



Steps to Serenity

• Parenting the ADHD Child •

Help! My child has been diagnosed with ADHD and none of the conventional approaches given by parenting teachers apply to me. I feel like I live on a different planet! What can I do?

There's only so far that the parenting toolbox can take a parent of an ADHD child. Parents are dealing with an enormous challenge and they need constant encouragement. I spoke with Liora Nuriel, an ADHD specialist in Pisgat Zeev, Israel. Though Mrs. Nuriel actually focuses on an extremely hands-on approach to dealing with the challenges of ADHD, her vision and her mission are the backbone of her success. Mrs. Nuriel's approach can serve as the basis for helping parents to reframe their role vis-a-vis their ADHD child.

Mrs. Liora Nuriel

Gives Words of Chizuk to Parents of ADHD Children:

I have been treating children in the *chareidi* community for more than ten years now. I received my Master's degree in studying this disorder and I began to treat children with the disorder. I also freelance as a lecturer in universities on the topic. It is a vastly spreading phenomenon; many parents are struggling with their ADHD children.

My understanding of ADHD, a disorder that I am intimately familiar with, as I have ADHD, is that ADHD doesn't make you abnormal. On the contrary, children with ADHD are normal-PLUS. What do I mean by this? The *Gemara* tells us that a carpenter can take the simplest tools and the simplest tree and with them he can create a castle. Children with ADHD, normal-plus children, receives the *choicest* tools and the *highest-quality* trees from Hashem. However, not only can't they build a castle with these tools, they can't even succeed in building a house.

Instead, they only know how to turn those tools around to hurt themselves. When ADHD children are given IQ tests while taking Ritalin, a large percentage of them actually present as geniuses. Hence, they are normal-plus.

Unfortunately, their ability to use their skills doesn't reflect their potential. People with ADHD have been given *kochos* to the extreme but need to learn how to use them properly. Otherwise, all this strength will be used for negative behaviors. But if we can learn how to

Bits and Pieces

A Note on the Social Piece

Kids with ADHD are also different when it comes to making friends. If your ADHD child is socially anxious, set up play dates for him, but make sure they aren't too long or overwhelming! And remember, ADHD kids thrive on action.

Give your child rewards for taking the social plunge. Take your child and her new friend out for pizza and ice cream or make an ice cream party at home. That's a great set-up for social success!

harness these skills, ADHD children can become *Gedolim baTorah* or fabulous mothers and wives who are capable of building true Torah homes and raising *inei Torah*.

Though I generally give parents hands-on skills, in this column, I only want to lay the foundation of inspiration for parents of ADHD children. Only when parents understand the greatness of their mission will they be open to accepting the tips and tools that I dispense.

When you read stories of *Gedolim* in their youth, they often faced nearly impossible obstacles. Some of them experienced extreme poverty and discomfort, living through times of war or experiencing personal challenges in learning, or other barriers. We know, though, that the greater a person is, the greater his *yetzer hara*. If your child is able to surmount the obstacles that block him from properly using the tools he was given, he can be truly amazing.

So what is our job as parents? We must understand that medication can sometimes provide a partial solution —

but it isn't the whole solution.

First, be proud of your ADHD children. Love them. Adore them. And help them to understand that they are not "dumb" or "disabled." On the contrary — they have been given greater tools than most people. Learning how to use them is where the parenting tools come in, and that is what I work on with parents. This basic understanding — the gift Hashem has given to them and to YOU — is the first important step in getting things right.

I once gave a lecture on ADHD to a group of teachers. At the end of the speech, all the teachers stood up, held hands and began to sing:

V'zakeini l'gadel banim uvnei vanim... ume'irim es haolam baTorah uv'maasim tovim...uv'chol meleches avodas haBorei (loose translation: *May I merit to bring up pure and righteous children who will light up the world with their Torah learning and mitzvos*).

At that moment, those teachers felt and understood what all parents can feel in their hearts about their ADHD children: These children were given to us

Bits and Pieces

A story of hope:

One of my clients had a daughter who refused to take medication, and her grades in school suffered terribly. She went to an alternative program; there she just barely passed her high school exams despite a lot of personal attention. The mother told me how she would sit outside her daughter's therapy sessions and cry her heart out to Hashem, begging Him to help.

The parents continued to work on listening to their daughter, supporting her and helping her to problem solve, communicate and trust her intuition. Today, that child is extremely successful in her chosen profession, which did entail a lot of academic training. With Hashem's help, she was eventually able to use the tools her parents taught her.

as presents. If we are trying to raise them to a life of Torah and mitzvos, Hashem will give us *siyatta diShmaya* to actualize all of their untapped potential.

At the beginning of this article I mentioned my credentials. Actually, I have learned that those credentials are virtually meaningless. Every tool that I acquired in university already existed in our holy Torah. Every *keli* that I use is drawn from the wellsprings of the Torah. If we use this approach, I believe we can't go wrong. These gifts, our ADHD children, our normal-plus children, will succeed. **B**

Liora Nuriel coaches ADHD children and their parents in Jerusalem, Israel.

Mrs. Simi Yellen

Addresses: What's different about parenting an ADHD child?

ADHD is a chemical imbalance. If your child is diagnosed with ADHD, there are medications that can supply the child with the chemicals he needs in order to function. However, there's a bias against medication in our society.

Many parents ask, "What about the side effects?" I always counter with: "What about the side effects of not putting your ADHD child on medication?"

Even so, the journey to finding the right medication and the right dose isn't always an easy one, and medication isn't always the answer. However, it should be considered as a viable starting point with which to treat the ADHD child.

Even when medication is helpful, it usually isn't a panacea. Parents of ADHD children experience unique challenges. The first notion these parents need to understand is that they need to alter their expectations of their children. There's a different playbook when it comes to ADHD kids. If you measure them up to the neuro-typical population, they will always fall short, and you will feel like a failed parent. Letting go of

these expectations is the first strategy toward giving parents inner peace and the strength to move forward.

How do these differences in approach express themselves?

Well, for example, most children feel a sense of accomplishment when they see things through to the end. ADHD children however, are hard-wired *not* to complete things. When they lose interest in something, they are happy to put it down and move on with their lives. They don't feel a sense of failure. When an adult puts down a 500-page book that isn't engaging, he feels relieved, not guilty. These children feel the same way. Parents shouldn't push their ADHD kids by saying, "Come on, you only have 25% left to go!" Your child can't relate to that.

Having said that, we all agree that, objectively speaking, completing a task is a good thing. Instead of blaming the child for losing interest, parents should take *small* goals and try to strategically make them interesting. "Let's make a card for Bubby's birthday" is a small goal your ADHD child might be able to complete.

But the job doesn't end there. Parents of ADHD kids need to get creative in terms of how to engage them. ADHD children thrive on excitement, action and change. When a child has a long-term project for school, a great way to get him to do it is to break it into sections without letting him know what's next. When he finishes one

section say, "Guess what's next?"

Changing locations is also good for them. "The next section will be done at Bubby's house!" Even giving them a new writing implement can give them the freshness their brains need to continue.

Another example of how parenting an ADHD child can be an entirely different experience is the experience at the Shabbos table. When a child is hyperactive, we need to consider both his needs and the needs of the rest of the family.

A main ingredient for success is having clear boundaries and expectations as to what is appropriate behavior for the Shabbos table. Parents can role-play the Shabbos table with younger kids in advance to make sure they understand the rules. They can also set up a parallel Shabbos table in another room with pretend food items. When the child can't sit at the table, he can sit at his special table in the playroom.

As ADHD children get older, they should be given permission to leave the Shabbos table when it becomes too difficult to act appropriately. However, for children of all ages, it's important that the option of leaving the table isn't viewed as a punishment. Children should be praised when they behave nicely and they should *also* be praised for choosing to leave the table when they can't control themselves.

These are just a few examples, but

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parents of ADHD children will attest that everything is different about parenting their child. I believe the hardest job of a parent with ADHD is recognizing where his *nekudas habechirah* (his point of choice) is. Parents don't want to expect things of him that he isn't physiologically capable of. But they also don't want to set their expectations too low, as they run the risk of really stifling their child's potential.

Once you can ascertain what your ADHD child is truly capable of, you need to set up a system involving clear boundaries, explicit rules and expectations, and lots of room for praise and encouragement. Once parents understand where their child is at, both parent and child are on the road to success.

Mrs. Simi Yellen has been positively transforming homes through her teleconference parenting classes and private consultations for over a decade. Her 10-week series entitled "Raise the Bar Parenting" empowers parents to raise respectful, responsible, and cooperative children through curtailing arguing, chutzpah, and other negative behaviors we have come to tolerate. To find out more about classes, MP3s, and consultations email SimiYellen@gmail.com.

Mrs. Rachel Brody

Addresses when the child won't take his medicine:

Are we adults always prepared to do what it takes to succeed? We might really want to lose weight, but does that mean we're willing to sacrifice in order to achieve that goal? It's a matter of what we want *more*. When our ADHD child refuses medication, he may be doing this as a form of self-preservation. As a parent, I want to understand what he's protecting.

Here are some things that might come up for your ADHD child when it comes to taking medications:

He hates the side effects

He doesn't like feeling dependent on meds for success

We live in a wonderful community. One in which none of us is ever alone or forsaken. Among us, there are many children struggling to overcome social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. For them, there is a beacon of hope to be had inside the walls of Yeshiva Ohr David.

Established over 15 years ago as Ha'or Beacon School and renamed in memory of Dr. David Pearl, Yeshiva Ohr David is a unique and exclusive yeshiva. We have small self-contained classes from Pre-1A through eighth grade, all led by master-level experienced Rebbeim and teachers, and assisted by highly trained and professional classroom parasa.

Our school welcomes but is not limited to children who may be struggling with ADD/ADHD, ODD, Aspergers, PDD as well as other emotional disabilities which may or may not affect their academic capabilities. Our curriculum mimics a mainstream yeshiva in both Hebrew and English subjects; however, we offer individualized instruction based on each child's learning style and level.

In order to achieve our school's mission of ensuring that each child becomes a productive member of society, we invest a tremendous amount of time and effort in



behavior modification strategies and social skills training. Originally set up by a child psychologist from the NYU Child Study Center, each grade has an individualized behavior system—based on the concept of a token economy, modified according to their individual needs. Through the use of the Social Thinking method, our students participate in daily social groups, learning and mastering a wide array of specific social goals. In addition, we accommodate a child's IEP by providing highly skilled and experienced speech, physical, and occupational therapists, as well as a social worker to fill each child's mandate.

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Inspiring Video Presentation

There's a stigma around taking medication

He feels it changes his personality

He senses ambivalence from his parents

He likes the drama he creates by not taking meds

So what can you do?

Parents need to evaluate who *they* become when they stand opposite their child in the morning, trying valiantly to get him to take his meds. See if you recognize yourself in one of the reactions below.

Exasperated. "This is good for you! Take it already!"

Calm. "I understand you don't want to take this, but..."

"I'm just so worried about you."

These reactions all demonstrate a parent who cannot rest until the results are achieved, that is, until the child takes his meds.

If you were trying to change, would it help you to have someone standing over you, saying:

"Just stop eating already!"

"I understand you don't want to lose weight, but look at you..."

"I'm just so worried about your weight."

Probably not.

It would be helpful to let go of the attachment to the result.

How can you do that?

By truly listening to your child. By truly caring and demonstrating curiosity as to what the child is feeling. Here's how you can do that:

Try to truly understand why your child doesn't want to take meds. We know he says it makes him feel "yucky." But when we say "We understand, but," our child only hears the "but." Write down what he says to show him how important it is to you. Or, reflect back to him: "I want to see if I really

understand." Help him see that we're not attached to the result; rather, we're looking for a solution.

Enroll him. This is very different from convincing him. Find a common ground between *your* desires for him and *his* desires for himself. Does he care that he isn't succeeding in school? Does he think that adjusting the meds might help? Make it into a fact-finding mission.

If it's more about interpretations than side effects, help him to shift his paradigms. Tell him stories about kids who thought things about meds that just weren't true.

If he's doing it to get excitement, evaluate your relationship with that child. Your child might need excitement and drama from your relationship in other areas so he won't need to get it from the meds struggle.

If you're the one who isn't clear about the meds, then it falls to you to understand what you want for your child.

Assuming your child does start taking medication, you need to handle the process gingerly even at that point. You can speak with your child's teacher, but make sure he realizes it's not his responsibility to be on top of your child's medication. He should not ask your child if he's taken his medication. Teachers should be in touch with parents to see how they can be helpful to the process.

Some children might benefit from charts where they can self-evaluate how much the medication is helping them. Sometimes kids don't feel the difference when they're on meds. It can similarly help parents.

But what if all your efforts prove fruitless, and your child still refuses medication?


I personally don't believe in forcing ADHD medications. I think we have a false belief that success in school is the

underpinning for success in life, and this leads us to feel acute emotional distress when our child won't take medication.

Success in life really comes from having the tools to communicate effectively, to learn how to trust one's own intuition, and learning how to problem solve. If a parent models these tools, the likelihood of that child's success rises exponentially. On the flip side, when we force our child to take medication, we are taking away his sense of intuition and self-preservation. I believe this is a risky thing to do.

When you've tried everything and you still can't get your child to comply with meds, the conversation is no longer about him, it's about you. It's about how you cope with the feeling of pain and fear. It's about turning to Hashem and saying, "He's Your baby too. Please take care of him."

When our hands are tied, it's about who *we* become and how we can support ourselves and our child under less than ideal circumstances.

Mrs. Rachel Brody is a certified ADHD coach and life coach for adults. She practices in Beit Shemesh or via telephone. She created and teaches workshops on time management and de-cluttering and organizing the home. Her experience raising her own brood of ADHD kids led her to embrace this field. Rachel's greatest pleasure comes from seeing and cultivating the greatness in others, and watching the transformations that occurs as a result. She can be reached at (02) 991-0350 or at rachel@possibilitiescoach.com. 

Yael's latest book, *The Face in the Mirror*, a groundbreaking book for teens which adults will also enjoy, is available in your local Jewish bookstore.

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