



ADHD in Kids and Emotional Intelligence in Parents

Higher Emotional Intelligence of Parents of ADHD Children Leads to More Positive Personal Growth.

Many studies describe the distress of parents whose children are diagnosed with attention deficit/hyperactive disorder (ADHD), a chronic and debilitating disorder affecting 3-5% of all school-aged children. However, few studies report any positive effects from stressful parenting, particularly any stress-related growth. Stress-related growth refers to the positive life changes that people make as a result of their struggles to cope with negative life events and adverse situations.

A group of Israeli researchers examined the potential for personal growth inherent in the stressful daily coping faced by parents of ADHD children, compared with the more routine coping required of parents of children without ADHD. They were also interested in whether parental emotional intelligence help parents cope with the stresses of raising an ADHD child allowing for greater personal growth. Interest was also in whether the amount of social support parents receive influence the amount of personal growth they experienced as parents –especially for those parents of children with ADHD.

151 parents participated in the study, including 71 parents of children diagnosed with ADHD and 80 parents of children without ADHD. These parents completed several surveys including: 1. The amount of personal growth they experienced as a result of parenting, 2. Amount of social support they experienced from family, friends and their significant other and 3. Parental emotional intelligence.

KEY FINDINGS

- No differences in personal growth as a result of parenting were found between parents of ADHD children and those parents of children without ADHD
- However, for parents of ADHD children, those parents higher in emotional intelligence, the more personal growth they experience in their role as parents
- Younger, less educated and the less economically stable parents, particularly if non-religious, the more personal growth they experienced as a result of being a parent.
- Social support contributed more to personal growth in the group of parents of children without ADHD.

THINGS YOU CAN DO

- ✓ **Develop self-awareness.** Keep a diary or blog or written journal of your emotions – what happened today, how you dealt with it, what pushed your buttons.
- ✓ **Self-manage.** We can't control what makes us feel a certain way but we can always control how we react. Work on controlling outbursts, recognising triggers, and turning emotional energy into something productive like exercise or a project. Doing what's best for our needs takes practise.
- ✓ **Keep perspective.** Keeping perspective is key. Using strategies such as the Catastrophe Scale (is it as bad as?) and rating those negative events in order of 'OMG how awful was that', helps rational thought and builds resilience.
- ✓ **Work on social skills.** Social competence means more than making friends. It includes skills in conflict resolution, collaboration and negotiation. Brush up on strategies through the myriad of printed and electronic information available and spend more time with friends and family.
- ✓ **More me time.** Very important when parenting a child with a disability. Films, coffee with friends, a walk around the

neighbourhood, maybe a massage. Try these and other strategies a regular basis. And don't feel guilty taking time away from parenting.

- ✓ **Discover empathy.** The child (and others) you are in relationship with have their own set of feelings, desires, triggers and fears. Listen, try to see the world from their perspective, and work on understanding your differences. Be sensitive to the pain of others and give them space to feel, but also be prepared to be firm and confrontational when needed.
- ✓ **Be motivated.** Decide what it is you most want and value. It doesn't pay to aim too high or be overly unrealistic as we may never in fact achieve the motivation to stretch ourselves that far. Keep goals in mind, but also be mindful that they may take time.
- ✓ **Pat yourself on the back.** Give yourself a gold star every time you have the confidence to step out and step back from the stress of parenting. Maturity and independence goes hand in hand with healthy social-emotional intelligence.

Source: Finzi-Dottan et al., Predictors of stress-related growth in parents of children with ADHD, Research in Developmental Disabilities 32 (2011) pp 510-519.

TAKEAWAY

FROM PROFESSOR MICHAEL BERNARD
FOUNDER, YOU CAN DO IT! EDUCATION

The responsibility for parenting a child with ADHD can place a heavy burden on our shoulders. Negative parenting patterns can easily develop but with well-developed emotional intelligence, parents are better equipped to be aware of the impact of stress on their mental health and work on ways to express and regulate emotions. Positive emotional intelligence can improve relationships, and give us a clearer sense of our own strengths and resilience.