Wednesday October 26, 2026

Parenting and Challenging Behaviours

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Fire Poker

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All Kids Learn

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… But sometimes they learn things we might wish they wouldn't



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Learning Objectives

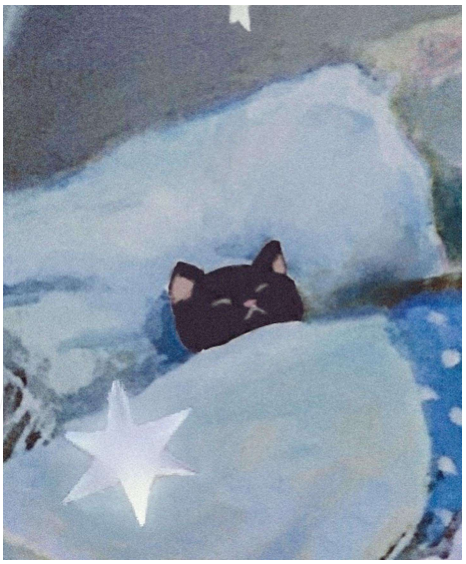
1. Explain why ADHD can make behaviour more challenging
2. Identify some strategies to reduce stress and improve behaviour
3. Locate resources for ongoing support



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(Realistic) Learning Objective

- Real talk – parenting can be HARD
- What do I really hope you will get from today?
- In that twilight between the kid going to bed and you going to bed, look back on how the day went.
- Be able to prepare **one thing** to help things go a little better in the future



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Why do they do these things?

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Why do they do these things?

- Children's natural daily experiences can set them up to learn some difficult behaviours

Examples:

- grocery store check out
- Classmates laugh at a swear
- Lying about homework or grades works sometimes



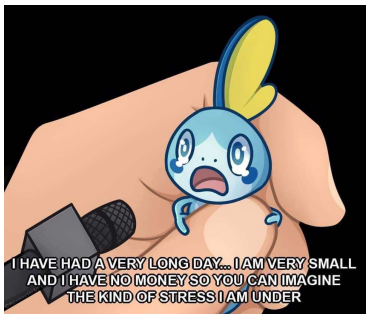
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And with ADHD…

Learned behaviour problems happen with all kids

ADHD can also accelerate the problem:

- May appear more driven, persistent, or willful about getting certain rewards
- May be harder to tolerate correction, or a withheld reward
- May take longer to learn preferred behaviours
- Once they learn a positive behaviour, they may still make a lot of mistakes



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What can we do?

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Be More Proactive

(less reactive)

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Core ADHD Behavioral Strategies

There are MANY established evidence based behavioural strategies that work. These have been around for decades.

We could spend weeks talking about these techniques.

Many of these strategies only work if you fully commit to them. (So better to start when you feel ready).

Today, I want to focus more on the art of *realistically* putting these thigs into practice.

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Core ADHD Behavioral Strategies

1. Save your breath
2. Grass is greener where you water it
3. SMART goals

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1. Save Your Breath

Experience: “They only listen when I shout”

What’s behind that?

1) ADHD might mean they did not hear you
2) If you only follow through when you’re shouting, children learn to ignore everything before the shout

“We have to consciously study how to be tender with each other until it becomes a habit.”

-Audre Lorde

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1. Save Your Breath

What to try instead:

1. Before you tell them something, take a breath
2. Go towards them
3. Gently get their attention (ex: by touching their hand or shoulder)
4. Look them in the eyes
5. Now tell them



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1. Save Your Breath

What to try instead:

- Use statements instead of questions when something is mandatory

Example:

- Instead of "Can you get dressed please, we're going to be late for the doctor!?!?!"
- Try "Time for shoes" (hand them the shoes)

This helps *minimize* resistance.



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1. Save Your Breath

- Only set limits you can enforce.
- **Let the rest go**
  - Or influence it slower, indirectly (more on this later)

Example:

- Instead of "STOP MAKING THAT NOISE, YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE ME CRASH THE CAR"
- Try "It's loud in here. Car drives once it's quiet."

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2. Grass is greener (where you water it)

Kids with ADHD get a LOT of negative criticism. This has consequences.

Would you keep listening to someone who only complains about you?

You can nudge them towards listening more if you make listening to you rewarding.



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2. Grass is greener (where you water it)

Try:

- Make a tally of how many corrections, reminders, complaints etc. you make compared to positive comments in a morning
- (Most of us give way more corrections than praise)
- Aim towards 4 positive interactions for every 1 correction *no matter how "good" they are being*



Aiming for 4 to 1 positive to negative

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2. Grass is greener (where you water it)

Sometimes it can be HARD to find the good things to praise. Building in more positive activities can help shift things.

Play is a great way to build connection and improve listening!

When was the last time you had genuine fun together? Were silly together? Without distractions? What could you do every day?



5 min Daily Special Playtime

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2. Grass is greener (where you water it)

Sometimes incentives (small rewards) a very powerful way to influence behavior.

Pick one observable behaviour at a time. Check consistently.

Use exciting but doable rewards.

Stop the rewards slowly.

This technique is simple, but there are several common pitfalls.

If this has gone poorly for you in the past, know there are work-arounds.



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2. Grass is greener (where you water it)

- Time banking (deliberately spending more time with a kid) can also help.
- This is because often when a kid is being difficult, we naturally pull away from them.
- This can lead them to try more and more extreme behaviors to get your attention.
- Spending more (quality) time with them can reverse this cycle.

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"Every time you think of calling a kid 'attention-seeking' this year, consider changing it to 'connection-seeking' and see how your perspective changes."

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3. SMART Goals

Sometimes kids with ADHD aren't following through because the goal is too hard or vague.
Example: "get good grades"

SMART goals are:
- **Specific**
- **Measurable**
- **Achievable**
- **Relevant**
- **Time based**

Example:
- **For the next two weeks, I'll empty lunch box before bed**
- I get a small candy for each one done on time
- and if I make it to two weeks only missing once or twice, we take a trip out for ice cream Friday night

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Extinction Burst

When you stop rewarding something you used to reward, the first response is sometimes a burst of much worse behavior



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Easier said than done

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(Easier said than done)

Two main struggle points:

1. It's hard to plan when you're already exhausted
2. It sometimes gets harder before it gets better



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Already Exhausted?

Some tips to consider:

1. Set the bar lower
   - pick fewer battles
   - If juggling: which balls are rubber versus glass?

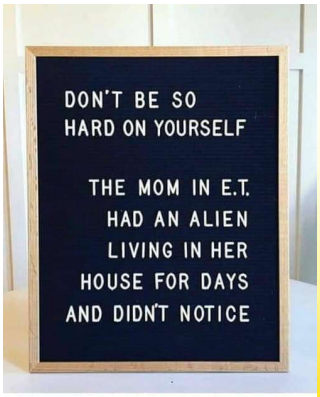
2. Do it with more support
   - Bullseye metaphor (balanced helping/asking)

3. Consider putting <u>whole family wellbeing</u> changes first

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Extinction Burst Tips

- Before you make a change, ask yourself what you think might happen
- If you think their behavior will be dangerous, <u>don't change it yet</u>
- Instead:
  - Work on other things first OR
  - Make the change in a safer environment (safer physical location, more adults to support)



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Getting More Support

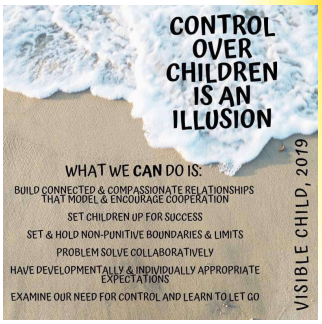
- Parent Support Group at the ADHD Clinic
- What is near you? What did your family used to do when things were better?
- Be a regular. Connections take time, protect that time by scheduling it.
- Find parents who are in the same stage, or just a little bit ahead.



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Putting It All Together

Imagine this:
It's bedtime, the kids are all running around. You notice one kid just got distracted on their way to PJs because they saw a mirror.
You take a deep breath.
Tap them on the shoulder, and say "It's time for PJs, here's your PJs."
They still get distracted on every step, but you're taking breaks to talk in an evil robot voice together. Tic tacs earned for peeing without making a mess.
Once it's lights out, they are still wiggly… but in bed with the door closed.
You set an alarm in your phone to leave evening activities earlier for the next two weeks, then re-assess.



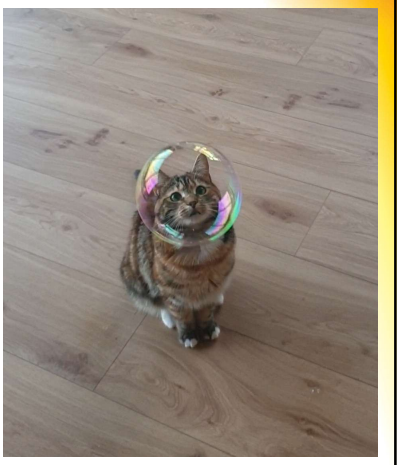
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Summary

There is a reason this is hard.
It can get better, with some strategies and patience.

Get out of the pattern;
try something new (you could always try something else later)

You are not alone in this.
(and if you are, get more support before making changes)



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Resources

Rolling With ADHD

5 min Special Playtime

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