

# Collaborate, Advocate and Educate

Act with a plan and give your child a better chance at success this school year

Elaine Lerner, MSW, CSW

ADHD Parent Trainer

ADHD has been recognized as a legitimate diagnosis by medical, psychological and educational organizations. ADHD is biologically based and is the result of an imbalance of chemical messages or neurotransmitters within the brain. People with ADHD have a great deal of difficulty with aspects of daily life including time management, organizational skills, focus, impulsivity and sometimes hyperactivity.

Because of this chemical imbalance, and the everyday problems a child with ADHD faces, parents need to learn how to Advocate, Collaborate and Educate others in the best interest of their child. Parents interact with their child on a regular basis and in the best position to observe the characteristics that could create problems for them in the classroom. Through these interactions they can identify strengths as well as areas that need to be accommodated. This school year, take the time to properly assess your child's situation and put together a plan of action.

- **Step 1. Assess your child's situation.** If it has been a while, or if you have not already done so, have your child diagnosed by a qualified medical professional. The diagnosis will help you better understand their characteristics and what causes them to act the way they do. ADHD is dynamic and can be ever changing. Having your child seen regularly by a medical professional can help you identify changes in treatment.
- **Step 2. Review last year's school experience.** Sit down with your child and take note of what worked and what didn't work for them in school last year. Perhaps they had a special teacher who listened to them or perhaps they were allowed to be a class monitor so they could relieve their stress in class without being noticed. Make note of these special situations.
- **Step 3. Review what is happening in school this year.** You can gain many useful insights by comparing what is not working this year with what worked last year. Perhaps the teacher has placed them in the back of the class where they cannot take part in the class easily. Perhaps this teacher does not understand how to work with an ADHD child to build upon their strengths. Perhaps they don't understand why children with ADHD act the way they do. Identifying key difference from one year to another can reveal ways to build a plan to improve your child's educational experience.
- **Step 3. Set up a Parent Teacher Meeting and build a working relationship with the teacher.** Remember, it is always better to be an Advocate than an Adversary as Adversaries often wind up with adverse results. Begin the meeting with the teacher on a positive note. For example, give the teacher a letter describing your child's best qualities and strengths. Everyone has strengths and good qualities even though they may need help with other areas. Everyone needs to be accommodated in certain areas. Tell your teacher how committed you are to help your child and to work with them. Tell them how their ADHD has impacted them over the years and just how much you want to help them. Create a working partnership with the teacher rather than an adversarial relationship.
- **Step 4. Offer to work with the teacher to develop a working plan.** Perhaps you can offer to set up daily routines that can be used at school to help accommodate your child's needs. Offer to communicate with the teacher by email or by written note each day or weekly. Work out a plan to receive weekly assignments in advance or on the school website. Arrange for a

school classmate to be a homework buddy to help your child organize their books and assignments before they leave each day. If your child constantly leaves their books at school ask for a second set to keep at home. Showing your concern and creating a connection with the teacher really works.

- **Step 5. Learn the basics of Special Education Law.** Educational laws may appear to be complex, but if your child is diagnosed with ADHD your child has specific rights. Understanding their rights for a 504 Plan or for an IEP (Individual Educational Plan) will empower you. These laws were developed to protect your child and should be used when appropriate. Just a little knowledge goes a long way when advocating for your child. Depending upon the diagnosis and their performance at school, they may be eligible for accommodations. This might include special assistive technology accommodations such as of a PDA on which to keep track tasks, use of a tape recorder to record lessons on or a use of a portable keyboard on which to type. In addition, other accommodations might be reduced homework assignments or resource room. Remember, if your child is falling behind, you have the right to ask for help and to follow up with a team meeting of school professionals.
- **Step 6. Organize your child's room at home.** Children with ADHD have trouble with organization. A few minutes helping them organize their room can make a life run more smoothly for them as well as you and your family. For example, label and color-code bins in which they can place their belongings. Set up file cabinets and color code the file folders for storage of schoolwork. Set up a homework workstation with color-coded sections. Blue on the left for homework to be done. Green in the center for assignments being worked on. Red on the right for assignments that are done that need to go back to school. At the end of the evening place these assignments into their school bag to avoid last minute chaos in the morning.
- **Step 7. Create Morning, Daytime and Evening routines.** Routines will bring calm to your family. Routines need to be clearly stated and followed consistently. Routines are best understood when reduced to writing or presented in a visual format. ADHD children are very visual. Focus on one item at a time. Break larger tasks down into smaller tasks. Allow for breaks in between. Reinforce good behavior or completion of tasks with positive rewards. ADHD children receive far too much negative attention. Try your best to pay positive attention to their efforts. Remember, changing behavior or habits takes time. Be sure to be patient and keep on trying.

Every child deserves the best chance for success in school. If you follow these simple ideas and Collaborate, Advocate and Educate those you who can help your child can make all the difference for your child this school year.



**Elaine Lerner, MSW, CSW** is an ADHD and ODD Parent Trainer. She trained with Russell Barkley, PhD, an internationally recognized authority on ADHD. She conducts Parent Trainings in Garden City and Melville. She is also available for individual, couple and family counseling as well as Social Skills Coaching for Teens and ADHD Grandparent Trainings

**Elaine Lerner MSW, CSW**

**233 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 200 Garden City, NY 11530**

**592 Bardini Drive Melville, NY 11747**

**Office: (516) 487-0636 • Fax: (888) 441-1743**

**[Elaine@ADHDParentTrainer.com](mailto:Elaine@ADHDParentTrainer.com) • [WWW.ADHDParentTrainer.com](http://WWW.ADHDParentTrainer.com)**