

Single Parenting and ADHD

Dealing with an Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) diagnosis can be tough for any family, but for a single parent the day-to-day realities can be doubly hard. Lone parenting a child with ADHD can mean spending a lot of extra time and resources managing their condition while juggling other aspects of their life. But with statistics revealing that an estimated 60,000 children are thought to have ADHD in Ireland and the country also having one of the highest rates of single parenting families in Europe, this is a very real issue for lots of people. If you are a single parent of a child with ADHD then here are some practical and emotional tips on how to cope.

Trust your instincts

Being the primary caregiver means that you are most likely to pick up on any worrying symptoms in your child. But not having anyone to confer with about these symptoms can lead to anxiety and self doubt. Is it ADHD or just a phase? Am I overreacting? Put a stop to this self doubt by trusting your instincts and speaking to a doctor. Although an ADHD diagnosis won't be immediately made (it may take months of 'watchful waiting' and monitoring of continuous symptoms in children over the age of seven) a doctor will still investigate and maybe even identify other conditions, traumas and learning difficulties that could be exacerbating your child's behaviour. Either way, speaking out means getting support and advice rather than worrying alone.

Don't feel stigmatised

Studies show that single mothers already feel admit to feeling stigmatised by society. Because some of the key symptoms of ADHD include impulsiveness, attention span and hyperactivity, many parents worry that outsiders are looking at their child and simply seeing naughty behaviour rather than a neurological condition. Single parents may feel particularly wary of judgement due to the insecurities that already surround this role. Learning to brush off the opinions and judgements of those who don't understand your situation is the only way to avoid becoming stressed and upset.

Set a routine

It is well documented that children with ADHD benefit from routine and consistency so try and ensure that your day-to-day lifestyle is structured and follows a fairly predictable pattern. Of course it isn't always possible to keep things exactly the same especially if you are juggling a house, a job and other children but remaining consistent with the core elements of your day such as meal times, bed times and indeed your rules, expectations and boundaries should provide the structure your child needs to ease their symptoms. Ultimately this will help improve their behaviour and make life easier for you too. Experts recommend setting time aside each day to spend one-to-one quality time with your child even if it just involves reading a story before bed. Children with ADHD are so often involved in negative interactions that their self esteem can suffer so factoring just a few minutes of your undivided attention into their day can help them to feel loved and appreciated.

Ask for help

Being a single parent is a full time job in itself but 'me time' is also important. Many single parents neglect themselves and dismiss the necessity of self care but taking time out to read a book, visit friends or simply take a long bath can leave you feeling refreshed, rejuvenated and more able to deal with the challenges in your life. Never feel guilty about asking for help from friends, family, babysitters or other support networks – you have needs too.

Work with your ex

If your child has contact with a non-resident parent then it is important that the two of you work together to manage the condition adequately. As mentioned, routines need to be followed and boundaries need to be established and applied by both parents. It is important that your ex understands the implications of disrupting routines or overindulging your child in treats. If possible, holding 'family meetings' may help you all to gain some clarification and also enable your child to discuss their wants and needs. Ideally it will help if you can be amicable with each other but if this isn't possible then perhaps suggest that your ex meets with your child's doctor, teacher or therapist to discuss the condition – this may help them to gain a greater understanding of your child's needs and the condition in general.

Resources

Irish Health, [60,000 children living with ADHD](#), accessed 09.05.16

Independent, [One parent families above the EU average](#), accessed 09.05.16

Health Service Executive, [ADHD](#), accessed 09.05.15

Psychguides, [Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder \(ADHD\)](#), accessed 09.05.16

Irish Health, [ADHD remains widely misunderstood](#), accessed 09.05.16

The Herald, ['Despite difficulties, the rewards of being a single mum are spectacular'](#), accessed 09.05.16