashes.

My first reaction, I now realize, was typical for a grownup with ADHD. It couldn't have been James, I calmly told the warden, because James was a good speller; he would never misspell "damn you." Alas, the miscreants confessed. (Maybe the friend had done the writing.) I felt obliged to tell the friend's mother what had happened. She told her son not to play with James, ever, ever again.

How loose is too loose?

My son's tenth birthday is coming up, and I'm wondering what to do about a party. At his party last year, James lost another friend, a boy with Asperger syndrome. The boys were driving go-karts. The friend pulled ahead and—as he does whenever his position is challenged—James flew into a rage. After the race ended, the other boy curled so tightly into the fetal position that I had a hard time getting him into the car for the ride home.

After that, I called several times to invite the boy over to play, but his mother never called back. When I saw her in the pick-up circle at school, she said life for her son was hard enough without James.

CHAPTER 6 Friendship in Real life, Personal Stories

Any parent of a child with ADHD probably has similar heartaches. And since ADHD runs in families, a parent's distress is compounded by the realization that he or she is, genetically speaking, to blame. Coming, as I do, from the undiagnosed generation, it was galling to realize that that my parenting style, however loving, revealed my own ADHD traits: I have trouble anticipating what will happen, and I don't read social cues well. My son praises me for being "a loose mom," and it's true that I am. But I'm afraid I may be too laissez-faire for him.

One benefit of having me for a mother is that I truly understand what my son is up against. If it took me this long to learn never to leave his side—not for a nanosecond—whenever he's around other children, imagine how hard it must be for him to learn all the secret rules and rites of friendship.

"One benefit of having me for a mother is that I truly understand what my son is up against. If it took me this long to learn never to leave his side—not for a nanosecond—whenever he's around other children, imagine how hard it must be for him to learn all the secret rules and rites of friendship."

Savoring Success When We Can

So we struggle along, my son and I, trying to behave appropriately and "make good choices." We savor success when we can. Last spring James hit a baseball, with the bases loaded, and I practically lost my voice from screaming. Never mind that it wasn't an organized team, or that he had already struck out in three previous at-bats. He was incredibly brave to give it another try, and it was grand beyond words to see him succeed.

No, James is not socially gifted. But like many other special-needs kids, he has strengths that could bring him strong friendships later in life. True to the profile, he's bright, creative, and strong-willed. He doesn't automatically respect authority, and, in part because he isn't slavishly attuned to what other people think, he has a wonderful sense of humor. I figure if he can make it through childhood and adolescence, he'll make a good (if bossy) adult friend.

Having spotted yet another example of what he calls "fake happiness" promoted by the self-worth industry, my son came home from school one day recently, scoffing. "Guess what we learned in 'character ed.' today," he said dryly. Then, in a perfect, singsong schoolteacher voice, he mimicked: "Every day is a gift."

We both burst out laughing. Then I said, "You know the funniest thing about that, James? It's true."

“I Want Friends, But They Don’t Want Me”

Hyperactive, awkward, and immature: My son might as well have a “kick me” sign on his back when it comes to his peers.

By Penny Williams

My son, Ricochet, has had trouble socially ever since his peers were old enough to be perceptive and discerning. By second grade, he came home and told me about kids being mean to him at school. He was up against a throw-you-on-the-ground-on-the-playground-and-punch-you-repeatedly bully in third grade—a kid who, with his posse of miniature thugs, taunted Ricochet until he reacted.

In the three years since, my son has been called “gay,” “dummy,” “dork,” “baby,” among other things. Ricochet may not be able to read social cues like body language and tone of voice, but he knows that being punched and called names hurts.

Each school year Ricochet instantly connects with a kid or two in his class who is hyperactive and awkward, like Ricochet. The same was true this past school year, in fifth grade. His teacher came to IEP meetings and told me my son does great socially, because he spends all of his time with two other boys in his class—outcasts like Ricochet. The school thinks he’s doing just fine with social skills.

Outside of recess, where these imaginative boys can be themselves together, Ricochet struggles a lot. This momma’s heart breaks because, at 11 years old, he’s too old for me to step in and mediate. He’s gullible, immature, and awkward—he might as well have a “kick me” sign on his back.

We used to live at the top of a mountain when Ricochet was younger. We moved off the mountain and into a traditional neighborhood almost two years ago, in part so that our children could learn to ride a bike, and have other kids within walking distance to hang out with. We settled into our and began looking around for boys Ricochet’s age. There didn’t seem to be any until a family moved in across the street about six months later. They had a boy in fourth grade also. It seemed like kismet.

ADDITUDE BLOG

Boy Without Instructions

<http://additu.de/boy>

CHAPTER 6 Friendship in Real life, Personal Stories

I recognized that Ricochet's quirks and obsessions could be annoying to his peers, so I didn't know if these boys would be friends. The possibility for my kiddo was exciting, though. They quickly began to play outside, play video games, and build LEGOs together. They became fast friends and spent a good amount of time together. They are in the same grade, but Ricochet is almost a year older than our neighbor, so that bridges some of the maturity gap and works to his advantage.

A year went by with a few misunderstandings and disputes, but the boys remained friends. Then it changed seemingly in an instant. As a pre-teen, his friend began spending more time with his older brother and emulating him. Pretty soon, Ricochet became the target of jokes and aggressive behavior from our neighbor boys. His calm, kind friend was neither calm nor kind anymore.

Ricochet was deeply hurt. He came in the house crying and slamming doors. He didn't understand why they were mean to him. He didn't understand why his friend seemed to have turned on him. After a fairly aggressive encounter a few weeks ago, Ricochet kicked his friend in anger, and was punched in the face. After talking it through with his therapist, he decided to explain to his friend why he got angry, apologize for kicking him, and put it all behind him.

Ricochet did apologize. But as soon as he joined his friend and his older brother at the park, he was told he was no longer welcome. His friend is maturing at a neurotypical rate and isn't interested in Ricochet—who is still naïve and child-like in the presence of older kids. I am a friend of the kids' mom, but I didn't feel like it was my place to talk to her about it. I didn't feel like it would do any good. In fact, it could make the situation worse.

Ricochet was hurt, but recognized that he was not willing to be the gullible scapegoat in the group any more. He spent the first three weeks of summer break alone, determined not to be the first one to try to break the feud. Every now and then I gave him some ideas on how he might break the ice, only to be told his friend had to apologize before he talked to him again.

Yesterday we talked in the car about inviting him to a water-gun fight, something the boys enjoyed together in the past. Ricochet still seemed unwilling. Yet, as I pulled into the garage when we returned home, Ricochet

“Pretty soon, Ricochet became the target of jokes and aggressive behavior from our neighbor boys. His calm, kind friend was neither calm nor kind anymore.”

CHAPTER 6 Friendship in Real life, Personal Stories

said, “I’m going to see if he wants to have a water gun fight.” He jumped out and ran across the street.

It worked! His friend was game, and they ended up hanging out together for several hours. Much to my relief, it looks like they will spend time together again, at least without the presence of his friend’s older brother.

Still, I am very worried about Ricochet’s future. I fear what the social machine will do to him in middle school and high school.

A Friend is a Friend, At Any Age

My daughter, Natalie, who has ADD/ADHD, has trouble making neurotypical friends her own age. Her solution to her social problems: start playing with younger kids, who like the attention from an older child. Is there any reason I should be worried about this?

By Kay Marner

Natalie and I were outside last night when a mom and her three kids, who recently moved to our neighborhood, walked up to our house. Two of the kids were holding copies of my picture book, *Dog Tales: The Adventures of Smyles*, for me to sign. Natalie chatted them up while I went into the house to find a blue Sharpie. She kept up the conversation until I came back out, pen in hand, and sat on the front steps while the kids spelled their names aloud for me as I inscribed their books.

Pausing to look at the two youngest, the boys, Nat said, “Wait a minute, didn’t I chase you today at recess?”

They both smiled and nodded shyly.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder can wreak havoc on a child’s social life. Kids with tend to mature more slowly than their peers and have trouble reading nonverbal social cues. The school playground can be a feelings-hurting, anxiety-provoking, isolation-creating challenge, rather than the memory-making, BFF-finding, steam-releasing outlet it’s meant to be. Natalie comes home with stories of having no one to play with or approaching a group of her peers just to hear, “Natalie’s coming. Run!”

Now, it appears, she’s found a way to compensate. Natalie, a fourth grader, is playing with much younger kids.

Earlier this week, after school got out, she and I stood in front of the building, because Natalie wanted me to meet her friends. Two little girls burst through the doors. “Hi, Natalie!” they both said.

“Want me to chase you?” Nat asked, and they squealed and ran. Nat chased them, growling. When she caught them, they laughed, delighted by this attention from a big fourth grader.

ADDITUDE BLOG

My Picture-Perfect Family

<http://additu.de/ppf>

CHAPTER 6 Friendship in Real life, Personal Stories

“See you tomorrow!” they said and headed for the school bus.

Playing with younger kids can be a healthy coping skill for our kids. It gives them a chance to have someone look up to them, the chance to be a leader—heady stuff for kids who may often be excluded or even bullied by their peers. Plus, for once, their differences may be overlooked. And children may have more in common with younger kids than they do with their typically developing peers.

As long as the little kids want to be chased, I don’t see a downside to Nat chasing them. Parents, am I missing any potential problems? Or is my gut instinct right—that a friend is a friend at any age?

CHAPTER 6 Friendship in Real life, Personal Stories

Friends Forever

When I was afraid to tell my longtime friends about Lee's ADHD, they reached out with their hearts.

By Jennifer Gay Summers

"They're talking about popular stuff, Mom. I want to go home," said Lee, burrowing into my side, finding the old familiar groove she loved as a child. I put my arm around her and gave her a tight squeeze.

Teens with ADHD

We were at a swimming party reunion with a group of friends we'd known since preschool. We hadn't seen them in six years. One family had moved to a different state and was back to visit, so we gathered in their honor. There were seven teenagers, who now went to different schools. We parents tried to pick up where we left off so long ago.

Lee had changed a lot, challenged by the differences that living with ADHD created, socially and academically. The happy-go-lucky attitude these kids would have remembered about Lee was now replaced by a teenage self-consciousness, coupled with anxiety in social settings when she didn't have her friends by her side.

"Mom, please?" Lee whispered. She nodded toward the door.

I whispered back, "Give them a chance, Lee. I'm sure you'll find something in common."

She moved off alone to the table with chips and dip, clutching her pool towel for security, the way she used to clutch her blanket.

My husband was working that day, and I sat at the end of the table feeling alone, listening to the other adults talk. Their kids were doing well in cross-country, honors classes, cheerleading. What if they knew how ADHD affected Lee, how her learning disabilities kept her at the other end of the spectrum from honors classes, how she belonged to a group of artists and computer geeks that others picked on. Maybe Lee was right. Maybe we should leave.

ADDITUDE BLOG

Mom Is the Word

<http://additu.de/mistw>

CHAPTER 6 Friendship in Real life, Personal Stories

“Is everything OK, Jennifer?” said one mom. She leaned in to me and asked, “How is Lee doing?”

“We’re hanging in there...” The minute I heard those words, I knew I was falling into the old trap of feeling sorry for myself. One I thought I’d escaped: My child wasn’t typical like theirs. She squeezed my hand. “Let’s have lunch.”

I looked into her concerned eyes and remembered these old friends. They had come to the hospital to comfort us when Lee had pneumonia. They helped at all of her birthday parties, always the last to leave. They were the ones who cheered the loudest when Lee won an art award at a school assembly.

The truth was that the times we had shared still bonded us together in a friendship that didn’t care whose kid was smart or athletic or whose had ADHD.

When I went upstairs to tell Lee it was time to go home, she was hanging in the game room, slouched over a chair like the others.

“Aw, Mom, do I have to go?”

One of the kids pleaded, “Let her stay!” And the others joined in.

I went back downstairs, smiling. She, too, had found a way past her fears, back home to old friends.

“The truth was that the times we had shared still bonded us together in a friendship that didn’t care whose kid was smart or athletic or whose had ADHD.”

Friends for My Daughter—Finally

The sweetest sound of my day is Lee laughing with her buddies.

By Jennifer Gay Summers

I stood in the cool afternoon breeze, listening for the sound of the girls' voices, the slap of their shoes running down the back path from the school. But it was the laughter I heard first, the sweetest sound of my day. All three thundered down the small slope that led to the street and down to my car. They passed under the tennis shoes someone had tossed up on the telephone wire with "Forever Friends" scrawled on the rubber sole. Lee has friends, I thought, close friends to be with all day. For many girls, that would be a given, but for Lee, who struggles with the social consequences of ADHD, it was a precious gift.

The social order that usually pairs off girls in twos spelled trouble for my daughter. In preschool, when she had trouble paying attention to any one friend, two princesses figured they were better off alone and locked her out of their castle. I hugged Lee in my arms as tears slipped down her cheeks. "Mommy," she cried, "why can't we all play together?"

By elementary school, she'd given up on having one best friend. Her hyperactivity made it impossible to sit still and listen. Girl talk was boring, and waiting in line to play a game on the blacktop was worse. Lee lived for lunch when she could escape to the grassy field by the sandbox. There, she fit in. She ran wild chasing lizards and dug holes to find roly polys. No need for a best friend.

When Lee started middle school, I worried. Without a grassy field at lunch, how could she fit into the social pecking order? What I didn't take into consideration was the enormous size of the sixth-grade class. After a few months, Lee found her tribe, and they have stayed together. They are different kids who share interests. One is an artist, someone to draw with and study anime. The other loves to hunt reptiles, and another is a computer whiz. I cross my fingers they will be those "Forever Friends" when it comes time for high school.

When the girls got into my car after school that day, I could feel Lee's energy bouncing off the small SUV's interior. "I'm hyper, hyper, hyper!" she called out.

"For many girls, friends would be a given, but for Lee, who struggles with the social consequences of ADHD, it was a precious gift."

CHAPTER 6 Friendship in Real life, Personal Stories

“Move over, Lee, and sit still!” Kay commanded.

“Here, look at the picture I drew today,” Annie said, pulling out her drawing notebook. In the space of minutes, her friends were calming her down and getting her to focus, better than I ever could.

That night, I asked her if there was one friend she liked the best. “They’re all my best friends, mom. Duh! I love all my friends equally.”

If only all the little princesses in the castles could do the same.

My Daughter's Emotional Floods—and the Unseen Damage Left Behind

When my 8 year old is overwhelmed by anger or frustration, my words and reactions—no matter how calm—only fan the flames. So I refuse to react. And pray that she knows deep down how much I love her even during these anguishing moments.

By Rebecca Brown Wright

The intense and sudden screaming coming from my 8 year old might have suggested a giant, poisonous snake bite. Or a house fire. Perhaps even an alien abduction. But, no, the actual event preceding the scream heard 'round the world was... wait for it... being told to take a shower.

Handling My Daughter's Emotional Flooding and ADHD

But not one minute later, she happily hopped into the shower while laughing at something funny her baby brother was doing—with zero acknowledgment of the explosion just moments before.

It all left me scratching my head, so I went looking for rhyme or reason—preferably both.

I recognized my daughter right away in this description of intense and sudden reactions written by Thomas E. Brown, Ph.D: “Flooding: A momentary emotion that can gobble up all of the space in an ADHDer’s head like a computer virus can gobble up all of the space in a hard drive.”

So there's a name for it: flooding. Hooray!

Now what?

Her intense flooding emotions take me by surprise every time. I used to try to end the extreme outbursts by talking, arguing, and even screaming through them. Of course, that only prolonged the flood.

I now know she really couldn't hear my logic during that time... but she could certainly hear my anger. And that only fed the flood.

ADDITUDE BLOG

Thrilled by the Thought

<http://additu.de/rebecca>

CHAPTER 6 Friendship in Real life, Personal Stories

When we both reached the point of drowning, I knew I had to stop responding. I began saying, “I will not fight with you”—and I stuck to it.

Gradually—oh, so gradually—she understood I was serious. And her brain mercifully allowed the waters to recede quicker during each flood.

But the floods haven’t disappeared. And while they’re now shorter, they’ve developed a dangerous mutation. In place of the arguments, she activates blame and self-pity. “Nobody cares about me!” she shouts. “Why does everyone treat me so bad?”

This new element—the expressed anguish over not feeling loved—gnaws at me.

Does she mean what she says? Does she really believe nobody cares about her? Does she truly think we’re treating her badly?

I know she felt it in the moment. But does it linger? Does it build?

I don’t know.

And I know I won’t know for a long time. I may not know until she’s an adult and she’s able to articulate how deeply it hurt when she stood screaming that nobody loved her... and nobody did anything.

Will she understand that my hands are tied? That I literally can’t do anything without propelling her into a deeper fury?

All I know is that letting the flood fill her brain without resistance is the shortest path to returning calm. And because there are other children in the house, I worry about their happiness. So if ignoring her snake-bite screams gets us all to a happier place sooner, that’s what I feel I have to do.

But should I just keep letting the floods happen without worrying about the leftover water damage?

No.

During the happy times, my job is to caulk any leaks; to batten down the hatches; to give her solid footing that can better withstand a flood. Here’s how I think about doing that.

My Fortifying Plan for Withstanding the Floods

- She and I picked the number 10 as a daily hug goal. As we have fun reaching that number each day—getting sillier with every hug—I hope all my deposits into the bank of security and warmth will supersede any flood damage.
- Her love language falls somewhere between hugs and words, so I leave love notes where she'll find them.
- We read stories while we snuggle.
- I've recently re-resolved to try and stop what I'm doing to give my attention to her when she's asking for it.

I have to believe that refusing to fight when she is flooding is actually an act of mercy to her. Instead of installing a dam when her emotions desperately need to spill forth, I let her release them.

And then I just pray that my efforts to reinforce and build up during the happy times will carry more weight than the hurt feelings during the floods.

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