

Routines for Morning and Night

Reliable schedules make a world of difference. Here are guidelines and suggested examples for your family.



From the ADHD Experts at

ADDITUDE

Strategies and Support for ADHD & LD

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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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Routines for Morning and Night

Reliable schedules make a world of difference. Here are guidelines and suggested examples for your family.

Though they may insist otherwise, children with ADHD desperately need and often thrive with reliable daily routines—particularly in the morning and at bedtime. Why? Many children with ADHD exhibit executive function deficits, which means they have a hard time organizing tasks in their minds—making it difficult to figure out how much time it will take to brush their teeth, take a bath, or choose an outfit. Creating a daily routine to guide them through these trouble spots provides external organization, giving your children the chance to prepare for school or wind down once the day is over without anxiety or stress.

MORNING

Perhaps your morning begins with flickering lights, music, and kisses as you try to rouse your child, who wants nothing more than five more minutes of peace. Fifteen minutes later, when you stop by her room to call her to breakfast, you find her absorbed in a game, half-dressed. And once she's seated at the table, she balks at what you're offering for breakfast.

Launching the day can be stressful for any parent; it's particularly so for those of us whose children need extra time to get going or who are easily sidetracked. Try these strategies and this sample routine to start the day on a better note.

Waking Up:

- **Invest in a good alarm clock**—preferably one that will wake the dead. Try one of our ADHD-tested alarm clocks like [Clocky](#) or the [Sonic Bomb](#), 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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Consider pre-wakeup meds.** If your child takes ADHD medication, ask his doctor about giving him a minimal dose of short-acting (not timed-release) meds 30 minutes before the alarm is set to ring and then letting him rest until wake-up time. This small amount of medication should supplement, not replace, the prescribed morning dosage.

Getting Ready:

- **Pace your children's routines.** If you have more than one child, chances are you are spending time keeping them from fighting with each other. Stagger their routines, so that one child is up earlier and out of the way of the other. Their paths needn't cross in the bathroom or at the breakfast table.
- **Enjoy breakfast.** 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

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dresses. Or give him breakfast to-go in the form of a piece of fruit, a chunk of cheese, and a Lara Bar. Do what works for your family—and forget the “shoulds.”

- **Turn on the TV!?** Consider allowing hyperactive children to watch the tube while eating. This works wonders for certain kids who cannot sit still long enough to get breakfast eaten.
- **Dodge common morning clashes.** If you’re fighting with your daughter over her choice of clothes, ask yourself whether it’s worth battling over socks that don’t match.
- **Lay on the praise.** Compliment him for every step forward. If necessary, reward your child for each stress-free morning.
- **Keep your weekend and vacation routines the same.** Letting kids sleep in too long makes it harder for them to get back on track on Monday morning.
- **Reward your child for every good morning.** Set up a reward system, and 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. Exchange a set number of tokens for a small reward, like a new toy or a mini-golf outing.

Sample Morning Routine:

7:00 A.M. —Wake up your child.

7:05 A.M. — Get ready:

—Wash face

—Comb hair

—Get dressed

7:20 A.M. —Breakfast time.

7:45 A.M. —Brush your teeth—
together.

7:55 A.M. —Zip, tie, and layer up

8:00 A.M. —Out the door!

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Advice from Other Parents:

“We have a morning checklist that the boys (both ADHD) complete. We use a poker chip point system for rewards.” —*Brenna*

“We use a custom-made ‘Morning Routine’ checklist to stay on track getting up in the morning.” —*Sheryl*

“One thing I’ve learned: Always add an extra five or ten minutes to your morning routine to allot for the unexpected!” —*Valeria*

“To get out the door in the mornings, the kids use a checklist on a magnet board that has bright pictures and is hung on the kitchen door.” —*Paige*

“We have a morning routine and evening routine and our son’s daily timetable on his bedroom wall.” —*Amber*

“I find the only way for mornings to run smoother is TIME. Giving us time to do everything in the morning has proven more important than my son getting that extra 15 minutes of sleep.” —*Amber*

“My daughter has an app on her iPad for her morning schedule so she knows what she needs to do next.” —*Melissa*

“There are mini dry erase boards in the bathroom to keep kids focused on the morning routine.” —*Melanie*

“We found that our home runs best in the morning with music as opposed to TV. CDs are turned on in the bedroom 10 minutes before it’s time to wake up. Something lively, yet gentle.” —*BGM*

“We try to get routines set in place in the first few weeks of school, so that our mornings are streamlined by the time things get hectic.” —*Heather*

“Since transitions of any kind are hard for my 12 year old, I give him time to get up. I’ll wake him up 15 minutes before he has to get up and then we begin ‘5 more minutes’ until he’s up.” —*Debbie*

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NIGHT

After a long day of school, homework, and sports, many children with ADHD are so wound-up they can't turn off their motor by the time bedtime rolls around. For parents who are at their wit's end, the key is to start planning for bedtime long before 9 P.M. A reliable and consistent bedtime routine will help your child get in the right mindset for sleep each and every night. Follow these tips to help your child get the sleep he needs to wake up physically and mentally refreshed.

Preparing for the Next Day:

- **Plan for an early bedtime.** Catching enough Zzzs is essential for anyone with ADHD. Start your evening routine early enough for your child to get about 10 hours of sleep every night.
- **Make decisions at night.** Choose clothes for school the night before. Also set breakfast and lunch menus to avoid discussions about them in the morning.
- **Pack the sack.** Place your child's papers and books inside his backpack—and leave it near, or even blocking, the front door, where it can't be left behind.
- **Have your child take his bath or shower before bedtime,** when time isn't so precious and it's less likely that someone else will need the bathroom. He'll sleep better and there will be one less rushed item—and less conflict—in the morning.

If your child is particularly restless at night, opt for a bath instead of a shower. The warm water and pleasantly scented bubble bath can be a great relaxing agent, especially for young children. Try soap with a light sleep-friendly scent—like lavender or chamomile—to avoid overwhelming a hypersensitive child.

- **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 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.
- **Play a quiet, low-stakes game, or read a book.** The light from electronic devices can throw off your child's circadian rhythm,

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making it more difficult for her to fall asleep naturally. Playing an old-fashioned game—or reading a book if your child is highly competitive—can help her let off any excess energy leftover from the day, as well as providing some quality bonding time for the whole family.

- **Steer clear of sleeping pills.** Most sleep medications that work well for adults haven't been adequately tested for their safety and effectiveness in children. A supplement like melatonin or valerian is a safer bet. Ask your doctor about the appropriate dosage for your child.
- **Look into relaxation techniques.** Deep breathing or listening to soothing music can make it easier to fall asleep. Try teaching your child a few simple deep breathing exercises, like this one: Take five slow, deep breaths through the nostrils, rest for five regular breaths, then take five more deep breaths. Repeat as necessary.
- **Have a sweet and personal nightly lights-out ritual.** Not only does this help your child feel secure about his place in your family, it also helps signal to his brain that it's time for sleep. For example, try giving your child a hug and saying, "I love you to the moon and back. Sleep tight!"

When a Child Refuses To Go To Bed

Some children with ADHD—especially those who also suffer from oppositional defiant disorder or an anxiety disorder—will do anything to avoid going to bed. If you do manage to get them to go to bed, odds are, they'll be up and about a short time later.

If this describes your child, your best bet may be a behavioral approach: Give strict orders for your child to stay in bed between certain hours, and sit outside her bedroom door to make sure she stays in bed.

If your child gets up, calmly tuck her back into bed. Then, in a soft but firm voice, remind her that it's time to go to sleep. Reassure her that you will be nearby in case she needs you. After a few nights of this routine, she will come to understand that resisting is futile—and you'll no longer have to sit vigilantly outside her door.

Use caution with this approach; it can be stressful for parents, as well as children. Don't attempt it unless you and your partner both feel confident that you have the resolve and the stamina to follow through. If you allow your

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child to break the rules, even once, you're sunk. Deviating from the rules is permissible only in the case of illness or some other special situation.

Sample Bedtime Routine:

8:00 P.M. — Have your child shower or take a relaxing bath.

8:20 P.M. — Get into PJs, have a light snack, and clean up any toys left out from the evening.

8:30 P.M. — Brush teeth and go to the bathroom.

8:45 P.M. — Your child gets into bed. Read with your child briefly, or talk about your days together. Before turning off the lights, say your ritual goodnight

9:00 P.M. — Turn off the lights and exit quietly.

Advice from Other Parents:

“We have a white board in my bedroom for the kids to write down the ‘Oh yeah, I forgot’ things before bed.” —*Cristin*

“Before bed, the backpack is packed with homework, permission slips, house key, and cellphone (turned off!).” —*Machelle*

“We take our showers at night and I iron my clothes at night. This way I can function normally in the morning—even when my daughter is having an off-day.” —*PurpleDiva*

“We utilize a large dry erase board calendar that we put everyone’s schedule on with a different colored marker. We review it each night so everyone has a ‘preview’ of what the next day looks like.” —*Patty*

“Keeping our family on schedule begins the night before. All electronic devices are turned off 10 minutes before showers.” —*BGM*

“To keep the kids’ heads as clear and focused as possible, I do a reminder each night before bed for what’s coming up the next day.” —*Kim*

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“We try to keep to the same schedule each day, during the summer, holiday and weekends... especially bedtimes. Everyone is more well-rested and less cranky to handle the tasks for the day.” —*Stephanie*

“For my high school student, I message him each night with the next day’s schedule (mine and his separately) so that he knows what to expect and can refer back to it throughout his day if needed. This includes reminders for his school projects (‘read two chapters for your book report,’ etc.) to help him stay on track.” —*Carla*

“We have a family meeting every Sunday night where we discuss all of the scheduled events of the week.” —*Lauren*

“A printed copy of our weekly schedule is always attached to the freezer door—because a scoop of ice cream is a favorite nightly treat in our home!” —*BGM*

“I’ve found it works best to knock homework out of the way ASAP so that we can have less stress by the time we’re heading to bed.” —*Rebecca*

GENERAL ROUTINE TIPS

Adapt Routines to Your Child

Your routine should reflect your child’s personality, your family values, and your child’s needs. If your child needs extra down time between waking up and eating breakfast, work this into your schedule. If your child enjoys long baths or reading in bed before falling asleep, put this into your routine. Take your child’s needs and personality into account when creating the routine.

Make it Public

Once you create a routine for your child, type it out and keep a copy of it in a central location—like the kitchen or living room. You, your spouse, caregivers, and your child can reference it to make sure every day is consistent and everyone is following the schedule. If you laminate the routine, your child can use a dry-erase marker to cross out tasks he completed.

Use Pictures for Younger Children

Illustrations or photos should spell out each step—dressing, washing up, brushing hair, and so on. Post them in the bedroom or the bathroom—or both.

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Making Structure Routine

A visual schedule is great, but don't stop there. Use other tools to make sure your family follows the routine every day.

- A kitchen timer helps your child stay on schedule
- Calendars on smartphones allow you to set reminders
- Behavior charts can be used to reward your child for following the schedule

Build in Flexibility

Life doesn't always follow the schedule you set. If bedtime usually begins at 8:30 and you're stuck in traffic—20 minutes away from your house—your routine is going to be off. Be prepared to make adjustments when needed and use this as an opportunity to teach your child that everyone needs to be flexible from time to time.

Narrate the Routine

Make an audiotape that guides your young child. Enliven your words with soothing music, or by singing parts of the tasks and including humor.

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ADDitude Special Reports Available Now

www.adhdreports.com

Your ADHD Homework Survival Guide

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

After working hard to focus and remember all day long, your child fights his nightly homework with a vengeance. And who can blame him? Children with ADHD struggle with executive functions, working memory, and restlessness — skills that are taxed all day. Parents who are tired of daily battles over vocab lists and multiplication tables agree: There has to be a better way. In this 50-page special report, you'll learn how to break the bad homework cycle and keep your child learning.

>> Learn more about this special report: <http://additu.de/hw-guide>

A Parent's Guide to ADHD, Diet, and Nutrition

The foods, vitamins, minerals, supplements, and herbs that can help your child manage symptoms.

What is a good ADHD diet? Is sugar the enemy? What about gluten? Dairy? In this comprehensive special report, we detail the connection between the food your child eats and the severity of his hyperactivity, inattention, and impulsivity, covering topics from artificial dyes and flavors to the right amount of protein.

>> Learn More About This Special Report: <http://additu.de/nutrition>

Video Games and the ADHD Brain

Setting limits on screen time, easing transitions, choosing smart games, and keeping your child safe online.

For children with ADHD, the instant gratification of video games can easily become addictive, leaving parents struggling to balance their child's passion for gaming with safety and normal development outside of the virtual world. In this expert guide, we outline how parents can pick brain-boosting video games, how to enforce reasonable limits, and what steps to take if your child takes his Minecraft obsession a little too far.

>> Learn more about this special report: <http://additu.de/minecraft>

FREE ADDitude Downloadable Booklets

Great Sports and Activities for Kids with ADHD

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

10 Toughest Discipline Dilemmas — Solved!

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

Does Your Child Have a Learning Disability?

Use this self-test to find out if your child's problems at school may be due to LD.

Sleep Solutions for Kids with ADHD

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

18 Writing Tricks for ADHD Students

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

10 Solutions for Disorganization at School

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

Find these and many more free ADHD resources online at:

[http://additu.de/
freedownloads](http://additu.de/freedownloads)

FREE ADHD Webinar Replays from ADDitude:

Why Don't I Have a Best Friend?

>> <http://additu.de/best-friend>

Nothing is as heartbreaking for a parent as seeing your child repeatedly strike out in the social arena. Just because he *wants* to make friends doesn't mean he can turn into a social butterfly overnight—but fortunately, there are things parents can do to help. Fred Frankel, Ph.D., shares strategies for helping your child foster true friendships.

Screen-Smart Parenting

>> <http://additu.de/screen-smart>

Do your kids always have a controller or tablet glued to their hands? Instead of fighting it, why not learn how to make technology work for your child with ADHD? Jodi Gold, M.D., a nationally recognized expert in adolescent and child psychiatry, shares helpful tips to understand the risks of technology, as well as strategies to teach your child the rules of being a citizen of the digital world.

ADHD and Gifted? Helping Twice-Exceptional Kids Succeed

>> <http://additu.de/ze-kids>

When special needs children are also gifted, it takes the help of a strong advocate to put them on the path to success. In this presentation, hosted by Diane M. Kennedy and Rebecca Banks-Cull, you'll learn how to navigate the complicated 2E maze of ADHD, learning disabilities, and giftedness to pave the way for your child's bright future.

How Stress Impacts Learning and Behavior

>> <http://additu.de/stress>

In today's high-pressure school environment, kids with ADHD or LD can become overwhelmed by stress. In this audio and slide presentation, hosted by Jerome J. Schultz, Ph.D., find out how school stress impacts your child's brain—and what you can do about it. Get the tools you need to help your child manage academic stress so their brain has room to grow and learn!

Emotions in ADHD Teens

>> <http://additu.de/teens>

Dealing with an emotionally volatile teen? It could be her ADHD. Thomas E. Brown, Ph.D., offers strategies for maintaining emotional control, as well as advice for teaching teens to find emotional balance.

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Adult ADHD and LD (weekly)

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

Parenting ADHD and LD Children (weekly)

Strategies and support for parents on behavior and discipline, time management, disorganization, and making friends.

ADHD and LD at School (bimonthly; weekly from August through October)

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

Treating ADHD (weekly)

Treatment options for attention deficit including medications, food, supplements, brain training, mindfulness and other alternative therapies.