

What To Do When A Child With ADHD Controls Your Home

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2023 Annual International Conference On ADHD



ADHD DUDE

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1

Disclosures

- I benefit financially from the ADHD Dude YouTube Channel, Membership Site, and Trip Camp, LLC.

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What I hope you'll take from this presentation

- Be able to explain Parental/Family Accommodation.
- Understand an evidence-based approach to reducing parental accommodation and helping parents reclaim parental authority for their child's benefit.
- Describe why this approach is focused on working with parents, not children.
- Understand why parental accommodation naturally occurs in many families of children with neurodevelopmental differences.

FAMILY ACCOMMODATION?

When parents change their behavior to alleviate or avoid their child's temporary discomfort.

Family accommodation is done out of love to protect the child from experiencing anxiety, having a "meltdown or blow-up" because they're not getting their way, etc.



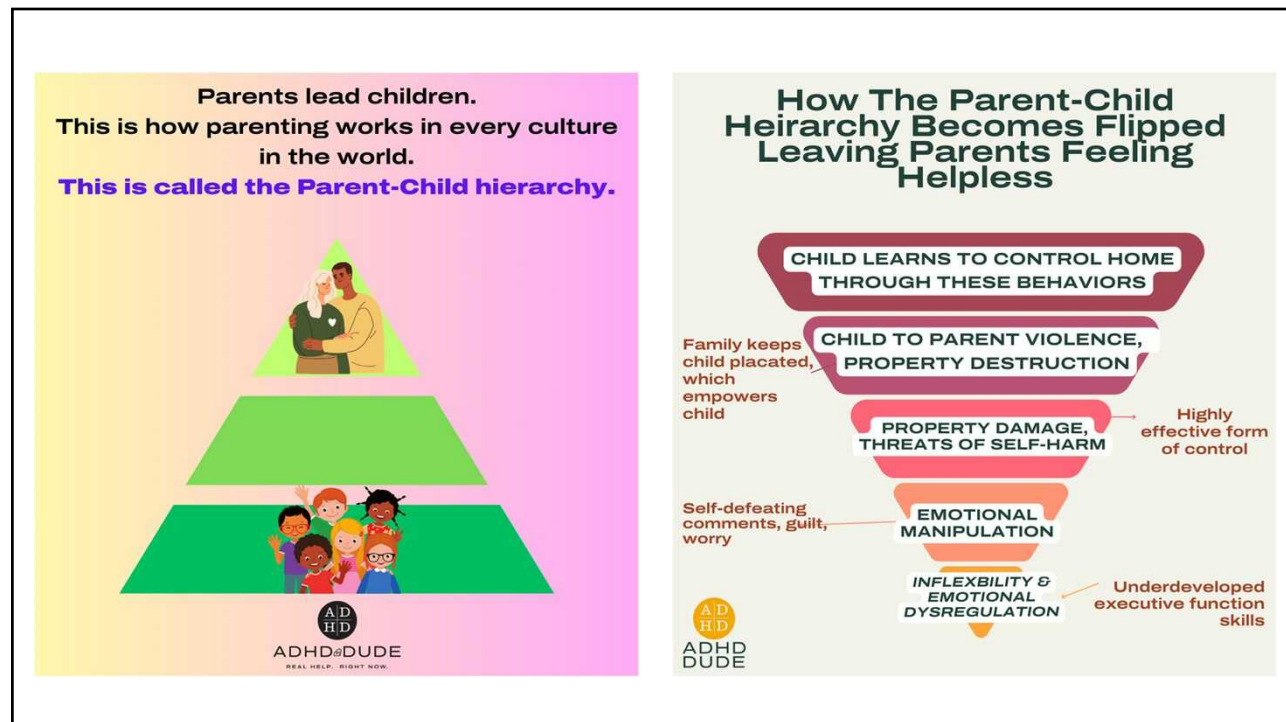
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About me and how I got into this work

- Licensed Clinical Social Worker, former School Social Worker at special education private schools, father to a (once extremely challenging) son with ADHD and learning differences.
- Founder of ADHD Dude & Trip Camp.
- ADHD Dude YouTube channel.
- Originally from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, now based in Tucson, Arizona.
- Dad of a dog with dreadlocks.
- You can read about my training at adhd dude.com



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Family (Parental) Accommodation Definition

Family accommodation describes changes that family members make to their own behavior to avoid or alleviate distress related to the disorder.

Source: Shimshoni, Yaara & Shrinivasa, Basavaraj & Cherian, Anish & Lebowitz, Eli. (2019). Family accommodation in psychopathology: A synthesized review. Indian Journal of Psychiatry. 61. 93. 10.4103/psychiatry.IndianJPsychiatry_530_18.

Changes in parents' behavior in attempts to prevent or reduce child distress.

Source: Thompson-Hollands J, Kerns CE, Pincus DB, Comer JS. Parental accommodation of child anxiety and related symptoms: range, impact, and correlates. J Anxiety Disord. 2014 Dec;28(8):765-73. doi: 10.1016/j.janxdis.2014.09.007. Epub 2014 Sep 16. PMID: 25261837; PMCID: PMC4254352.

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Can you give an example of parental accommodation you've seen in families you have worked with, or you have made to keep the peace in your own home?

(No judgment, we've all accommodated at some point.)



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Why is family accommodation so common in families of children with neurodevelopmental differences?

- Families lack support in child-rearing.
- Physical/emotional exhaustion/parental mental health issues lead to the "path of least resistance."
- Fear of child's emotional dysregulation, aggression, etc.
- Fear of harming child by setting limits, having expectations, etc.
- Fear of rejection by the child (*parents who have ADHD themselves).
- Misinformation on social media.
- Currently popular parenting approaches that encourage parental accommodation.
- Lack of clinicians providing evidence-informed treatment.

The more flexible I was, the more inflexible my son became.

-Mother of a nine-year-old

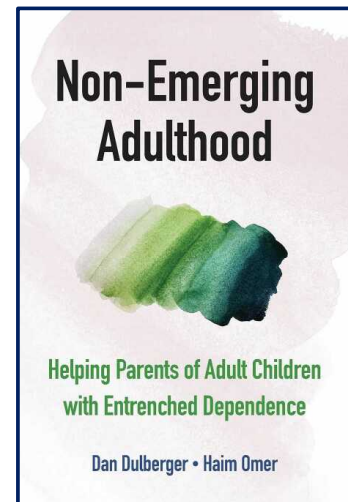
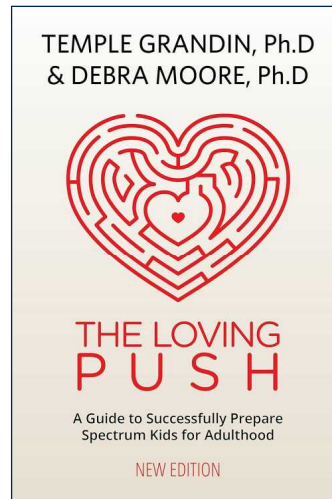


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Is this applicable to families of children with ASD Level 1 (Asperger's) as well as ADHD?

They are at higher risk for "non-emerging adulthood," aka "failure to launch."



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Tested Behavioral Therapies for Children and Adolescents

<p>Level One: Works Well</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Behavioral interventions (any combination) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> BPT BCM BPI Organization training
<p>Level Two: Works</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Combined training interventions
<p>Level Three: Might Work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neurofeedback training
<p>Level Four: Unknown/Untested</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cognitive training
<p>Level Five: Tested and Does Not Work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social skills training

Therapies and Terms Defined:

- BPT: behavioral parent training
- BCM: behavioral classroom management
- BPI: behavioral peer interventions

The evidence-based treatments for children with ADHD.

- Source: effectivechildtherapy.org
- Society of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology

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Evidence-based approaches that I pull from:

- Non-Violent Resistance (Dr. Haim Omer)
- SPACE Treatment (Dr. Eli Leibowitz)
- Nurtured Heart Approach (Howard Glasser)

"Working with parents on decreasing family accommodation has shown promise as a means of gradually increasing the child's capacity for independent coping."

Source:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4895190/>



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Lucy, 11

- Oldest child in a family of three.
- Propensity to be highly inflexible, often gets "stuck" when she doesn't get her way.
- Will pretend to strangle herself, threaten suicide, and hold knives up to herself if her parents do not give her what she wants.
- Professional working with the family said: "Don't get into power struggles; Lucy is too fragile. Just focus on building your relationship." (i.e., Accommodate her inflexibility and give her what she wants.)
- Parents reported that the more flexible they were with Lucy, the more inflexible she became, with an increase in the behaviors mentioned.



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Corey, 12

- Mother must dress him daily while he watches something on his iPad.
- Parents order Domino's Pizza daily, which he will eat for breakfast. Will only eat about six other foods.
- All meals must be eaten in front of an iPad.
- Will become physically aggressive towards his mother (never his father) when not given what he wants. Mother has had to stop driving the car due to Corey throwing things at her head when she is driving, unbuckling his seatbelt to hit her when she would not stop to get him Pokemon cards.
- None of these behaviors are exhibited at school, only at home.



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Sam, 17

- Involved in marching band at school, has a part-time job. Some experimentation with marijuana and alcohol but not excessive.
- Parents brought Sam to a therapist when Sam was experiencing depression. The therapist suggested that the parents not place any demands or expectations on Sam because "he was too fragile."
- Sam took advantage of this newfound freedom and began staying out later and later began experimenting with more drugs, taking the car out in the middle of the night to sneak over to a girl's house, etc. *"We realize now that the therapist's advice made things worse, which is why we're reaching out."*



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Malik, 9

- Parents began following social media influencers (Pathological Demand Avoidance) who promoted parental accommodation (“low demand parenting”).
- Parents began to treat Malik as their equal in parenting. He was involved in every parenting decision, and everything was negotiable, including taking medication.
- Parents reported that Malik’s behavior began to deteriorate, he became more irritable, and he started to become physically aggressive towards them and his younger sibling. Teachers reported that he appeared sad and irritable in school. Started depression medication.
- Several months later, they came to understand that the newfound parenting approach they were implementing caused Malik’s deterioration because it had made him highly anxious.



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Helplessness & Parental Anchoring

- When the parent-child hierarchy is flipped upside down, parents often feel helpless. They may feel that they have no control over their child and that their family life is controlled by their child’s emotional dysregulation and behaviors.

Many parents fall into learned helplessness:

- *“My 11-year-old won’t take medication.”*
- *“If we limit screen time, he becomes violent, so we’ve stopped putting limits on screen time.”*
- *“She won’t go to school; she steals my debit card to buy things. I feel like I’ve failed her as a parent, but I can’t stop her.”*

sled parent.” The hassled parent feels tossed this way and that, pulled and pushed, and loses the feeling that he or she is running the show. In order to evaluate such situations, we¹⁰ created the *Hassled Parent Questionnaire*. Results from our studies¹¹ include two important findings:

- parents of children with ADHD are much more hassled than other parents; and
- with training, parents can get off the merry-go-round and restore their authority and influence with their children.

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Helplessness & Parental Anchoring

- Parental Anchoring is when parents help ground their children through an authoritative parenting approach.
- Parents (not peers or the internet) become the biggest influence and presence in their children's lives.
- Articulating their unconditional commitment to the child: *"You can hate me, and I'm not going anywhere because I love you."*

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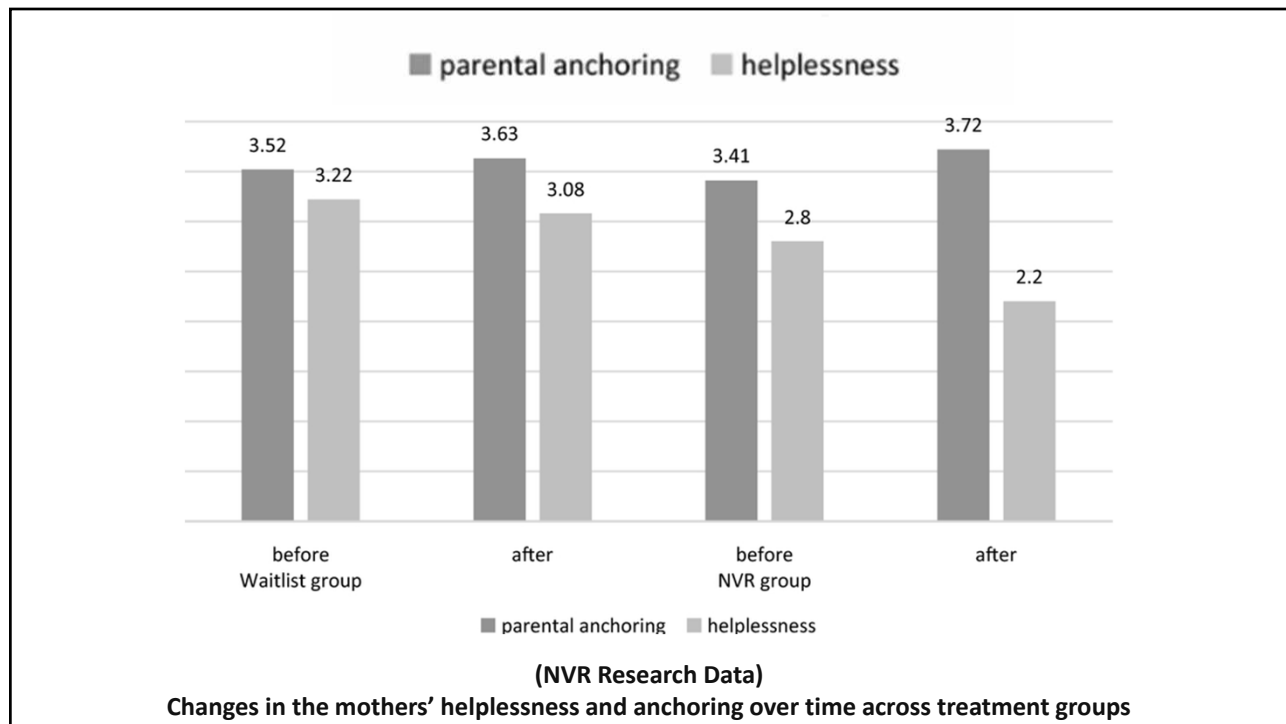
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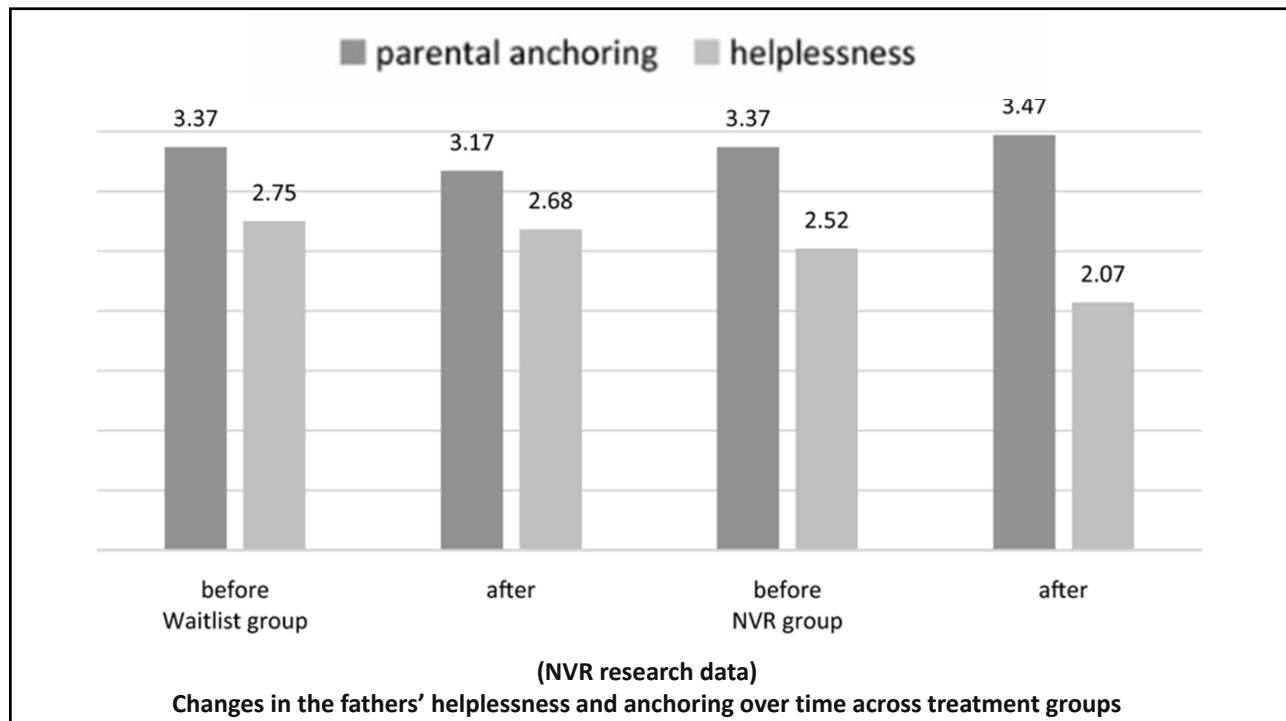
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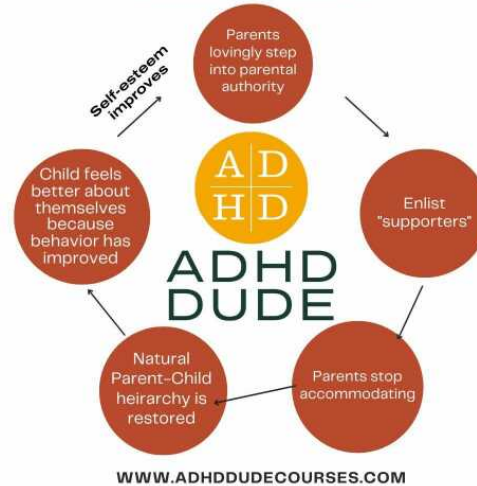


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The premise of the work here

- No one is at fault; this is not about blame.
- The child *is not* the “identified patient”.
- This is not about being punitive, not about punishments, etc.
- The child *will not* be asked to change anything; the parents will learn how to stop engaging in parental accommodation and reclaim their parental authority by serving as their child’s anchor.

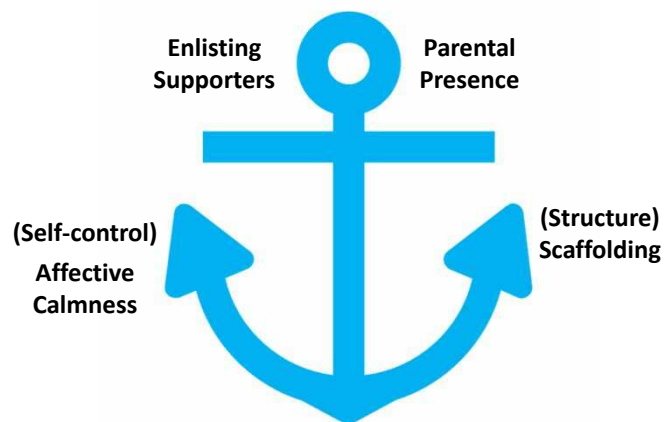
SCAFFOLDING BETTER BEHAVIOR TEACHES HOW TO END PARENTAL ACCOMMODATION



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The anchoring function

Stepping into parental authority



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Working on reducing accommodation is working with the parent(s), *not* the child.

- This is about the parents changing their behavior, not trying to get the child to change.
- Sessions can be done virtually, in small groups, etc.
- We focus on the outcome the family wants, not how they want the child to change.



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The plan

1. Identifying the 1st accommodation to target
2. Identifying and enlisting supporters
3. The “announcement”
4. Taking a stance (resisting behavior)
5. Enacting the plan

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Example family – The Smiths

- 15yo Eric, 10th grade.
- Regularly misses school because he won't get up or as a "punishment" for his parents not giving him what he wants.
- Decided to stop taking ADHD medication that was working well for him.
- Using marijuana, he is purchasing himself but does not have a job. His parents continue to give him money.
- Will destroy property in the home when he is denied things he wants, punches holes in walls, and has caused significant property damage.
- Police came to the house when he was being destructive.
- School has been (too) accommodating of his absences.
- "We know we've allowed him to control our home for too long."



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I. Identifying the accommodation to target

Goal: For Eric to attend school regularly

- Typically, I suggest targeting whatever the family feels is causing the most stress for the entire family.
- In the case of Eric, I suggested targeting the school avoidance issue, so it does not turn into complete school refusal.

-
- Parents will resist his school refusal.
 - Access to his phone is dependent upon him going to school.
 - If Eric refuses to go to school – the home internet is shut off, his phone is shut off, TV remotes are removed, etc.
 - No negotiating about going to school, no response to property destruction or threats unless safety is a concern.



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2. Identifying & Enlisting Supporters

- Supporters are people whom the child respects; they do not need to be local.
- Grandparents, aunts, uncles, older cousins, youth group leader, family friend, etc.
- Ideally, the child would not want the supporters to know about their maladaptive behaviors because they would feel embarrassed. This is called *constructive shame*.
- The job of supporters is to offer support and encouragement, nothing else.



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3. The “announcement”

- The announcement is a letter prepared by the parents to be read to the child.
- It is a way to formalize how the parents will reduce accommodation and explain to the child what changes they will make.
- The tone of the announcement is supportive and loving; it is never about telling the child what they are doing wrong or what they need to change.
- In the announcement, the parents take responsibility for accommodating the child and acknowledge how their behavior has not been helpful.



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Example of an announcement letter

Dear Eric,

We love you very much. You are thoughtful, curious, fun to be with, and talented with your videos. Every year since you've been in school, your teachers have commented that you ask great questions and are helpful to your classmates. You have shown that you will make it happen when you want to accomplish something. You are a loyal and great friend to your friends.

We recognize as your parents that we have been doing e things at home that have not been helpful to you. We love you too much to continue to allow you to miss school, and we take responsibility for the amount of school you have missed this year.

Here are the things that we will be changing because we want the best for you and want you to feel successful:

1. Moving forward, if you choose not to go to school, your phone will be shut off during the school day. Additionally, the home internet will be turned off as well.
2. If you refuse to go to school, Grandpop, Aunt Tina, James from your youth group, and Dad's friend Jim will contact you because they care about you and want the best for you. They will only offer you their support and ask how they can help you.
3. If you refuse to go to school, we will no longer discuss why you don't want to go; we will no longer plead with you or negotiate to get you to go. We will remind you once of your choices and let you decide what you want to do.
4. We will not respond to your threats or destroy things in the home. If we feel that your behavior is unsafe, we will call the police as we have done in the past because, as your parents, it is our job to protect you and your sister.
5. If there is anything you feel we can do differently to help you get to school, we want to hear your thoughts because we want you to be successful and will do whatever we can to help you.

We love you very much and know that you can do this.

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4. Taking a stance (Resisting the behavior)

Taking a stance means that the parents verbally articulate to the child that they will not accept their behavior because they love and care about the child.

There are no threats, ultimatums, etc.

Eric Example: "Turn my phone or I'm not going to school."

Parents taking a stance: We will not accept you not attending school; we love you too much to allow you to sit at home all day and do nothing.



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5. Reaching out to supporters

Parents to Aunt Tina: *"Hi Tina, Eric is having a hard time right now, is cursing as us and refusing to go to school. Do you mind reaching out to him?"*

Aunt Tina to Eric: *"Hi Eric, I know you're having a hard time getting to school. I know you can do this; how can I help you?"*



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6. Enacting the plan



- Things will often get worse before they get better. This can be the most challenging time for families as behaviors can escalate as the child intensifies their behavior to see if the parents are serious.
- When parents reclaim their parental authority, it can feel like a loss of control to the child. They may need to mourn the loss of their power in the home.
- This is when parents often need the most support, as the escalation period can vary, depending on the child.

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Other strategies incorporated into this approach

- Give attention, recognition, and purposeful praise to desired behaviors; do not give attention or emotional reactivity to negative behaviors.
- Praise effort, resiliency, cognitive flexibility, and thinking about others.
- Avoid “empty praise” such as “Great job” or “You’re so smart.”
- Who are the supports that can help you with the four aspects of serving as an anchor?
Parents need support because this can be extremely challenging, particularly if the child is highly skilled at emotional manipulation.

My son is doing much better now that I have stopped accommodating his inflexibility. He is more flexible, and I can see the sense of pride he feels when he tries something new or challenging.



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Avoid...

Over-validating Over-empathizing
Over-processing feelings (playing “armchair therapist”)
Over-negotiating Over-asking
Over-thinking Over-suggesting

- **Remember**
Your child *is not* your equal in parenting
- Your job *is not* to keep your child comfortable.
- Your job *is to* help your child develop the resiliency and the skills required so they’re on a pathway towards becoming a capable, independent adult.



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Common objections

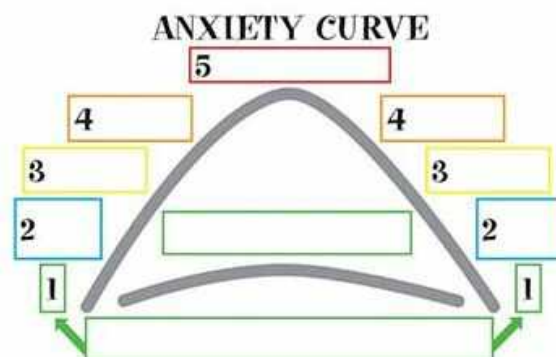
- I don't want to lose connection with my child.
- I'm worried they won't feel heard.
- What if they mean what they're threatening?
- I'm scared I'll traumatize them.
- I don't want to hurt their self-esteem.
- The therapist/parent coach/social media "expert" said the opposite of what you're saying, so I don't know who to believe.



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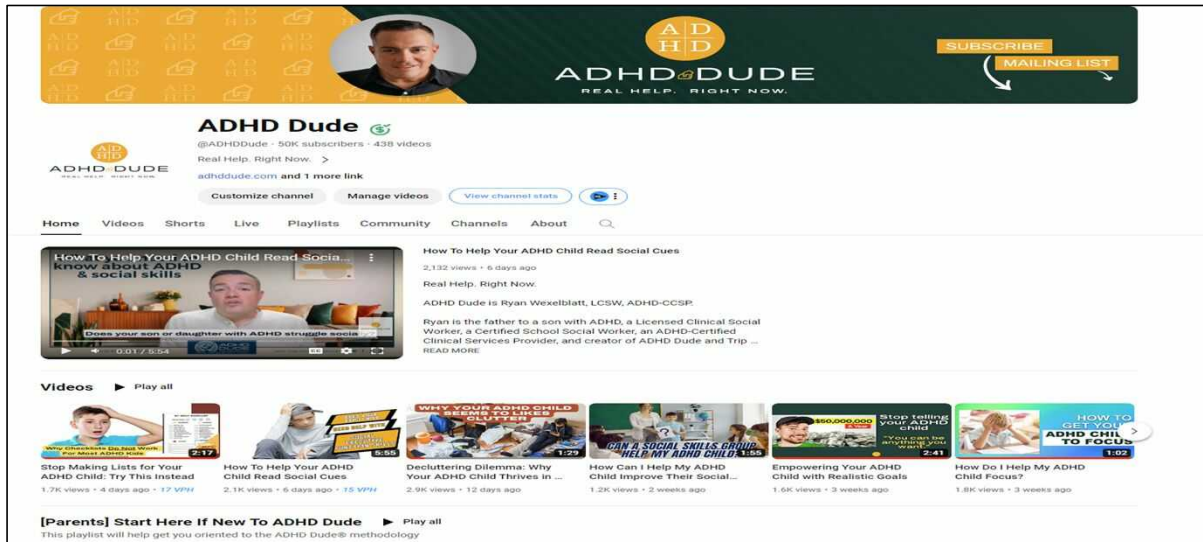
How I would vary this approach for a child diagnosed with higher-verbal autism

- 1. Is there parent-child codependency, and if so, how severe?
- 2. Would a proactive med adjustment be helpful in advance, given that anxiety may increase significantly?
- 2. Have suicidal threats been made?
- 3. Psychoeducation around anxiety using visuals like this.
- 4. It is important to ensure they understood the "announcement" as they may have become anxious and not heard it correctly or missed the "bigger picture" and only focused on certain details.



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Click on “Playlists” to see different topics of videos



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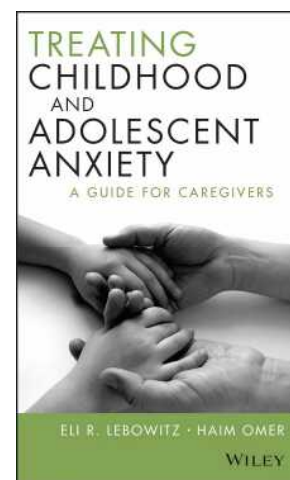
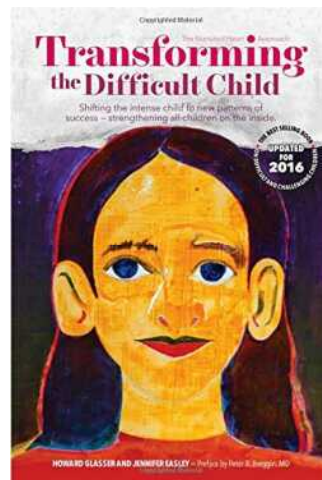
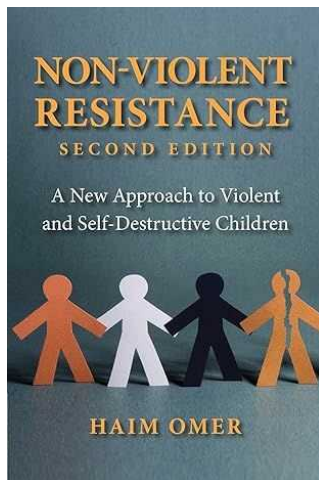
What ADHD Dude provides

- Parent Training & Coaching through the ADHD Dude Membership Site
- In-Person Social Learning Programs (Tucson, AZ)
- Trip Camp (Margate, NJ and Tucson, AZ)
*Columbus, OH 2025



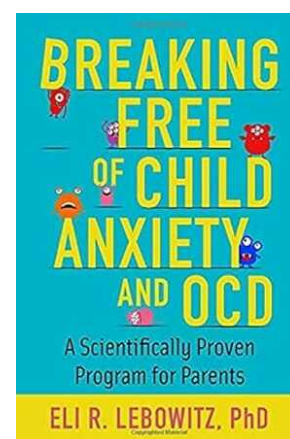
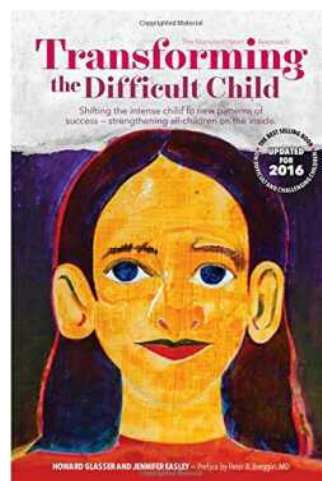
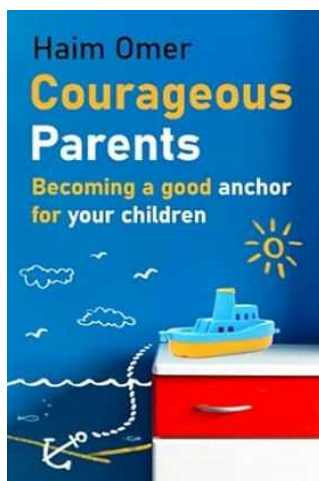
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Suggested Readings/Trainings for Clinicians



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Suggested Readings for Parents




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Final thoughts

- Help parents understand the universality of parents leading children and that their children are not fragile, they are “anti-fragile”.
- Many parents are desperate for their child’s approval; they need support to understand that their child being temporarily upset with them will not damage their relationship.
- I stress the importance of kids being connected to their community through activities, youth groups, etc.
- Help parents discern evidence-informed information from opinions and pseudo-science on social media.
- Teach parents that phones and the internet are not entitlements; they are privileges to be earned by meeting realistic, age-appropriate expectations. (Shifting away from “high giving/low expectations”)

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Thank You!
ADHD Dude social media




★★★★★ 4 months ago

This is an incredibly helpful program for parents of kids with ADHD to improve social skills and executive functioning and scaffold better behavior.

And for parents who have ADHD themselves, it will help you understand yourself and your childhood better and reparent yourself, to heal and make life better for your kids. I actually paused and just wept a few times watching all this. Took tons of notes. The advice is already working with my daughter.

And it's incredibly affordable, simple to follow, and accessible. Run and get this! You could easily sign up for a month for \$20 and get through the materials within a couple weeks, though many families continue monthly or yearly because of the Office Hours.



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