

SCHOOL ADVOCACY

7 Reasons Why You Need to Advocate More Than Other Parents

You are not enabling. You are not helicoptering. You are taking an active, hands-on role in the education of your child with ADHD. And you should not feel ashamed or guilty about it. Here is why.

BY [CHRIS ZEIGLER DENDY, M.S.](#), [ADDITUDE EDITORS](#)

Neurotypical parenting books will tell you: A child only learns by doing... and failing... and trying again. By doing everything for your child, you are doing him a disservice in the long run. So don't hover. Don't orchestrate. Just trust.

This is not bad advice. But it's also not helpful or relevant to most of the parents of children with attention deficit disorder ([ADHD or ADD](#)). For us, according to Chris Zeigler Dendy, M.S., the message is quite different:

- Meet with your child's teacher before school begins
- [Educate him or her about ADHD](#)
- Introduce your child's strengths, challenges, interests, and successes
- Collaborate with the teacher on appropriate accommodations
- [Review and adjust your child's IEP or 504 Plan](#) several times a year
- Get to know the school guidance counselor
- [Join the PTA](#)
- Keep a strict [family calendar](#) with time slots for homework, meals, and bedtime
- And that's just the Cliff Notes version

Don't feel guilty about staying involved longer and stronger, says Dendy, author of [Teenagers with ADD & ADHD: A Guide for Parents](#). Instead, give your child the support she needs to get started, and then stick with her until she is able to function with less support. Don't let anyone tell you you're doing too much. Our kids require more. Here's why, according to Dendy:

1. Succeeding at School Is Therapy for a Child with ADHD

Success at school is the single most therapeutic thing a child can experience. In fact, it can be just as beneficial as an hour of talk therapy a week. This makes sense; if children aren't able to understand or complete their work, they will not be happy. You want your child to [be happy](#), so you need to help her succeed!

[Self-Test: Could My Child Have a Learning Disability?]

2. Children with ADHD Have Maturity Delays of Up to 3 Years

Our children are late bloomers — they often have a three-year [delay in maturation](#) and their brains continue maturing into their 30s. We expect them to be able to do what their classmates can, but they actually need more help, and for a longer time. By denying them that help based on what may be appropriate for their classmates, we allow them to languish and fall behind academically.

3. Half of Children with ADHD Also Have a Learning Disability

Often our children's [learning disabilities](#) remain unidentified because we attribute their struggles to the ADHD alone and we just aren't on the lookout for other issues. If you and your child's teacher are keeping a close eye on her progress, it will be easier to spot other related conditions.

Also, a negative learning environment can actually *cause* some conditions. For instance, if a teacher is particularly rigid and frequently in conflict with a child, the anxiety may cause a child's brain to produce cortisol, which [blocks her ability to learn](#). Keeping a close eye on what happens in your child's classroom will help prevent any such related conditions from being exacerbated.

4. Executive Function Deficits Can Be More Debilitating Than ADHD Symptoms

Our children's [struggles with executive function](#) can cause serious educational delays. At the beginning of elementary school, teachers support executive function by telling the class when to do things and how, but as children grow they are expected to take on increasing responsibility. For children who are not yet developmentally capable of doing so, the academic pressures of school are compounded by the difficulties of simply going about one's day. Understanding the executive challenges your child will face — and having a plan to combat them — will help them keep up with the rest of the class.

[For Teachers: A Most Insightful Student Profile]

5. Your Child's Teacher May Not See Her IEP or 504 for Months

Depending on the size of your child's class and school, her teacher may know nothing about her when the new school year begins, and may not even see her IEP or 504 until late autumn. It's crucial that you [meet with her teachers](#), or at least write to them, before the year starts to ensure that she has adequate support. Regardless of whether your child's teachers see the IEP or 504 at the beginning of the year, make sure to have one in place for the sake of documentation.

6. Last Year's Teacher Won't Necessarily Talk to This Year's Teacher

Learning as much as you can about teachers in higher grades, and maintaining a good relationship with school administration can also help you ensure that your child is placed with the best educators for her individual needs. Once your child is assigned a teacher, you need to assess out how much he or she knows about ADHD and how open he or she will be to learning more. If your child has a [former teacher with whom she worked well](#), ask that educator to speak informally with her new teacher about how to best to work with her. If you think you can do so without making the new teacher feel defensive, you can even invite the former teacher to join your IEP or 504 planning or reassessment section.

7. The Emotional Underpinnings of ADHD Can Throw Everything Off Track

Always have a crisis plan. If your child experiences tumult in his personal or school life, emotional turmoil may upset even the best-laid plans. If he gets upset and behaves in a way that instigates school discipline, the consequences can be devastating to his academic and social progress. Make a plan with your child about what to do and where to go if he feels upset during the school day. Have a Plan B, so that he won't have to improvise if Plan A falls through. If you have [a crisis plan, a back-up plan, and a good communications plan](#) in place, your child's education has a much lower chance of being derailed by emotionality.

[\[How to Advocate Forcefully for Your Child\]](#)

<https://www.additudemag.com/parent-involvement-adhd-school-advocacy/>

This advice came from "[Back-to-School Starts Now: Your Plan for Academic, Behavioral & Organizational Success](#)," an ADDitude webinar lead by Chris Zeigler Dendy, M.S. in August 2018 that is now available for free replay.