FREE GUIDE

My Child's ADHD: 30-Day Action Plan

A practical, week-by-week guide for parents who just received an ADHD diagnosis. From understanding the diagnosis to building routines that work.

Printable · Shareable

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You are your child's greatest advocate. This plan gives you the tools to start.

Your Child Was Just Diagnosed. Now What?

If your child has just been diagnosed with ADHD, you are probably experiencing a whirlwind of emotions: relief that there is an explanation, worry about what it means, and uncertainty about what to do next.

Here is the most important thing to know: ADHD is one of the most well-researched and treatable conditions in all of psychiatry. With the right support, children with ADHD thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

This 30-day plan breaks the overwhelming first month into manageable weekly goals. You do not have to do everything at once. Just focus on one week at a time.

> **A Note About Guilt**
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> Many parents feel guilty after a diagnosis, wondering if they missed something or caused it. ADHD is a neurobiological condition. It is not caused by parenting style, screen time, sugar, or anything you did or did not do. Let go of guilt and focus on moving forward.

Week 1: Understanding the Diagnosis

Before you take action, take a breath and learn. This week is about building your knowledge foundation.

Day 1–2: Process Your Emotions

- It is normal to feel relieved, scared, sad, or all of the above
- Talk to your partner, a trusted friend, or a therapist about how you are feeling
- Remind yourself: a diagnosis is not a label. It is a roadmap for help
- Write down your three biggest concerns — you will address them over the next month

Day 3–4: Learn the Basics

ADHD affects the brain's executive functions: attention, impulse control, working memory, organization, and emotional regulation. It comes in three presentations:

- **Predominantly Inattentive:** difficulty focusing, easily distracted, forgetful, loses things
- **Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive:** fidgety, talks excessively, acts without thinking, cannot wait
- **Combined:** features of both types (the most common presentation)

Day 5–7: Start a Symptom and Behavior Journal

- Note what times of day are hardest for your child
- Track triggers: transitions, homework, boredom, overstimulation
- Record what helps: movement breaks, timers, one-on-one attention
- This journal will be invaluable at follow-up appointments and school meetings

Understanding Medication (If Recommended)

If your doctor has recommended medication, here is what you should know:

- Stimulant medications (like methylphenidate and amphetamine-based medications) are the first-line treatment and have decades of safety data
- They work by increasing dopamine and norepinephrine in the brain, which improves focus and self-control
- Common side effects include decreased appetite, difficulty falling asleep, and mild stomach upset. Most are manageable and often improve over time

- Medication is not a cure — it is a tool that makes other strategies work better
- Non-stimulant options exist if stimulants are not a good fit

> **Medication Myth**
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> "Medication changes who my child is." When dosed correctly, ADHD medication helps your child be MORE themselves, not less. If your child seems flat, zombie-like, or overly subdued, that is a sign the dose or medication needs adjustment — tell your doctor immediately.

Week 2: Setting Up School Support

School is where ADHD challenges show up most. This week, you will start building a support system at school.

Day 8–9: Contact the School

- Email your child's teacher and school counselor to share the diagnosis
- Request a meeting to discuss accommodations
- Ask about the process for getting a 504 Plan or IEP evaluation
- Keep all communication in writing (email is best) for documentation

Day 10–11: Learn About 504 Plans and IEPs

Two types of formal school support exist:

- **504 Plan:** Provides accommodations (extra time, preferential seating, breaks) without changing curriculum. Easier to get.
- **IEP (Individualized Education Program):** Provides specialized instruction and services. Requires formal evaluation by the school. More comprehensive.

Most children with ADHD start with a 504 Plan. Common accommodations include:

- Extended time on tests and assignments
- Preferential seating (near the teacher, away from distractions)
- Permission to take movement breaks
- Chunking of large assignments into smaller pieces
- Written instructions in addition to verbal ones
- A daily communication folder between teacher and parent
- Use of fidget tools (quietly) during class
- Reduced homework load if appropriate

Day 12–14: Meet with the Teacher

- Share what you have learned about your child's specific ADHD presentation
- Ask the teacher what they have observed in class
- Discuss which accommodations would help most
- Establish a communication system (daily folder, weekly email, etc.)

- Thank the teacher — a collaborative relationship makes a huge difference

> **Homework Strategies That Work**
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> Set a consistent time (not right after school — kids need a break first). Use a timer (15–20 minute chunks with 5-minute breaks). Eliminate distractions (no TV, phone away). Sit nearby but do not hover. Praise effort, not just results. If homework consistently takes more than 1.5x the expected time, talk to the teacher.

If the School Pushes Back

Unfortunately, some schools are slow to implement accommodations. Know your rights:

- You have the legal right to request a 504 evaluation. Put it in writing.
- The school must respond within a reasonable time frame (typically 30–60 days depending on state)
- You can request an independent educational evaluation if you disagree with the school's findings
- Document everything: save emails, take notes at meetings, request written copies of plans
- If you hit a wall, contact your state's Parent Training and Information Center (free advocacy support)

Week 3: Building Effective Home Routines

Children with ADHD do best with structure, predictability, and clear expectations. This week, set up home routines that support your child.

Morning Routine

1. Wake up at the same time every day (yes, weekends too — within 30 minutes)
2. Use a visual checklist posted on the wall: Wake up, Get dressed, Eat breakfast, Brush teeth, Pack backpack, Shoes on
3. Lay out clothes and pack the backpack the night before
4. Set a timer for getting ready — make it a challenge, not a punishment
5. Build in 10 minutes of buffer time so mornings are not a rush

After-School Routine

1. Arrive home — 20–30 minutes of free time (snack, play, decompress)
2. Homework time (consistent time, consistent place)
3. Activities or free play
4. Dinner
5. Calm-down time (reading, drawing, quiet play — no screens)
6. Bedtime routine begins

Bedtime Routine

- Start 30–60 minutes before target sleep time
- Screens off at least 30 minutes before bed (the blue light suppresses melatonin)
- Consistent sequence: bath/shower, pajamas, brush teeth, read together
- Keep the bedroom cool, dark, and quiet
- If your child takes stimulant medication and has trouble sleeping, talk to your doctor about timing or dose adjustments

The Power of Positive Reinforcement

Children with ADHD receive far more negative feedback than their peers — by some estimates, 20,000 more corrective or negative messages by age 10. Counteract this:

- Catch your child being good: "I noticed you started your homework without being asked. That is great."

- Use specific praise: "You kept your hands to yourself at dinner" is better than "Good job."
- Consider a simple reward chart for 2–3 specific behaviors you want to encourage
- Aim for a 5:1 ratio of positive to corrective statements
- Celebrate small wins — progress, not perfection

> **About Consequences**
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> Traditional punishment (yelling, taking things away, time-outs) is often ineffective for kids with ADHD because their impulsivity means they genuinely cannot always control the behavior. Natural consequences and positive reinforcement work much better. Consult with a child psychologist who specializes in ADHD if behavior is a significant challenge.

Week 4: Monitoring Progress and Adjusting

You have spent three weeks building a foundation. Week 4 is about stepping back, evaluating what is working, and making adjustments.

Evaluate What Is Working: Progress Check

☐ Is my child's school performance improving or stabilizing?
☐ Are mornings less chaotic?
☐ Is homework getting done with less conflict?
☐ Is my child sleeping better?
☐ Are behavior problems at home decreasing?
☐ Does my child seem happier or more confident?
☐ If on medication, are side effects manageable?

Follow-Up Appointment

Schedule a follow-up with your child's psychiatrist (if you have not already). Bring:

- Your symptom and behavior journal
- Teacher feedback
- Any medication concerns (side effects, timing, effectiveness)
- Your progress checklist above
- New questions that have come up

Adjust Your Plan

Based on what you have observed, make targeted adjustments:

- If mornings are still hard: simplify the routine further, or add a reward for getting ready on time
- If homework is still a battle: talk to the teacher about reducing the load or changing the approach
- If sleep is an issue: check screen habits and bedtime consistency, and ask your doctor about medication timing
- If behavior at school is not improving: request a meeting to review accommodations
- If medication seems off: do not adjust it yourself — call your doctor

Build Your Support Team

You do not have to do this alone. Consider building a team:

- **Psychiatrist:** manages medication, monitors symptoms
- **Therapist (CBT):** teaches coping skills, builds executive function
- **School counselor:** monitors academic progress, facilitates accommodations
- **Tutor:** helps with academics if your child is falling behind
- **Parent support group:** connects you with other families navigating ADHD (CHADD is a great resource)
- **You:** the most important member of the team

How to Talk to Your Child About ADHD

Children need to understand their own brains. Here is how to talk about ADHD in a way that empowers rather than shames:

For Younger Children (Ages 5–8)

> *"You know how sometimes it is really hard to sit still or pay attention, even when you are trying your hardest? That is because your brain works a little differently. It is like having a race car brain with bicycle brakes. It is not bad — it is actually pretty cool — but it means we need to practice using the brakes. The doctor is going to help us with that."*

For Older Children (Ages 9–12)

> *"You have been diagnosed with ADHD. That stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, but it does not mean you cannot pay attention. It means your brain has a harder time deciding what to focus on and when. It also means you might be more creative, energetic, and spontaneous than most people. We are going to learn strategies that help with the tough parts while keeping all the good parts."*

For Teenagers

> *"I want to talk to you about something the doctor said. You have ADHD. I know that might feel like a big deal, and it is OK to feel however you feel about it. What it really means is that we now understand why some things have been harder for you than they should be. It is not about being lazy or not trying hard enough. Your brain processes things differently, and there are real tools that can help. I am on your team and we will figure this out together."*

Key Messages (All Ages)

- ADHD is not your fault and it does not mean you are broken
- Many successful people have ADHD — it comes with real strengths
- There are tools and strategies that help, and we are going to use them
- You can always talk to me about how you are feeling
- Having ADHD does not change who you are — it helps us understand you better

Resources and Next Steps

Recommended Resources

- **CHADD (Children and Adults with ADHD):** chadd.org — education, support groups, advocacy
- **Understood.org:** free resources for learning and attention differences
- **ADDitude Magazine:** additudemag.com — practical strategies for families
- Your child's school counselor and special education coordinator

Beyond Day 30

The first month is about building a foundation. Going forward:

- Keep attending regular follow-up appointments
- Continue your behavior journal (even briefly)
- Review and update school accommodations annually
- Revisit routines when things change (new school year, new activities, summer)
- Be patient with yourself — there will be hard days, and that is normal
- Celebrate progress — every step forward counts

> ### Final Thought
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> ADHD is a marathon, not a sprint. You will have great days and tough days. On the tough days, remember: your child is not giving you a hard time. They are having a hard time. And the fact that you are reading this guide means you are exactly the parent they need.

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This guide is for informational purposes only and does not constitute medical advice. Always consult with a qualified healthcare provider for diagnosis and treatment.