

GREAT DAYS AHEAD

Parenting Children
Who Have ADHD
with Hope
and Confidence



Frank E. Bowers, Ph.D.
with Tara R.S. Borsh, Psy.D.

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Boys Town, Nebraska

Great Days Ahead: Parenting Children Who Have ADHD with Hope and Confidence

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A crisis, resource, and referral number for kids and parents.

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Speaking from Experience

I can't begin to tell you the frustration I felt when, yet again, I received a note from my son's teacher.

"Your son had a difficult time in school today...."

He was only in second grade and it seemed like every day was another "bad day at school." The same thoughts went through my head: "What is wrong with him?" "Why can't he just behave?" And the ever present, "What am I doing wrong?"

But then, you already know the frustration I was feeling. You are feeling it right now. That is why you picked up this book. You are looking for answers to those questions and many others.

I decided to go looking for answers, too. His teacher suggested that we have him tested for "ADD." I had never heard of that! So my wife and I found a specialist who completed the testing. Sure enough, our son was diagnosed with what was

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then called “Attention Deficit Disorder with Hyperactivity.” This actually brought us a sense of relief. We finally had a name for “the enemy!” We now knew what we were fighting and this gave us some hope that we could overcome the difficulties.

Truthfully, the sense of relief was not only for my son. I now understood why I had been having difficulties with focus and concentration all of my life. The same behaviors we had been seeing in our son had been a part of my life for as long as I could remember. Now that my son was diagnosed with ADD, I suspected that I, too, could be facing the same challenge.

But I still didn’t know exactly what ADD was. I knew our son was having difficulty with his behavior at school. And I knew he was not completing his homework. One night, he had an assignment to do ten math problems. I had him work at his desk in his room. Ninety minutes later, he had written his name at the top of the page and the numbers “1-2-3” down the left margin. Not much progress in an hour and a half!

The worst problem was that he was having a lot of trouble making friends. It was heartbreaking to see only one child come to his birthday party when he turned six.

In light of all this, I made a decision. Armed with a lot of questions, both about my son and myself, I went back to school to learn more about “the enemy.” Three years later, I emerged with a Ph.D. in psychology, and with a little better understanding of what was happening and how I could help my son.

That was more than fifteen years ago. Since then, the name of the disorder has changed to “ADHD,” and a lot more research has been conducted to give us a better understanding of it. New medications have come on the market and more

effective interventions have been developed. My son is now twenty-six years old, and is doing well, thank you. I am proud of him for sticking with it and not giving up. It was not always easy, but armed with knowledge and a specific plan, we were able to keep "the enemy" at bay.

Over the years, I've met with scores of parents and children who struggled just like my family did. They were looking for answers, just like we were. Of course, not everyone has the luxury of being able to go back to school and make a major career change. But what those parents simply needed was someone to tell them how they could best help their child.

That's what this book is about. My colleague Tara Borsh and I have written it to help you by providing some hands-on, practical ideas for parenting a child with ADHD. The ideas and concepts in this book have been well-researched by professionals. I've not only taught them to my young patients and their parents, but I lived by them every day as my son was growing up.

Your child is precious. More than anything else, he or she deserves your love and care. We humbly hope the advice and guidance provided here brings your family closer together and helps you overcome the many challenges you and your child may be facing.



How's Your Parenting Toolbox?

There are a lot of tough jobs in this world. But none is tougher, or more important to the future of human beings, than the one we call “parenting.”

Parenting is a responsibility you can take on with little or no formal training. There is no required “parenting degree” or a parenting license or permit a person has to apply for. Although you have to have a license to clean swimming pools, cut hair, poke earlobes, or do psychology, there are virtually no requirements for potentially the most demanding, all-encompassing, and important job of all – raising a child. In fact, most men and women become parents with only the experience of having been on the receiving end of the job; they were parented. For most of us, whatever else we learn about rearing a child comes from on-the-job training.

Like all jobs, parenting requires a certain variety of tools and the skills to use those tools. A carpenter would not consider

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trying to build a house if the only tool he had was a hammer. The more tools he is skillful at using, the more successful he will be at completing his task. Similarly, moms and dads should not expect to be successful at parenting if they learn and use only one tool. That's why it's so important to get as many good tools in your "parenting toolbox" as possible.

Successful parents have a variety of tools and understand how and when to use the right tool in a specific situation. And that's the real key to good parenting. You wouldn't use a sledgehammer to shape a diamond or use a jeweler's pick to dig for diamonds in a mine. Parents need to be able to identify and choose the right tool to accomplish a particular goal or purpose.

Your ultimate goal as a parent is to prepare your child to move out of the nest and be independent. You want to shepherd your child from birth to adulthood safely, with most bones intact, and to ensure he or she is emotionally, spiritually, physically, educationally, socially, and mentally prepared to take his or her place as a productive member of society. You also want to serve as a good role model for what a good parent is so your children can draw on those positive experiences if they decide to have children. This is a process, not an event. How and what you are teaching your child at any given time is a function of where you are and where your child is in his or her development.

This means understanding that a child is not just a small adult. Children see and think about the world in a much different way than adults. You are used to looking at adults in the eye. Kids look at adults in the kneecaps. Successful parents are ones who can understand their kids' perspectives and relate

to them, communicating and instructing without giving up their authority as parents.

Employment coaches tell us that the best jobs are ones we would do and enjoy even if we weren't getting paid. Although parenting holds few financial rewards, successful parents love what they do and realize that how they raise their child will have a significant impact on the future of the world.

As difficult as parenting can be, having a child with ADHD makes this tough job even tougher. Since you are reading this book, you may have already experienced all the emotions that go with the territory – anger, sadness, frustration, exasperation, feeling overwhelmed, and many others. These emotions often have a way of unintentionally expressing themselves in negative ways when parents interact with their child. Before you find yourself at your wits' end and feel like you're losing all control, we hope using the tools we offer in this book will help you transform your home environment into one that is positive, loving, and productive.

This is a hands-on book. It will have done its job if it eventually becomes dog-eared, written on, bent, wrinkled, and well-worn. It's best to read this book in segments, rather than all the way through at once. There are stop signs throughout that will tell you when to put it down and practice the tools that have been discussed. As you become more skillful with each tool – not just thinking about it but actually using it – you will begin to see a difference in your child, and perhaps, in yourself.

The focus of this book is on parenting children who have either been diagnosed or are displaying the symptoms of

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ADHD. However, these parenting tools can be successful with all children.

You are on a wonderful, exciting, and yes, sometimes frustrating, adventure. I hope this book helps you and your child reach your destination safe and sound.

What to Do When Your Child's Diagnosis Is 'ADHD'

IF YOUR CHILD HAS BEEN DIAGNOSED with or shows the symptoms of ADHD, your emotions probably swing from sadness to frustration to anger on a daily, if not hourly, basis. The difficulties of parenting a hyperactive, disorganized, inattentive, forgetful, aggressive child may be threatening to overwhelm you.

When the author heard that same diagnosis for his own son years ago, he recognized that he himself had struggled with many of those symptoms throughout his childhood and adult life. He also decided that he needed to return to school to learn more about the disorder so that he could help not only his own son but other families with children who had ADHD. Dr. Frank E. Bowers is now the proud parent of a successful adult son and has counseled hundreds of parents and children.

With a father's insight and a clinician's knowledge, Dr. Bowers examines the challenges a child with ADHD presents and offers parents workable, effective ways to reduce and prevent behavior problems and the everyday stress they can bring on. He reminds parents that, despite the diagnosis, children need to be held responsible for their actions and suggests how to use positive discipline strategies to help them learn new skills and better behaviors.

In this book, parents will discover how to address their child's issues at school, at meals and bedtime, with siblings and peers, and out in public. The tools Dr. Bowers provides can empower frustrated or fearful parents to approach raising a child who has ADHD with renewed hope and confidence.



FRANK E. BOWERS, Ph.D., is a Supervising Psychologist at the Boys Town Behavioral Health Clinic, where he counsels hundreds of children and families each year. A licensed psychologist, he earned his doctoral degree at the University of Southern Mississippi. Dr. Bowers has been with Boys Town since 2006. Prior to that, he was in private practice for seven years.

"Dr. Bowers has produced a gem of a self-help book that offers parents a rare combination of scientifically validated treatment advice delivered in a common sense commentary, infused with the wisdom of a father who has dealt with this issue on a very personal level. I highly recommend that any parent who is struggling to raise a child with ADHD pick up this book and give it a read. They won't be disappointed."



- MICHAEL HANDWERK, Ph.D.
Licensed Psychologist
Harrisburg Medical Center (Illinois)

