

Glossary of terms used in Scaffolding Better Behavior



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Family Accommodation

When families change their behavior to avoid causing their child temporary distress, meltdowns, anxiety, etc., While it might prevent problems, research shows that family accommodation worsens behaviors in the long run.

Example:

You give your child extra time on video games because you want to avoid a meltdown when they have to turn off the game.

Affective Calmness

Showing affective calmness means you appear calm and use a calm tone even if you do not feel calm inside. This models healthy emotional regulation. It also shows your child that you are in control of the situation because their behavior does not change your response.

Armchair Therapist

Playing armchair therapist is when parents have long conversations with their child about their feelings and try to analyze the reason for their behavior. This is not a recommended strategy because it focuses on challenging behavior and makes it more likely to continue. Additionally, making kids verbalize “feeling words” on demand can be frustrating and patronizing.

Argument Vortex

This is when you are pulled into an unproductive argument directed by your child. They may argue about small details, debate semantics, or pull you into unrelated topics. The child’s arguing usually stems from wanting to avoid non-preferred tasks, difficulty with flexibility, challenges using perspective-taking, and the need to “win” the argument for the sake of feeling in control.

Example of how to respond:

“I already gave my answer, and that will not change. I’m not ignoring you, but I will not respond if you continue asking the same question.”

Before and Now

This type of praise highlights growth in challenging areas for kids with ADHD (ex, showing flexibility, following directions, thinking about others, accepting parental decisions, etc.).

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Examples:

"I appreciate you making your brain be flexible and not arguing about unloading the dishwasher even though it's not your day for that chore. Before, you would have argued about why you shouldn't have to do it, and now you just did it."

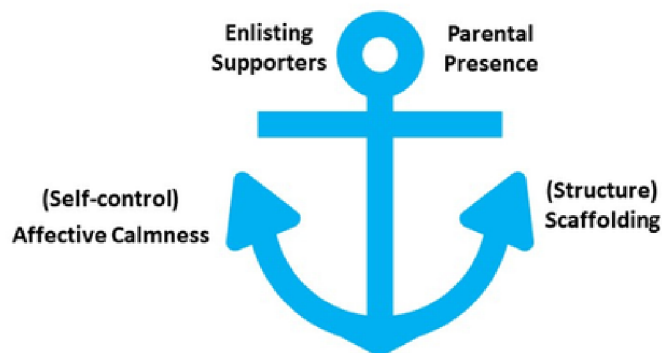
"You worked hard on your school project and didn't give up when you got frustrated. Before, you would have gotten angry and quit; now, you took a Brain Break and kept trying."

Being an Anchor for Your Children

This means you provide stability and consistency and create emotional safety for your child. It is essential to stay calm and not react emotionally to their behavior. If you react emotionally, this sends the message that you are not in control of the situation.

The anchoring function

Stepping into parental authority



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Being an Anchor for Your Children



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Brain Break

A Brain Break is an opportunity for kids to take a break or have an opportunity to “restart” when they begin to get frustrated, inflexible, emotionally dysregulated, or speak disrespectfully. This is a chance for them to use coping skills to get back to a better state of self-regulation. It should not be used as a punishment if they have already escalated.

Clean-Up

This is a way for a child to make amends when they have said/done something hurtful or treated others poorly. It is an opportunity for them to do something nice for the person they have hurt. This is more meaningful than a forced apology since it teaches relationship reciprocity.

Clear, Concise, and Concrete Language

The ADHD brain tends to struggle with abstract concepts and language. It requires clear, concise, and concrete language where you tell them precisely what you want them to do and exactly what you do not want them to do.

Examples:

Abstract: “Use kind words in our house.”

Clear, concise & concrete: “You do not curse or insult each other.”

Abstract: “Keep your room clean.”

Clear, concise & concrete: “Put your dirty clothes in the hamper and put your legos in the bin.”

Abstract: “Use safe hands.”

Clear, concise & concrete: “You will not hit your brother or threaten to hit him.”

Emotional Manipulation

Kids with ADHD often resort to emotional manipulation when they struggle to be flexible, accept limits, complete a non-preferred task, or leave their comfort zone. They may make self-defeating comments, threats, or accusations. The child’s goal is to avoid the task by making you feel sympathetic, guilty, or worried. You can acknowledge you heard them by saying “okay,” but do not engage in discussion since this will reinforce this behavior.

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Examples:

"I'm stupid."

"You don't care about me."

"I can't do anything right."

"You never believe me/You're never on my side."

Empty Praise

Generic, unspecific, vague praise that does not focus on effort, patience, flexibility, etc.

Examples:

"Great job!"

"You're so smart."

"Nice work."

Enlisting Supporters

When a child continues to show challenging behaviors, it is essential to enlist supporters. These are people in the child's life who they respect. Supporters can be relatives, family friends, grandparents, etc. Supporters do not need to be local.

The role of a supporter is to provide encouragement and unconditional support when the child is struggling with their behavior. Supporters can reach out via phone, video call, text, or person. Supporters should not shame them, give lectures, or play "armchair therapist." In addition, supporters should not be used as a threat (ex: I'm going to tell your grandpa if you keep acting this way.)

This is an excellent strategy because kids often do not want their negative behaviors and poor treatment of family to be known to people outside of the family. When they know their problematic behaviors will be known to people they respect, they often willingly change them. They may also be more open to receiving feedback and advice from someone who isn't as close to the situation.

Executive Function

Professionals and parents often think that executive function skills mean academic organizational skills, but executive function skills include almost all of our daily functioning. This includes getting through non-preferred tasks, visualizing what needs to happen in the future, being organized, learning from mistakes, and understanding how long things will take ("feeling time").

See Executive Function Crash Course for more information.



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High Giving/Low Expectations

When parents give their children access to video games, phones, etc., regardless of their behavior or if they meet daily expectations, children begin to view these things as entitlements and often show immature or selfish behavior at home but not in other environments.

Example:

Your child isn't required to help with chores, yet is given video game time each day.

Language of Accountability

This proactive approach allows you to move away from responding reactively or making threats of punishment. Language of accountability frames the child's behavior and outcome as choices. This gives them ownership and control over what happens.

Example:

"If you choose to do your chores, you choose to have your Xbox time after dinner. If you ignore your chores, you choose not to have the Xbox."

Learned Helplessness

Learned helplessness is when kids act like they are less capable than their ability or resort to emotional manipulation (defined above) so you will "rescue" them from a non-preferred task. This is not done with bad intentions; they lack the resiliency to persevere through non-preferred tasks and have difficulty understanding how long a task will take.

Examples:

Your child sits at the table and won't do homework unless you sit with them, prompting and helping. But they can complete work independently at school.

When asked to take out the trash, your child struggles to pull the trash bag out of the can (even though they have done it before) and says, "I'm too weak and dumb to do this; I need you to do it."

Negotiation Vortex

Sometimes, parents feel they must get their child's approval for their parenting decisions, so they compromise and negotiate everything with their child. This undermines your parental authority and doesn't make you look confident in your decisions.

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*Please note that negotiating in some situations is appropriate; it can model flexibility and problem-solving skills. It certainly can be helpful to consider your child's requests and opinions in certain situations.

The saying I teach parents to use with their kids: "Certain things in life can be negotiated, and some cannot. That's just how life works for everyone."

"Noise"

Kids with ADHD often make "noise" when unwanted demands are placed on them. They may complain, argue, whine, vent, or try to start an argument. Responding to "noise" or having an emotional reaction sends your child the message that making "noise" is a way to avoid a non-preferred task and get your attention. It is best to acknowledge that you heard your child and then stop responding.

Example of how to respond:

"I hear you don't feel like getting dressed right now, but that's what is happening. I will make breakfast and see you in a few minutes."

Parent-Child Hierarchy

Children with ADHD need clarity in their parent-child relationships. They need their parents to be on top of the parent-child hierarchy. This means the parent is in charge and provides stability, consistency, and emotional safety. This hierarchy often gets flipped in families with kids with ADHD because of challenging behaviors, and the child dictates how the household runs.

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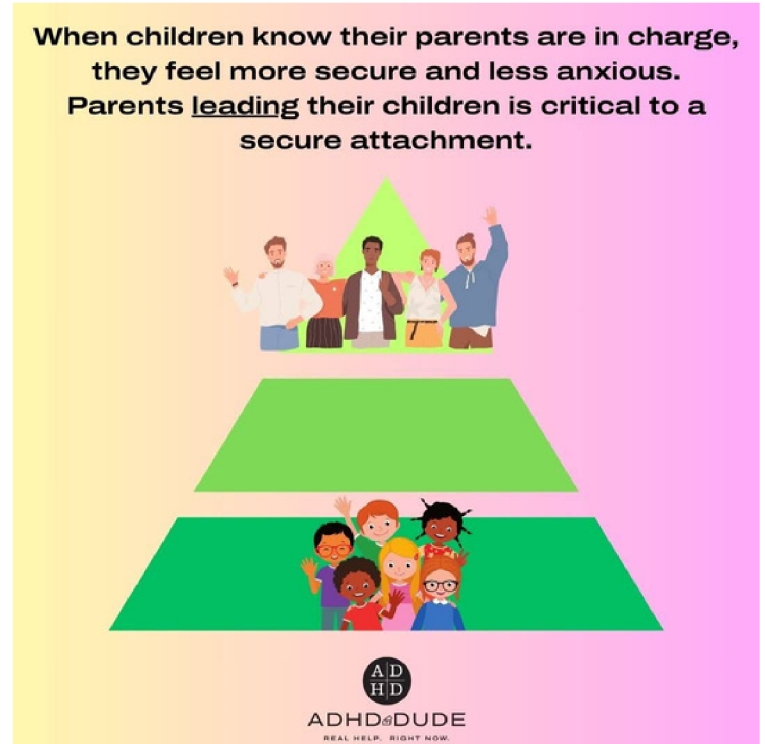


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Parent-Child Hierarchy

Purposeful Recognition and Praise

This is when you give specific and concrete praise for effort, resiliency, patience, consideration for others, and flexibility (difficult skills for kids with ADHD). Since kids with ADHD often receive negative feedback, positive recognition feels extremely good, reinforces essential skills, and helps build confidence.

Examples:

“That was awesome when you went to your first day of karate, even though you were nervous. It’s uncomfortable going into new situations, and you did it.”

“I’m so proud of you for patiently waiting for our food at the restaurant. It is hard to wait, but you did great waiting until our food arrived.”

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Reactive Language and Responses

This is when parents respond emotionally and reactively and make threats of punishment, consequences, etc., in response to the child's inappropriate behavior. This language also allows kids to argue or escalate.

Examples:

"You're punished."

"You lost Nintendo."

"I'm taking it away."

As a reminder, consequences do not help improve behavior. Additionally, many children with ADHD become punishment-adverse, meaning punishments do not help them improve their behavior. What does help is using the strategies in this series.

Reasoning Vortex

When parents use reasoning or logic to convince their child why their suggestion, decision, etc., makes sense. However, you cannot reason someone out of being inflexible. When parents get pulled into the reasoning vortex, it can present as a lack of confidence and appear as if they are seeking their child's approval. You can give your child an explanation if they ask, but it shouldn't turn into a discussion.

Screaming for Scaffolding

When kids with ADHD act out during unstructured time at home (but are usually successful at school), it likely means they need help structuring their time and are "screaming for scaffolding" from you.

Lack of scaffolding at home is the #1 reason kids with ADHD provoke their siblings; they are bored and are novelty-seeking. Provoking siblings is a form of novelty.

Provide structure during free time by giving clear, concise, and concrete directions about what they can do. Remember to provide incentives, use language of accountability, use the clock (covered in section 3 of the Executive Function Crash Course), and give purposeful recognition and praise when they are successful.

An example of providing structure during free time is:

"When we get home, your activity choices are reading or playing basketball for 20 minutes until dinner. If you choose to do this without arguing or bothering your sister, then you are choosing to have your switch for 30 minutes after dinner. If you choose not to meet these expectations, then you are choosing not to have your switch."



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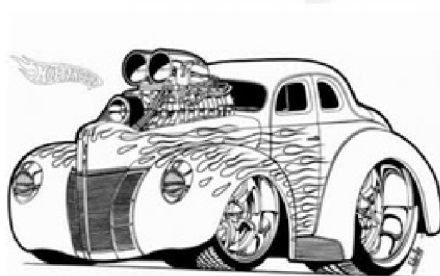
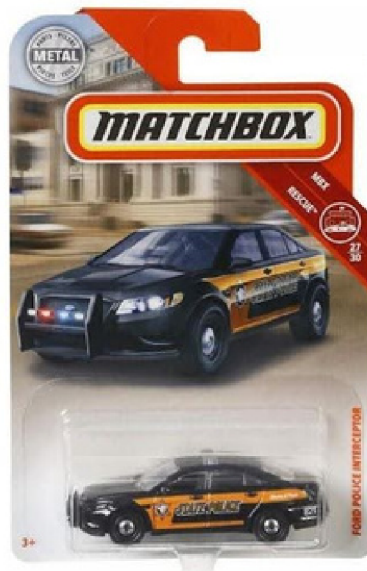


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Below is a graphic designed for an elementary schooler to help him structure his time and visualize things he can do when bored. An explanation that goes with this graphic is in section 9.

M THINGS TO DO WHEN I'M BORED



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Stepping into Your Parental Authority

Stepping into your parental authority means your children know you are always in charge. This helps kids feel emotionally safe (even if they are temporarily upset or disagree with your choices). The ADHD brain is very concrete and needs relationships to be clear, which is why parents must step into their parental authority.

Take a Firm Stance and Resisting Behavior

Directly and confidently tell your child that you disapprove of a choice or specific behavior. While this may not immediately lead to behavior change, it lets them know that their behavior choices do not match your family values and you disapprove. This alone can be powerful for your child to hear. Even if your child says, "I don't care," etc., they are still hearing that you do not approve of their choice or behavior.

