

The Morning Survival Guide for ADHD Families



From the ADHD Experts at

ADDITUDE

Strategies and Support for ADHD & LD

ADDITUDE

A trusted source of advice and information for families touched by attention-deficit disorder—
and a voice of inspiration to help people with ADHD find success at home, at school, and on the job.

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The Morning Survival Guide for ADHD Families

If waking up, getting out of bed, and making it out door on time is a daily battle in your ADHD household, use this plan — including magnet boards, pre-prepared breakfast, playlists, and more — to craft a less stressful morning routine.

The alarm rings. Your child hops out of bed and pours a bowl of cereal before you even know she's awake. After brushing her teeth, she picks out an outfit appropriate for the season. She checks her backpack to make sure that she's got all of her homework, then heads to the bus stop with five minutes to spare.

OK, so it's you who's dreaming.

More likely, your morning begins with a frantic attempt to rouse your over-sleeping child, who wants nothing more than to be left alone. Fifteen minutes later, you find her half-dressed in her room and fully absorbed in a game. That's when the nagging really kicks in. Finally seated at the table, she balks at breakfast so crams in a piece of toast before dashing out the door without her finished homework.

Launching the day is universally stressful, but for parents of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD or ADD) it feels downright impossible most days. If that's you, try these ideas for starting the day on a better note.

**The Morning
Survival Guide
for ADHD
Families**

from the editors of

ADDITUDE

Long-Term Planning for Better Mornings

1. Establish and review the morning routine. Together with your child, create a chart that details the sequence of morning events. Help her get into the habit of referring to the chart. A **magnet board** can be particularly helpful for children who need visual reminders and for pre-readers who use pictures to denote activities (such as a toothbrush or shoe).

Hang a magnetic dry-erase board on the fridge. Using colorful tape, divide it into two columns (“Not Done” and “Done”). Buy a set of magnets for each child, and draw a small picture and keyword on each magnet in permanent marker, to represent all the morning tasks. Examples include: make bed, put lunch and homework in backpack, place backpack at the back door, eat breakfast, take meds, clean dishes, brush teeth. Star the last three tasks to signify that they are done after breakfast.

Your children shouldn’t eat breakfast until they’ve “played their magnets.” As they complete a task, they move that magnet to the “Done” side of the board. When all non-starred magnets have been moved, they eat breakfast. All parents need to do is check the magnets’ locations on the board.

“I created lists for both of my sons. I got them on board by taking them with me to the dollar store to pick out a container and marbles to put in the container. Each time they complete an item on the list, they put a marble in the container. The marbles act as points for them. When they reach 10 marbles, they can earn 15 minutes of video-game time or they can bank those points for a bigger prize at the end of the week.”

— *anniethomp13*, ADDitude reader

2. Integrate Self-Care into Your Morning Routine

“If I could wave a magic wand and change one thing about my mornings it would have to be to wake up happy and energized.”

— *weo*, ADDitude reader

Exercise, meditation, affirmations, reading, writing, and visualization can all help reduce morning stress for everyone in the family. Begin by practicing a daily visualization for a couple of minutes. Lie in bed, listen to a soothing song, and envision how you want your day to go to help you feel more calm, inspired, and focused.

Our sensitive kids are also highly attuned to our energy. If we're feeling rushed, stressed, or frustrated, our kids will know it (likely before we do). It's critical that we do our own work to set our energy each morning — anything from practicing a minute of conscious breathing or doing a guided meditation (I love the app Headspace for this) to going for a walk or engaging in living room yoga. Taking this time helps to quell the morning chaos and puts us in the best frame of mind to deal with challenging situations as they arise.

Better Mornings Start the Night Before

3. Plan for an early bedtime. Kids with ADHD need at least 10 hours of sleep. Start your evening routine early enough to give your child the sleep he needs to wake up physically and mentally refreshed. Many parents put off bedtime in hope their child will grow exhausted and practically beg for sleep. But this strategy typically has the opposite effect.

When a child misses their natural sleep window, they become overtired, can't fall asleep, wake frequently, and sometimes wind up crawling in to bed with you. To avoid this, do the following:

1. Watch for signs of tiredness (yawning and stretching).
2. Move bedtime to an earlier hour.
3. Eliminate screen watching at least an hour before bedtime, and establish a nighttime ritual: candles and lavender soap (calming), story time, a song, lights out.

Have your child take his bath or shower before bedtime, when time and bathroom space isn't so precious. He'll sleep better and there will be one less rushed item — and less conflict — in the morning. Consistency is crucial. This may mean declining the invitation to the back-to-school dinner or the basketball party.

4. Provide a protein-rich bedtime snack. Tryptophan — the protein that occurs in milk, turkey, and chicken — is a natural sleep inducer. But just about any protein-rich snack eaten about 30 minutes before bedtime is an efficient get-to-sleep aid. Try oatmeal, whole-wheat cereal, an egg, some meat or fish, cheese, or pumpkin or sunflower seeds.

5. Make decisions at night. Choose clothes for school the night before. Set breakfast and lunch menus to avoid bickering in the morning. Prepare a batch of batter for quick pancakes, slice fruit, cook sausages for a quick morning warm up — the possibilities are seemingly endless. Bonus points for making it easy for your child to prepare breakfast independently!

“The biggest change that has helped my daughter on school mornings is this: I have her put on the next day’s clothes, THE NIGHT BEFORE! Really! She cleans up and gets ready the night before except for her socks & shoes. She doesn’t keep track of time and gets sidetracked, so this is one thing that has helped reduce stressful mornings.” — Alice, ADDitude reader

6. Pack the sack. Place your child’s papers and books inside his backpack — and leave it blocking the front door, where it can’t be left behind. Call this area by the door the “launch pad” and encourage all family members to use it for backpacks, projects, briefcases, and so on. If you set the example, your children will begin to use the pad, too.

How to Wake Up Right

7. Invest in a good alarm clock. You’ll probably need one that can wake the dead. (See [Moms Rate the Best Alarm Clocks](#) for a sampling of models.) Or make the most of the alarm you’ve got by setting it on a metal pie pan with dimes in it and placing it just out of arm’s reach. Avoid setting the alarms to music as it tends to become white noise that lulls teens back to sleep.

Also, the nightstand is the worst spot imaginable for an alarm clock. Place several clocks in different spots around the room — each one set for one to two minutes apart.

8. Get up before the rest of the family. As the director of the morning routine, you have to be ready. Your clothes are already laid out. Hop in the shower, fix your hair, put on your deodorant, and get dressed, down to the shoes.

9. Gently awaken with a touch. Many kids with ADHD are extremely sensitive to touch. Try gently wiping a cool, damp washcloth over your sleepy kid’s brow and cheeks while whispering a morning greeting. This routine should be agreed to ahead of time to avoid overstimulation.

10. Let light into the room. If it’s naturally dark outside at night, leave the bedroom curtains parted to allow natural light to prod your

child into wakefulness in the morning. Or install a dimmer switch and turn up the light gradually on dark mornings.

11. Consider a new medication routine. Most ADHD medications do not take effect for as long as an hour after taken, so the ADHD symptoms of even those children who take a morning dose are untreated during the critical morning hour. Consider waking up your child a half an hour early to take their morning medication, then allowing him to snooze until wake-up time. Alternatively, ask your prescriber about a new delayed release medication called [Jornay PM](#). Taken in the evening, Jornay PM capsules activate 10 to 12 hours later so that the effects are in place when a child wakes up and last throughout the day.

12. Set ground rules if your child is mean and obstinate when you try to wake him. Clearly state your expectations and explain what you will and won't do. For example, perhaps you will knock once on his door to ensure he is awake, but it is up to him to take the lead after that. Or if he misses the school bus, he will need to find his own way to school. If that is not a feasible consequence and you have to drive him, then impose another consequence that is an obvious fit. Try telling him: "If I take 30 minutes out of my day to drive you to school because you are late, then you will give me back that time in chores around the house."

Bottom line? Your child needs to experience the consequences of not getting himself or herself up on time if you really want to change his or her behavior.

Getting from Bed to Door

13. Design a breakfast that works for you. Eating breakfast together is great, except when it isn't. If your child makes war at the table, or just has trouble sitting down and eating, let him enjoy his meal in his room as he dresses. Or give him breakfast to go in the form of a piece of fruit, a chunk of cheese, and a breakfast bar. Do what works and forget the "shoulds."

14. Shut down the stimuli. Because many children (and adults) with ADHD are highly distractible and impulsive, avoid stimuli that are likely to grab attention and throw the routine off course. For example:

- Leave the TV off in the morning.
- Don't get on the computer to check your e-mails.
- Ignore that new magazine or catalog until after school or later that evening.

However, if you have a hyperactive child, consider allowing him or her to watch the television while eating. This works wonders for some kids who can't sit still long enough to get breakfast in them.

15. Reward your child for a good morning. A new morning routine won't take hold overnight, but implementing the structure and encouraging these behaviors will pay off. Reinforcing good behavior with praise is essential, so compliment and reward your child when they do something right. Let your child add a sticker to his chart or a token to his jar for getting out the door with a minimum of fuss. And be patient with yourself. You will falter, but stick with it. One day, the dreaded witching hour may turn into sweet, cozy family time that you greet with a smile.

16. Leave the house 15 minutes earlier than normal. Factor in a grace period for traffic jams, flat tires, whatever. Being early to school is not a bad thing. It will help your child start his day on a calm note. Starting early also keeps you from rushing, which is dangerous, especially when you're driving.

The advice featured in this free download came from ADDitude experts John Taylor, Ph.D.; Susan Kruger, M.Ed.; Deborah Reber; Merriam Sarcia Saunders, LMFT; Leslie Josel; and Terry Matlen, MSW, ACSW

How to Use Music for Motivation in the Morning

By Tricia Arthur

STEP 1: DELIVER THE MUSIC SALES PITCH

Pick a time when your child is not engaged in any critical tasks and approach them enthusiastically about your new plan:

What if together we create a morning “soundtrack” timed to the tasks you need to complete before school? Each song can let you know what you need to be doing so you never need to worry about time; you just get to follow the music and let it lead you!”

STEP 2: START SMALL WITH MOTIVATING MUSIC

1. Select the daily tasks and the order that makes the most sense.
2. Figure out how many minutes you have to work with.
3. Determine the playlist. Does he want to get out of bed to a loud peppy beat or a soothing, calm ballad? Does hearing a cheesy song about “clothes” prompt her to get dressed quickly?

The only real requirements are that the length of the playlist equals the amount of morning time you have to work with and that the tasks match up somewhat sensibly to the songs.

STEP 3: PUT THE MUSIC SYSTEM ON PAPER

In one column, list the song titles. In the second column, list the task(s) matched with each song. Post the musically inspired schedule to your kid’s bedroom door.

STEP 4: PREPARE TO LAUNCH THE MOTIVATIONAL SONGS

Decide how to launch the playlist each day. We have an Echo Dot in our son’s room with a reminder set at 7 am. Or you could start the playlist yourself by hand. Be aware of movement from one floor to another during the morning routine, as you may need to change the speaker source of the playlist.

STEP 5: GIVE MOTIVATIONAL MUSIC A GO

The first morning, expect some portion of your plan to flop. Talk about how the plan flopped and encourage your child to share ideas to improve it. Even better than that: Encourage your child — if he’s developmentally capable and/or technologically savvy enough — to fix the hiccup on his or her own.

STEP 6: SWITCH UP THE MUSIC PERIODICALLY

Finally, swap in new songs to keep the soundtrack fresh. Chances are, playlist re-creation won’t be painful for you or your child like all other time-management family systems. Instead, it’ll be fun.

ADDitude eBooks Available Now

<https://www.additudemag.com/shop/>

A Parent's Guide to Effective ADHD Discipline

A better-behavior plan, designed specifically for the most oppositional and defiant children.

Nothing works. You take away electronics or special activities, and your child couldn't care less. You try rewards, points, praise, consequences — nothing turns around his behavior. Sound familiar? This eBook is here to help. It'll let you identify the root cause of your kid's ADHD or ODD mis-behavior, and devise game-changing strategies to — finally — bring about real change

>> Learn more about this *ADDitude* eBook: <http://additu.de/disciplinebook>

The ADHD Homework Survival Guide

An ADHD-friendly guide to help you (and your child) survive nightly homework battles without tears, tantrums, or fights.

Millions of parents struggle with the same painful emotions as they work tirelessly to advocate for their children, teach them necessary skills, and send them off into the world as healthy, confident adults. This book of essays gives testament to the challenges and triumphs of parenting a child with ADHD.

>> Learn more about this *ADDitude* eBook: <http://additu.de/hw-book>

My Kid Is 'That Kid'

Essays from parents doing the best they can to raise confident, happy, healthy children with ADHD

Millions of parents struggle with the same painful emotions as they work tirelessly to advocate for their children, teach them necessary skills, and send them off into the world as healthy, confident adults. This book of essays gives testament to the challenges and triumphs of parenting a child with ADHD.

>> Learn more about this *ADDitude* eBook: <http://additu.de/lparentstory>

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Expert solutions for meltdowns, defiance, or disrespectful behavior in children of all ages.

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Help your child fall asleep and stay asleep, every single night.

20 Secrets to a Smarter Summer

Don't let your child get in a summer slump.

10 Solutions for Disorganization at School

Use these tips to get lockers, backpacks, and desks under control.

Great Sports and Activities for Kids with ADHD

The most beneficial after-school sports for the ADHD brain.

18 Writing Tricks for ADHD Students

Use these strategies to help your child put her ideas on paper.

Find these and many more free ADHD resources online at:

<https://www.additudemag.com/download/>

ADHD Webinar Replays from *ADDitude*:

Time for Bed! Sleep Solutions for the ADHD Brain

>> [Additu.de/webinar-sleep](https://additu.de/webinar-sleep)

Studies show that poor or insufficient sleep exacerbates ADHD symptoms. Here, Dr. Roberto Olivardia uses the latest research to shed light on the unique challenges of the ADHD brain, the critical importance of sleep to healthy brain development in children and teens, and strategies for achieving it.

Get the School Day Back on Track: Strategies for Overcoming Your Student's Toughest Daily Challenges

>> [Additu.de/webinar-schedule](https://additu.de/webinar-schedule)

Whether your child struggles with following morning or bedtime routines, a homework schedule, regulating screen time, or organizing chores, you're frustrated and tired of the pushback and arguments. Now, before the holiday break, is the perfect time to regroup and make necessary changes that teach lasting executive functioning skills.

ADHD Moms Raising ADHD Kids: How to Survive and Thrive: Tips from a Mom Who Did It

>> [Additu.de/webinar-moms](https://additu.de/webinar-moms)

ADHD expert Terry Matlen will share her experiences raising a challenging child with ADHD and offer strategies and tips that worked for her and her daughter. Don't worry: You can do it, and you're never alone.

A Parent's Guide to Evaluating and Troubleshooting Your Child's IEP or 504 Plan

>> [Additu.de/troubleshoot](https://additu.de/troubleshoot)

Many parents find that the IEP or 504 Plan doesn't work for their child. Their grades don't improve, and they aren't learning any more than they did before the accommodations and services were in place. This webinar helps parents determine whether the accommodations and goals spelled out in that plan are what their child needs to truly succeed in school.

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Sign up to receive critical news and information about ADHD diagnosis and treatment, plus strategies for school, parenting, and living better with ADHD:

<https://www.additudemag.com/adhd-newsletters/>

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Expert advice on managing your household, time, money, career, and relationships

Parenting Children with ADHD

Behavior and discipline, time management, disorganization, making friends, and more critical strategies for parents

ADHD at School

How to get classroom accommodations, finish homework, work with teachers, find the right schools, and much more

Diagnosing & Treating ADHD

Treatment options including medications, food, supplements, brain training, mindfulness and other alternative therapies