

This is the final article of a three-part series introducing parents to a new way of looking at their role in parenting children with ADHD—that of “parent case manager.” If you’ve not yet read the first two articles, “The Parent’s Role Makes a Difference” (October 2013) and “What Are the Tools in a Parent’s Tool Box” (December 2013), we strongly encourage you to do so.

**Parents as  
Case Managers:  
A Roadmap for  
ADHD Management  
PART THREE**

# Parents Taking Action as Case Managers

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IT IS A PARENT’S JOB to manage everything for the first several stages in a child’s development. As children grow, parents ideally are encouraged to relinquish control to their children, step by step as developmentally appropriate. While that “letting go” is difficult for many parents, it is absolutely critical for their children to achieve independence.

When ADHD is added to the mix, however, the lines of when a parent should relinquish control begin to blur. ADHD is a chronic, neurobiological condition marked by developmental delays and requiring lifelong management. Children are less likely to develop essential skills for management without specific education and intervention. As a result, parents are called upon to take a more active role for a longer period of time in three critical aspects of their child’s development: medical, educational, and social development.

Part one of this series explained how parents can consciously assume the role of parent case manager, coordinating services and ongoing support for their children

with complex needs. Of course, there are inherent challenges to any parent taking on this responsibility, as objectivity is not necessarily part of a parent’s job description. Still, in our experience as professionals and as parents, we have seen time and time again that the benefits far outweigh the disadvantages. When parents take a deliberate role in preparing their children for medical, educational, and social independence, the entire family thrives.

Part two provided a strong framework for parents about specific aspects of medical, educational and social management of ADHD. That installment includes a list of training resources, a glossary of terms, expectation of costs, and an explanation of support professionals.

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## FIVE STEPS TO ACTION

When you understand these five aspects of any problem—and you remember to be resilient, hopeful, and calm—you're on your way to making effective decisions.

- what
- when
- where
- who
- how

In part three, we are going to help you take action to become a case manager for your child or teen with ADHD, providing examples in the three important areas in your child's life: medical, academic, and social. It's important to remember that progress with ADHD issues occurs slowly and is progressive. One success builds on another. For some parents, this will be a relatively easy process. Others may face greater challenges or meet more resistance. We urge you to stay the course, and be persistent. Real change takes time.

### Three keys to success

Persistence is not the only key to your success, however. Successful parent case managers tend to possess three additional qualities: resilience, hope, and calm.

- In her book, *The Gift of Imperfection* (Hazelden, 2010), Brené Brown defines a resilient person as one who is resourceful, likely to seek help, believes that she can do something, and has social and family support. Without resilience, parents often feel powerless or desperate.
- The resilient parent also has hope, sets goals and is persistent in reaching these goals. She believes in herself and in her child. She works hard to find others who can help her—this is crucial. Without hope, a parent is likely to give up.
- The calm parent removes drama from decision-making and avoids getting caught up in the emotions of shame and blame. By keeping a matter-of-fact attitude, while still being compassionate, a parent can hold her family accountable with firm and loving support.

### Five steps to action

So what's the blueprint for action? To begin with, you need a plan. Actually, you need many plans. You'll want to choose options that work best for your family. But here's the challenge: Your children are growing and changing every day, and your plans need to change with them.

So what do you need to do to prepare for each obstacle on the course? You must start by getting clear on the path ahead, the problems you're trying to address, and the outcomes you're looking to achieve. Before you ever get to planning and action, you must start by collecting information.

To do this, we recommend that you try the what-when-where-who-and-how approach to planning and management. In any given situation, after you've taken aim on the problem, there is a period of discovery when you must collect the information you'll need to make the most informed decisions about how to proceed. This will get you started.

Ask yourself the following five questions to gather the facts:

- **What** is the situation? What is the problem that is calling for your attention or your intervention? What are you trying to solve? What's the big picture?
- **When** does this problem happen? Is this a challenge during school? After school? In the evenings? At what time of the day?
- **Where** is this situation a problem? At school? At home? In after school sports? At day care? (This is where a plan of action will take place.)
- **Who** is involved? Is this just about your child? Is there a





teacher involved? A behavior specialist? A parent? A sibling? Another student? Who else might be helpful? (Which individuals need to know and understand the plan you are going to create?)

- **How** might you look at this situation differently? How would you like to see the situation resolved, or how might it look when the situation is better? You may also consider how to achieve the desired result, like trying a new approach, or using a system or structure? In this case, how will lead you to a plan (an intervention or modification). How can you stay involved and be part of the plan?

While these five categories alone will not resolve every challenging situation you face, they do provide a foundation for you to gather information to support you in planning and decisionmaking. When you understand these five aspects of any problem—and you remember to be resilient, hopeful, and calm—you're on your way to making effective decisions. You'll have a much better idea of who your allies might be in the process, as well.

Let's look at how understanding what, when, where, who, and how can help in each of the three critical areas where you tend to face challenges.

## Medical

**Scenario:** *Your preschooler is hitting and biting other children in school. Neighbors are reluctant to let their children play with your child. You do not want to put such a youngster on medication, but are getting a lot of pressure to do so.*

**What:** What is at the source of your child's aggressive behavior toward other children? What is happening that is triggering your child's behavior?

**When:** Problems occur during free time at preschool, and during play hours at home and on the weekends.

**Where:** Preschool room, at home, and in the neighborhood. This is where a plan of action must be put into place.

**Who:** Preschool teacher and classmates; neighbors and their children; your child's doctor. These are the individuals who need to know and understand the plan in order for it to be implemented.

**How:** You want your child to understand how to make friends at school and feel safe in the neighborhood. With the what, when, where and who, how might you develop a plan of action? For example, you might ask for closer supervision at preschool during free time activities, and set up a reward chart for hands and feet to self. You could also increase structure for outside activities at home by limiting the number of children your child plays with, and making sure there is supervision as you teach your child self-management. If necessary, you may consult a behavioral specialist or a coach, or ask your doctor what other support might be available.

## Education

**Scenario:** *School staff and relatives are continually telling you that you need to do something about your child. Your relatives think you are a poor parent, and the school staff is hinting that your child may have ADHD.*

**What:** In what way is the child struggling or having problems? What is happening in your child's experience?

**When:** School is sending notes home routinely. Large family gather-

ings are miserable. Are there problems at any other time? Can you find out specifically when during the school day the problems are occurring?

**Where:** Problems are happening at school, and whenever your child is around other family members, either at your home or theirs.

**Who:** Teachers, principal, and relatives are involved. Is anyone else noticing a problem?

**How:** You want your child to feel successful at school, and for family events to be less stressful. With the what, when, where and who, *how* might you develop a plan of action? Perhaps there are learning issues that are causing challenges. The schools have professionals (counselors, psychologist or social workers, behavioral specialists) who can provide classroom observations, collect data to demonstrate the magnitude of the problem, and be more specific as to where and when the behavior most often occurs. A Functional Behavioral Assessment can be very appropriate at this time, and an evaluation or ADHD assessment can be requested. Until you have more information, you might also set clear expectations with extended family, and limit time spent at family gatherings to avoid difficult and stressful situations. You can also read and learn about ADHD.

## Social/Educational Issues

**Scenario:** *Your teen's football coach is getting frustrated with your teen because he cannot follow play instructions. Coach wants to take the teen off the team because he won't listen to instructions and gets mixed up with plays.*

**What:** What is at the source of your teen's challenges? (For example, the coach is unaware of your teen's learning disability for sequencing and memory issues, and your teen may be embarrassed because other kids on the team think he is stupid.)

**When:** Coach gives instructions in classroom and before game plays, when your teen is not able to process effectively.

**Where:** Practice classroom and football field.

**Who:** Coach; other players on the team; school counselor or learning specialist.

**How:** You want your child to be able to excel as an athlete, where he is naturally talented. You want his coach and team to recognize your son's talents. With the what, when, where and who, how might you develop a plan of action? First, get clear on why it's important to be on the team. Is it the teen's dream, or someone else's? If you decide it's important to stay on the team, what's next? Since sequencing and remembering plays are a challenge, you might recommend that he have more time to review and practice the plays, or that he be taken off offensive line and be put on defensive line. After all, on defense, your teen just needs to get the ball away from someone else by tackling. What fun!

## Social/Home Issues

**Scenario:** *Parents are dreading a family trip. Children are always very active and noisy in the back seat of the car. Trips are generally not relaxing and are annoying for parents.*

**What:** What is causing the kids to be active and noisy? What tends to trigger the parents?

**When:** Trips over a half-hour in length, usually a few times a year.

**Where:** In planes, trains, and automobiles, away from home.

**Who:** Parents and children; sometimes children's friends; sometimes other family members or family friends.

**How:** Parents want the entire family to enjoy vacations and create positive family memories. With the what, when, where and who, how might you develop a plan of action? Be creative, and let flexibility rule the day. Do the kids need something to keep them busy when they get bored? Can the parents take turns being on call? How can parents set reasonable expectations for a more pleasant trip? Can you schedule enough time to allow for frequent stopping, and maybe even make the stops an adventure along the journey? How can the kids be motivated to behave more respectfully? Do all trips require the entire family's participation?



## THREE KEYS TO SUCCESS

Remember that successful parent case managers tend to possess the following qualities:

- resilience
- hope
- calm

### Taking action

When acting as a parent case manager for any challenging situation with your ADHD child, there is a lot to consider. Generally speaking, though, the best courses of action always begin with getting clear on the problem and the results you're looking to achieve. You can start this by collecting information about the what, when, where, and who. These specifics allow you to build your support team and set clear priorities for action. Then, by looking at how you might view the situation differently, you'll begin to take appropriate action. Inevitably, this leads to better outcomes.

It's important to remember the Three Keys to Success here, as well. Parent case managers who are resilient, hopeful, and calm are better able to hear other people's concerns about their children without taking them personally. When you take away the blame and the shame, and know that you're working toward a successful future, it's much easier to get to the core of what needs to be addressed.

As any case manager will tell you, success builds on success. So while we encourage you to put this process into place, we want to remind you to take things one challenge at a time. Change comes slowly in the ADHD world, and it helps a lot to have patience with the process. It's a lot like preparing for a marathon. You eventually have to pay atten-

tion to everything from clothing, to nutrition, to practice schedules—but you don't do it all at once. It takes time to plan for a marathon. But when you do, it makes for a much more satisfying race!

Perhaps the most important point we want you to take away from this series is that what you do as a parent matters—a lot. By seeing yourself as a parent case manager, you have the incredible opportunity to improve your child's ability to manage ADHD. After all, no case manager operates alone. With all the resources available, it's time to trust your instincts, take it one step at a time, and get the support you need to help you help your child. 🧠

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