

Parenting Your ADD Teen

*A Special Report for
Parenting My Teen Listeners*

from

ADD Moms
Brenda Nicholson

Thank You!

This report is presented as a special thank you for all of the listeners of “Parenting My Teen”. I appreciate the fact that you took the time to listen to my interview, and I hope that this e book will provide you with additional information that you will find valuable.

Brenda

About This Book

The information contained in this report is based on my 20+ years of studying Attention Deficit Disorder, my training as an ADD Coach, and research that I have conducted on my own.

I have made every effort to insure that the information provided is accurate; however, I cannot guarantee that the advice offered here will help your ADD teen. I can only say that in most cases, it does prove to be effective.

You will note that I have highlighted certain areas within the book. On my websites, I use a different color font to do the same thing. The reason I do this is because I tend to write a lot :), and so much text can be overwhelming for people with ADD. By highlighting certain parts, they can get the basics if they need to, and make a decision as to whether or not to read the entire article.

About Me

My name is Brenda Nicholson. I am:

- The owner of [ADD Moms](#) and [ADD Student](#), websites dedicated to helping people with Attention Deficit Disorder manage their lives more effectively. As the names imply, my emphasis is on helping parents who are raising kids with AD/HD, and teaching students with AD/HD how to manage their symptoms and succeed in school.
- An ADD mom and the mother of 3 children with Attention Deficit Disorder.
- An ADD Coach, trained at the American Coaching Association. I have been coaching for about 7 years.

I first started studying and learning about ADD over 20 years ago, when my son was small. I suspected early on that he had Attention Deficit Disorder, so I started reading everything I could about it and talking to anyone who would listen. I wanted to be the best mom that I could be, and I believed that in order to do so, I needed to learn about ADD.

When my son's ADD symptoms began interfering with his school performance, I went to his teachers, the school psychologist, and his pediatrician, looking for help and for answers. It was soon apparent that all of my research had made *me* the expert! It was dismaying to find out that I knew more about ADD than the professionals who were supposed to be helping my son, but I was grateful that I at least had the knowledge to step in and do it myself.

There are so many other parents out there who find themselves in the same position, but without the benefit of my years of experience and research. They go to professionals looking for guidance, advice, and help for their child, and find little. That's where [ADD Moms](#) and my other site, [ADD Student](#) come in. I created this business to help parents like you - parents who have a child with ADD or ADHD, and need some help in helping their child succeed.

I am dedicated to helping children, adolescents, and adults with ADD/ADHD live happier, more successful, and productive lives. Please let me know how I can help you. Contact me at Brenda@ADDmoms.com.

The Interview

I will start with the questions that Aurelia asked me, along with my answers. Additional information will be included at the end.

What is ADD (in a nutshell)?

Attention Deficit Disorder, or AD/HD as it is now known, is a neurological disorder that causes the brain to function differently. Most scientists agree that it is hereditary, and often occurs in families with a history of alcoholism or substance abuse, and/or depression.

It should be noted that people with AD/HD are typically highly intelligent and creative, but have trouble with things that others take for granted. This would include such tasks as maintaining focus, paying attention, and keeping track of belongings or time. In addition, there is often a disparity between the person's potential and what they have actually accomplished.

What are some of the concerns that parents of ADD teens might have, both as it relates to school and home?

In many ways, the concerns of parents raising ADD teens are no different than those of any other parent raising a teenager. Each is concerned about their teen:

- Getting a job
- Learning to drive
- Getting good grades, and getting into a good college
- Becoming involved with sex, drugs, and alcohol

However, because of some of the symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder, these concerns may be amplified for parents of ADD teens.

Depending on your child's job, issues like distractibility and the inability to pay attention can be real concerns.

Distractibility and the inability to pay attention are also concerns when it comes to driving a car, particularly for new drivers. Add in a tendency for risk taking, and you can see how dangerous this traditional rite of passage can be.

If you have an ADD teen, you are probably already aware of how difficult it can be for them in school. Despite their high intelligence, people with Attention Deficit Disorder often struggle through school, making grades far below what they are capable of.

ADD symptoms such as the inability to focus or pay attention, an inability to sit still for any length of time, poor short term memory, and others can interfere with learning. Poor grades, of course, decrease the likelihood of getting into a good college, which in turn can affect the rest of their lives profoundly.

Sex, drugs, and alcohol are concerns for any parent. But when you add in ADD symptoms such as a tendency towards impulsive behavior, risk taking, and a low threshold for boredom, you can see how much greater these concerns become.

It's important to remember, too, that up until they are in their mid to late 20's, kids with Attention Deficit Disorder have a gap of 2-5 years between their actual age and their emotional one. That means that your 16 year old may sometimes behave (and make decisions) as though they are 11-14 years old.

In light of these concerns, what can parents do to keep their kids safe?

There are a number of things that parents can do to help insure their teen's safety:

- **Educate yourself about Attention Deficit Disorder.** Not only do you need to know what the symptoms of AD/HD are, but you need to know **how they apply to your child.** You need to know how your child thinks. For example, when we bought our first 2 story house, we lived in Michigan, and our son was about 11 or 12 years old. He was also an avid snowboarder. It was September when we moved in, and on moving day, I found him upstairs looking out his bedroom window to the roof below. I knew immediately what he was thinking, and that was the first day (of many) that I told him there would be no snowboarding off the roof.
- **Medicate your child.** Work to find the right medication and the right dosage, and make sure it's always on hand and that your child is taking it. If you are concerned about abuse, there is a new medication on the market that has zero potential for abuse. It's called Vynase. Studies have shown that not only is ADD medication effective in treating the symptoms of ADD (which will help with grades), but it also makes it much less likely that your child will turn to drugs or alcohol as a way to self-medicate. (Tom Arnold, who has publicly said that he has AD/HD, has also said that he took cocaine because it made him feel “normal”. Abusing alcohol, or any drugs, including prescription and over the counter drugs – especially antihistamines and diet pills – is a way to self-medicate, although most people doing it don't realize that.)
- **Keep the lines of communication open,** and pick your battles. If every verbal interaction with you is in anger or in a lecturing tone, you will lose them. Your teen is in the process of becoming an adult, and therefore, capable of adult conversation. See if you can't have a pleasant conversation with them as you would with a friend, and learn to let the little stuff slide. Also, bring ADD out of the closet. It's nothing to be ashamed of, and there is no reason for anyone who has it to feel as though they are less of a human being. Talk candidly and openly about it with your child, not in a “I'm trying to help you way”, but more as an “I want to get to know you better” way. ADD was always out in the open in our house, and as a result, no one felt uncomfortable talking about some aspect of it that might be giving them trouble.
- **Keep them busy, but not too much.** Find what interests them, and let them participate. Team sports are great, as are lessons of one kind or another. We had hockey, figure skating, and dance in our house. Usually our kids were limited to one activity each, because sometimes they needed to tag along on their sibling's activity, plus there was homework to consider. Remember, people with AD/HD are easily overwhelmed, so you don't want to overschedule.
- **Be the Kool-Aid house.** That's the house that all the kids gravitate to, and when

my kids were younger, that was our house. We had a basketball hoop, a pool, and video games, plus snacks and drinks, and a welcoming atmosphere. The advantage of this is that you get to know your teen's friends, you know where they are, who they're with, and what they're doing. The only rule is that there must be adult supervision at all times.

- Buy them a stick shift car – the old lady variety. A recent study concluded that teens with AD/HD who drove a stick shift had fewer accidents and paid more attention to their driving than those who drove automatics. The reason is obvious: it takes more of your attention on a more consistent basis to drive a stick. Please do yourself a favor and buy the old lady version. I once had a client whose mother told me with some exasperation that she was going to have to bring him to his appointments for a while. She and her husband had taken away his car because of too many speeding tickets. Turned out they had just bought him a brand new Mustang!

I understand that kids with ADD often struggle with school and I can't imagine it would be any easier for a teen with ADD in high school. What can parents do to help them?

There are a number of things that parents can do:

- **Learn how your teen's brain functions.** Which subjects are easier for them, and which ones are harder? Why? Find out about learning styles and have your teen take a test to find theirs, if you don't know already. Here's a link to a simple one that I wrote: [Learning Style Quiz](#). The benefit of this is that once you know their learning style, you will know how to offer the most effective help. For instance, suppose your teen is a visual learner and needs to read a novel for school. If the book has been made into a movie, having them watch the video will allow them to absorb more of the material than listening to an audio tape of someone reading the book.
- **Embrace school** and be a positive presence there. Get to know the staff on a friendly basis, volunteer your time. **Keep the lines of communication open here**, too. I have found it very effective to schedule a meeting with the teachers and guidance counselor early in the school year. Going to parent teacher conferences was always such a negative experience for me. It seemed that all I heard were negative things about my child, and that I spent the evening apologizing and promising they would do better. Not only that, but you're already 6 weeks into the semester and just now finding out how badly your child is doing. **Take back your control.** Decide what you want the staff to know about your child. Tell them what sorts of problems ADD can cause for your child, as well as possible solutions. Take this opportunity to educate them about your child, what you expect, and what you are willing to do. Emphasize that you are giving them explanations about your child and his ADD; not excuses. Don't expect all of the teachers to be willing to attend, nor to be willing to cooperate. Still, it's worth a try.
- Be aware that **ADD is covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act.** This is a Federal law that basically states that individuals with Attention Deficit Disorder have the right to reasonable accommodations that will level the playing field and allow them the same opportunity for an education. Whoever diagnoses your child for ADD will determine what accommodations are appropriate. If you have the necessary paperwork on file with the school, they are obligated to abide by it and provide the accommodations. This would include things such as extra test time, a different test location, someone to read or write for your child, or a limit on homework. **Make sure that your teen is aware of this, and teach them to advocate for themselves** to insure that they get what they are entitled to receive.
- **Think outside the box** when it comes to solutions to common problems. For

instance, if forgetting the books at school is a problem, see if you can get a second set. If getting the homework back to school is the issue, maybe you can fax it or email it. If forgetting assignments is the problem, ask the teacher for a copy of his for the year, or see if your child has a friend that they can call.

- **Hire help when it's needed, but make sure it's the right kind.** A tutor is appropriate if the subject matter is the problem, but if the problem is caused by the ADD symptoms themselves, then maybe you should consider an ADD coach. In general, I have a low opinion of franchise operations that offer help with school, but you may find that they work well for you.
- If at all possible, **find ways to fit the school experience to your child.** Most kids with ADD do better with a teacher who's highly structured and organized, as long as they are not rigid and uncompromising. See if you can find out who those teachers are in your school and if your child can be put in their class. Also, we all have times of the day when we are more alert and function better. Find out when that is for your child, and see if you can schedule the harder classes for that time of day. This is where a good relationship with the guidance counselor will pay off.

What about college? What can parents of ADD teens do to help them get into a good school and to make sure that they feel well adjusted there?

- First, do the best that you can to **keep their grades up in high school**. Understand that due to their nature, for many ADD teens, college is too far off to motivate them to do well in school – even at the beginning of senior year.
- Get them **involved in other activities** while they are in high school. Being on a committee or team of some kind at school will look good on their college applications, as will community service. If you can get them into scouting, or keep them there, earning the badges and awards that scouting offers high school students is especially impressive.
- If you can, enroll them in **private school**. They often have smaller class sizes and more structure overall, which will benefit your ADD teen.
- Allow them to take any **AP (Advanced Placement) classes** they are eligible for. It looks good on the application, and because they are more challenging, it's actually more motivating for many ADD teens.
- Have them **take the ACT or SAT as soon and as often as possible** (once or twice a year, depending on how old they are.) Don't expect them to study for it yet; you're using this for its familiarity. **Getting them used to taking it while there's no pressure will eliminate much of the pressure when it's for real**. It seems, too, that ADD teens do far better in general on these tests than you might expect from their grades. As far as I can tell, there are no age restrictions. My youngest daughter first took the SAT when she was 11.
- Check out the **CLEP and DANTES tests**. Both are well respected tests that allow you to test out of college level classes, and each is accepted at almost any school in the country, including Harvard and Yale. If you have a college in mind already, you can ask the counseling office for the classes that the tests correspond to. If not, it shouldn't really matter much. The tests are designed primarily for the basic classes that everyone takes the first year or two. Some of the more subject specific tests can be used to replace electives. It's a good idea to choose subjects that your child is already comfortable and familiar with; there's a greater likelihood that they will pass. The tests do require some self-study, but for many ADD teens, that's appealing because they can do it on their time frame rather than sitting in a classroom.
- When it's time to apply for college, consider **casting a wider net** than you might have for your other children. Because ADD teens tend to have lower GPA's, you may need to look harder for a school that will fit their needs and also admit them. You may want to consider a two year or **community college**, too, although that's not likely to be popular with your teen. I worked for many years in Learning Assistance at a community college, and many people judged it unfairly as a

glorified high school. The fact is, community colleges exist to serve kids like ours, who benefit from the smaller class size, smaller campus, and location close to home. I've had more than one student tell me that they felt bad going to community college when all of their friends left for the state university, but that in a year (sometimes less), their friends had flunked out and were joining them.

- When you're looking for a school, look at **class size and campus size**. Smaller is better. Also, check to make sure the school has a **dedicated learning assistance center with a full and knowledgeable staff, as well as a special needs counselor**. (The community college I worked at had a staff far superior to many of the local universities.) These are services your child will need to make use of in order to succeed in college, so make sure they are top notch.
- Understand that if you are **sending your child away to college, it's likely to be overwhelming for them**. Also, the lack of structure is a huge problem for many ADD students, and those without ADD, too. You would be wise to get them **familiarized with the college over the summer**, while much of the student population is gone. You can enroll them in a class, or just take a few trips there with them, so they can find their way around. **Put as much structure in place as you can**. Do they currently get up on their own, when they're supposed to? Can you count on them to take their meds reliably? Are they likely to spend most of their time drinking and staying up too late, or can you trust them to use good judgment? **Remember, they still have that gap between their actual age and their emotional one**. Sending an 18 year old off to live on their own can be like sending a 13 year old.

I know that children with ADD are generally diagnosed earlier in childhood, but what should a parent of a teen do if they suspect that their teen has ADD?

First, educate yourself about Attention Deficit Disorder. Learn the symptoms, and see if they apply to your teen. (See [ADD Moms](#) for a list.) They must have at least 6 of the symptoms, and they must be present in a variety of places (not just at school, for instance) for at least 6 months, and must impact their lives in a negative manner. Everybody gets distracted or stops paying attention some of the time. For people with ADD, it happens more often than not, and is generally beyond their control.

Keep in mind that having ADD is sort of like a cold; sometimes, it's really bad, and other times you hardly notice it. ADD symptoms get worse with lack of sleep and are affected by diet as well. And the ability to get lost in a video game or other activity for hours does not mean it isn't ADD. That's actually a symptom of ADD called hyperfocus.

If you're unsure, ask a teacher or sports coach – someone who knows your child – for their opinion.

Once you're pretty sure it's ADD, you need to get a diagnosis. There are a number of professionals who are able to diagnose Attention Deficit Disorder:

- Psychiatrists
- Psychologists
- Neurologists
- Pediatricians or family doctors
- Clinical social workers

I recommend a psychiatrist if you can afford one. You will get a more comprehensive evaluation with valuable information about your child, plus you have someone who has the ability to write prescriptions. Above all, make sure that whoever you choose to do the evaluation specializes in AD/HD.

Any final thoughts you have to share with us?

A few:

- Always remember that there is **no** relationship between Attention Deficit Disorder and success or happiness in life. There is **no** relationship between Attention Deficit Disorder and intelligence. And finally, there is **no** relationship between grades and success or happiness in life. **Some of the most accomplished and successful people there are have ADD.** Do a search online for famous people and Attention Deficit Disorder and you'll see what I mean.
- The **majority of people who have ADD wouldn't give it up if they could.** That includes me.
- I have so much more to say to you; **everything about ADD isn't bad or negative, and there are ways to cope with what you need to manage.** I hope that you visit my website and read more, because that's my ultimate goal: to share what I know with others, and to help as many people as possible.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I hope you found it helpful.

Brenda