



# PSYCH NOTES™

Courtesy of

JOSEPH S. VOLPE, PH.D.  
CLINICAL DIRECTOR

EAST END PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES, P.C.

565 ROUTE 25A, SUITE 201  
MILLER PLACE, NY 11764

TEL. (631) 821-7214 • FAX. (631) 821-7263

Volume I Issue 5

## TIPS FOR THE BEHAVIORAL MANAGEMENT OF CHILDREN WITH ATTENTION-DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (AD/HD)

Joseph S. Volpe, Ph.D.  
Psychologist

Many families have described their home as more of a “battlefield” than “haven” when there is an AD/HD child in residence. Like other children, AD/HD children test limits and have considerable potential to violate household rules, resist doing their homework, fight with siblings, etc. AD/HD individuals are especially at risk for difficulty in these areas. Moreover, oppositional-defiant behavior, depression, agitation and/or stubbornness can exacerbate an already difficult situation. Basic tenets of behavioral management for AD/HD children include:

1. *Learn to pay positive attention to the child.* Attention is a very strong reinforcer for a child. It is important to consider that even negative attention (e.g., yelling at a child) can be potentially reinforcing and can maintain the inappropriate behavior that is causing it (e.g., interrupting a conversation). Learn when to give attention and when to withhold it.
2. *Give more effective commands.* Don't give commands that you do not plan to back up. Do not present the command as a question or favor (especially for young children).
3. *Teach the child not to interrupt activities.* Give two-part commands that include telling the child what to do while you are busy (i.e., a task) and specifically tell the child not to interrupt you. The task that you give should not be a chore, but some interesting activity such as coloring, playing with a toy, etc. Periodically, stop what you are doing and praise the child for remaining occupied, and then return to what you were doing. You can use this same approach when teaching anything new to the child. Start with frequent attention/praise and gradually reduce (or “fade”) how often you compliment the new behavior.
4. The *token system* is a behavioral strategy utilized to increase appropriate behavior and minimize or eliminate inappropriate or undesirable behavior. Many AD/HD children benefit from programs that systematically deliver rewards or consequences. Two common programs that pair compliance and cooperation with powerful rewards include the Home Poker Chip Program (for ages 4 through 8) and the Home Point System (for children 9 and older). These programs can be used for individual children as well as in the group setting. It is often helpful to define target behaviors to reward with the child. Chips or points become “symbolic” or representative of rewards and/or privileges that the child can earn. Moreover, children can get “fined” for misbehavior as a means to decrease inappropriate behavior.
5. *Time-Out* is a method of discipline. It is a brief interruption of activities for your child. The child is placed in a dull, boring place immediately following the inappropriate behavior. He/She remains there until a timer signals that he/she can leave. A rule of thumb for time-out duration is to use one minute for each year of the child's age. The time-out method serves to bring a quick stop to the problem behavior with the long-term goal of helping the child achieve self-discipline. It is important to consider that time-out, when conducted properly, is a safe and effective way to curtail or stop inappropriate behavior. There is no evidence that time-out emotionally harms children.
6. Management of *behavior in public places* can become a nightmare for parents. It will be most beneficial to set up rules before entering the place. Development of an incentive for compliance is also crucial. Randomly reward/praise the child for appropriate behavior (i.e., catch a child being good). Finally, set up a form of punishment for noncompliance. Don't be afraid to use time-out in a public place - it is an effective method away from home as well.

*Joseph S. Volpe, Ph.D. is a New York State licensed Psychologist and certified School Psychologist. Dr. Volpe specializes in the evaluation and treatment of individuals across the life span with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) and also works with people in need of support for depression and anxiety. He is a School Psychologist in the Farmingdale School District. Dr. Volpe serves as the Clinical Director of East End Psychological Services, P.C. in Miller Place. Dr. Volpe is co-author of A Practical Guide for University Crisis Response (published Jan, 2004), A Practical Guide for Crisis Response in Our Schools (Fifth Edition) (published in 2003), and Selected Papers on Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (published in 2001). Dr. Volpe serves on the Professional Advisory Board for Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorders (CHADD) of Suffolk County. For further information, Dr. Volpe can be reached at (631) 821-7214.*

THIS DOCUMENT MAY BE REPRODUCED & DISSEMINATED IN ITS ORIGINAL FORM