

Cooperation Without Power Struggles

Clear directions, useful encouragement, and steady limits.

For parents and caregivers of children ages 4-17

Start with one page and one real-life moment. These tools are designed to be practiced together, not assigned to your child as another thing to get right.

Choose a place to begin

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A steadier family life, one workable change at a time.

Print or annotate digitally. No fillable form fields. Use the developmental adaptations, not age alone, to choose the right level of support.

Teach the skill behind the behavior

ADHD is not caused by bad parenting. Parents still have powerful ways to help.

01 Describe, do not label

Replace lazy, defiant, or careless with observable facts: the shoes are still on the floor after two reminders. Look for confusing directions, competing interests, missing skills, fatigue, or overwhelm.

02 Practice outside the conflict

Show the skill, do it together, then invite a small independent attempt. Knowing a rule is different from performing it consistently. Keep needed support while the skill develops.

03 Keep connection separate from performance

Offer a few minutes of child-led play, conversation, or shared interest without correction. Notice humor, kindness, curiosity, and effort as well as task completion. Affection is never something a child must earn.

Illustrative example

From facts to practice

Notice

The shoes are still on the floor.



Explore

What skill or support is missing?



Practice

Put the shoes by the door together.

Separate observations from labels such as lazy or careless.

Words to borrow

We keep getting stuck at cleanup. Show me the hardest part. Let us practice putting just the blocks in this bin.

Younger children learn through modeling and play. School-age children can help name barriers. Teens need respectful collaboration and meaningful choices.

 Your small experiment

The skill we can practice

Teach the skill behind the behavior

Choose one real-life moment. Write, sketch, or talk through the plan together.

What we actually see

What skill or support may be missing

A practice moment and connection time

Practice moment

Connection time

A plan can be revised. Keep the support your child still needs.

Learn together

Give a direction the child can use

Fewer words, a clear action, and enough time to respond.

01 Get attention gently

Move nearby and say the child's name. Do not demand eye contact. Check that they heard you, particularly if language, hearing, sensory, or learning differences are involved.

02 Give one doable action

Say Put the plate in the sink instead of Be responsible. Use a calm voice. Offer a choice only when both options are acceptable. Avoid stacking several instructions while walking away.

03 Pause, then help

Allow several seconds to process. If nothing happens, check understanding, reduce the step, or begin together. When the child acts, name what worked instead of adding a criticism about how long it took.

Illustrative example

A usable direction

Instead of

Be responsible.

Say

Put the plate in the sink.

Then

Pause. Check. Help.

Notice what worked when the child acts.

Words to borrow

Sam, put your shoes by the door, please. [Pause.] Would pointing to the spot help? ... You put them where we can find them tomorrow.

For teens: agree on timing when possible. Say Please put dishes away by 7 rather than interrupting repeatedly or monitoring every movement.

 Your small experiment

A direction we can use

Give a direction the child can use

Choose one real-life moment. Write, sketch, or talk through the plan together.

A direction we often repeat

Our shorter, visible-action version

How we will prompt and notice success

Prompt

Notice success

A plan can be revised. Keep the support your child still needs.

Learn together

Reward the next learnable step

Make success reachable and feedback close to the action.

01 Choose one observable target

Example: put the homework folder in the backpack after the evening cue. Avoid broad goals like Have a good day. Start with a step your child can achieve with the planned support.

02 Choose a small reward together

Pair specific praise with a point, sticker, or simple shared activity if helpful. Agree on the plan beforehand. Keep it affordable, prompt, and appealing to this child. Food, sleep, movement, affection, and essential care are not prizes.

03 Protect the next opportunity

Do not take back earned points or require a perfect streak. If the target is rarely met, simplify it or increase teaching and support. Gradually reduce rewards once the skill becomes more reliable.

Illustrative example

A reachable reward

Action

Folder in bag after the cue



Earn

One point



Receive

Five minutes choosing the shared game

An illustrative plan from the script. Agree on the rule together.

Words to borrow

When your folder is in your bag after our cue, you earn a point. Each point earns five minutes choosing our shared game. You get a fresh chance tomorrow.

Young children need very immediate feedback. Older children can use short point systems. With teens, co-design a private plan and avoid childish charts.

 Your small experiment

Our next learnable step

Reward the next learnable step

Choose one real-life moment. Write, sketch, or talk through the plan together.

Our one observable target and adult support

Observable target

Adult support

Our reward, earning rule, and delivery time

Reward

Earning rule

Delivery time

Three tries: what happened / what to adjust

Try

What happened

What to adjust

1		
2		
3		

A plan can be revised. Keep the support your child still needs.

Learn together

Hold limits without humiliation

A boundary can be firm and still protect the relationship.

01 State the boundary and alternative

Say Blocks stay on the floor. You can build here or put them away. Keep the response brief, predictable, and connected to the behavior.

02 Respond to danger, not with danger

Do not use hitting, threats, public shame, or frightening isolation. Never ignore unsafe behavior. Move others away from thrown objects and seek help if you cannot keep everyone safe.

03 Repair and teach afterward

When calm, practice the alternative and address the impact: pick up together, replace what can be replaced, or make a meaningful repair. A long lecture is not extra learning.

Illustrative example

A steady boundary

Boundary

Blocks stay on the floor.



Alternative

Build here or put them away.



After calm

Practice and make a meaningful repair.

Keep the limit brief, predictable, and connected to the behavior.

Words to borrow

I will not let blocks be thrown at people. We are putting them aside now. When we are calm, we can practice a safe way to show you are frustrated.

If conflict persists, ask about parent training in behavior management. These worksheets are not a full treatment program or a substitute for live coaching.

 Your small experiment

Our limit and repair plan

Hold limits without humiliation

Choose one real-life moment. Write, sketch, or talk through the plan together.

Our clear limit

A safe alternative and related response

Safe alternative

Related response

How we will reconnect and practice

A plan can be revised. Keep the support your child still needs.

 Care, evidence, and next steps

Support beyond the page

Use these resources alongside your child's care, not in place of it.

What these tools are

Original educational worksheets informed by established approaches to parent behavior training, routines, and school support. The exact scripts, time intervals, and layouts have not been validated as a treatment package. Adapt them with your clinician to your child and family.

When to ask for more help

Ask your child's clinician about structured parent training in behavior management and an individualized treatment plan. For children under six, parent behavior training is recommended before medication. School-age treatment commonly combines medication with behavioral and school supports. Discuss treatment choices and any medication changes with the treating clinician.

Make it fit your family

Adapt for developmental level, language, disability, sensory needs, culture, family structure, and available time. Tools should not demand eye contact, suppress harmless movement, or reward hiding distress. Never withhold basic needs or connection. Faith practices can support a family when welcomed; symptoms are not a spiritual failure.

Sources and further reading

CDC: Parent training in behavior management

<https://www.cdc.gov/adhd/treatment/behavior-therapy.html>

CDC: ADHD in the classroom

<https://www.cdc.gov/adhd/treatment/classroom.html>

CDC: Treatment of ADHD

<https://www.cdc.gov/adhd/treatment/index.html>

 Source review: September 2026. These PDFs do not establish a clinician-patient relationship. For urgent mental-health concerns in the U.S., call or text 988. For imminent danger, call 911.