

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) Chapter (II) Treatment and Support (Part 2)

To help children and adolescents with AD/HD using psych-education, in addition to proper methods for managing behaviours introduced in Part 1, parents can also help your children by changing their mindset and enhancing their executive skills.

Education Bureau
2022

Changing the Mindset

Thoughts or beliefs we have about matters/situations often affect our emotional and behavioural responses. Even when facing the same matter/situation, our different thoughts and beliefs will result in our different responses. Positive/reasonable thoughts lead to positive emotional and behavioural responses. For example:

Matter/situation	Thoughts or beliefs		Emotional responses	Behavioural responses
Failing in an exam	Negative	• I'm always useless. I can't pass the exam.	• Disappointed • Frustrated	• Give up revising for exams
	Positive	• I believe I will make progress if I study hard!	• Confident • Proactive	• Schedule the time for revision before the next exam
Being reprimanded by the teacher	Negative	• The teacher picks on me, he does not like me.	• Angry	• Refuse to follow the teacher's instructions
	Positive	• The teachers wants to help me improve	• Calm	• Accept the teacher's reminders

By changing the child's habitual negative or unreasonable thoughts or beliefs on matters/situations, you can gradually cultivate the child's positive thinking, so as to generate positive emotional and behavioural responses.

For example, some children and adolescents will ventilate their feelings by losing their temper while encountering problems. Parent needs to know about the thought of your child before finding the right antidote. After your child has calmed down, parent can guide your child to express how s/he thinks about the problems that s/he is facing with and the reasons for losing his/her temper; parent can also encourage your child to think from different perspectives and handle the difficulties with a positive and proactive attitude. Besides, parent can teach your child the steps and methods to solve problems to improve his/her self-management ability. For example:

Steps to solve problems:
1. Identify the problems
2. Brainstorm different solutions
3. Analyse the pros and cons of each solution
4. Select appropriate solutions and review the effectiveness

Enhancing Executive Skills

Executive Functioning

“Executive Functioning” is mainly responsible for controlling behaviours and thoughts, as well as planning and implementing a series of activities. When we respond to things, the behavioural inhibition system will first be activated to delay immediate responses which have not gone through careful consideration. After that, we will use our working memory to process useful information and steps, and use self-regulation to plan and organise appropriate behaviours and responses. Children and adolescents with AD/HD not only have executive skills deficits, but also lacks the ability to make use of and display their skills in real situations.

What skills are involved in Executive Functioning?

Psychologists Peg Dawson and Richard Guare broke down executive functioning concretely into eleven executive skills²:

Response Inhibition	Think before acting
Self-regulation of Affect	Manage emotions in order to achieve goals and complete tasks
Sustained Attention	Stay focused without being distracted by irrelevant things
Task Initiation	Begin a task in a timely fashion, without undue procrastination
Goal-directed Persistence	Follow through to the completion of a goal
Flexibility	Revise plans according to changing conditions
Working Memory	Hold information in mind while performing complex tasks
Planning/Prioritization	Create a roadmap to reach a goal and set priorities
Organization	Design and maintain systems for keeping track of information and materials
Time Management	Estimate and allocate time to complete tasks before deadlines
Metacognition	Stand back and take a bird's eye view of oneself in a situation

(Dawson& Guare, 2018)

Methods for Enhancing Executive Skills

We can make use of direct teaching, breaking down steps, external cues, as well as appropriate motivational strategies to help children and adolescents enhance their executive skills to improve their attention and behavioural inhibition. For details on the application of various skills, please refer to the “Tips for Parents” in this series.

Let’s take a look at the following example: whenever my child starts a learning project, s/he will be very upset and does not know what should be done first. S/he often can’t initiate the relevant work after a long time, thus always submit assignments late.

In this case, you can teach (direct teaching) your child to list out the steps/matters to be completed one by one (break down the steps) to make a to-do list, decide with him/her the sequence and completion date of each task, and then print and post the list (external cues) to facilitate your child to complete the tasks one after the other.

Learning Project – To-do list	Completion date
1. Decide the subject	
2. Collect information from the Internet and the library	
3. Carry out on-site observations and take relevant photos	
4. Interview with teachers, classmates and janitors	
5. Organize the information and outline the content	
6. Write the first draft	
7. Proofread and revise	
8. Complete and submit the learning project report	

If you are interested in this chapter about executive skills, you may refer to SE Newsletter Issue no.42 – “How to Enhance the Executive Skills of Children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder” (Chinese only) for further information. <https://sense.edb.gov.hk/en/integrated-education/information-for-parents-and-the-public/special-education-newsletter/38.html>

Reference:

Dawson, P. & Guare R. (2018). Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents, Third Edition: A Practical Guide to Assessment and Intervention (The Guilford Practical Intervention in the Schools Series) Third Edition. Guilford Press