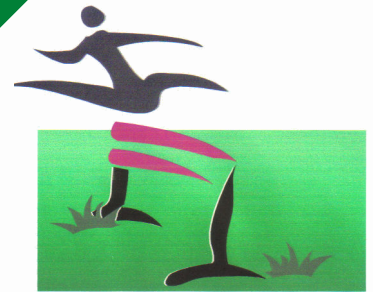


# BMC JOURNAL

The monthly newsletter of  
Behavior Management Consultants



## **STUDY: ONE IN SIX COLLEGE FRESHMEN HAS ADHD – MOST WITH COMORBIDITIES**

Roughly 16 percent of college students worldwide have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD or ADD), according to findings from an international survey spanning nine countries and dozens of colleges.

The study of ADHD in college students, published this month in the Journal of Attention Disorders<sup>1</sup>, also found that 58 percent of students with ADHD have at least one comorbid disorder; 30 percent have two or more comorbid conditions.

Researchers derived the findings from a World Health Organization survey on college students and mental health (WMH-CIDI-SC). Roughly 16,000 college freshmen representing 24 colleges completed the online surveys between 2014 to 2018. The surveys comprised self-reported screening scales for ADHD and six other conditions — major depression, bipolar disorder, panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, drug use disorder, and alcohol use disorder.

ADHD prevalence rates did vary cross-nationally in the study, ranging from about 10 percent of total survey respondents in Germany to about 28 percent of total respondents in Australia. The authors also found that prevalence rates were lower in European sites and highest in English-speaking countries.

Total ADHD prevalence in this group, however, appears substantially higher than suggested by previously reported literature about college students, according to the authors. Prevalence of ADHD was also similar in both males (15.7 percent) and females (16.1 percent), which the authors attribute in part to improved symptom awareness in females.

The WHO study's comorbidity rates are consistent with existing literature on college and community data. The authors divided survey data on the disorders into "profiles" for analysis, and found that:

- ADHD was present in about half of participants who also had internalizing disorders (depression, anxiety)
- About 60 percent of individuals with bipolar disorder also had ADHD
- About 76 percent of individuals with externalizing disorders (alcohol use disorder/drug use disorder) also had ADHD

One objective of the study was to examine the association between ADHD and impairment in college students. Findings show that ADHD, comorbidities, and the multivariate disorder classes (profiles) all independently predict severe impairment. What's more, removing all ADHD cases, according to the authors, would hypothetically reduce severe impairment by about 20 percent in all college students.

Given the prevalence of ADHD in college students and the complexities that come with comorbid conditions, the authors note that a transdiagnostic approach should be explored to limit impairment and improve treatment.

The best discipline approach for a child with ADHD? It doesn't exist — at least not in any universal, no one-size-fits-all form. Caregivers' most effective strategies are personal and changing and often honed from trial and error. Here, ADDitude readers share their families winning approaches to dealing with meltdowns and challenging behaviors.

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# “All Behavior is Communication:” The Discipline Approaches That Work for Real ADHD Families

The best discipline approach for a child with ADHD? It doesn't exist — at least not in any universal, one-size-fits-all form. Caregivers' most effective strategies are personal and changing and often honed from trial and error. Here, ADDitude readers share their families winning approaches to dealing with meltdowns and challenging behaviors.



Meltdowns in the check-out line. Trouble with transitions. Big, big feelings.

Parents of children with ADHD live and breathe these daily behavioral challenges — and many more. ADHD traits like emotional dysregulation, impulsivity, and poor working memory often contribute to these challenges, but the manifestations are unique to each child and their circumstances. No single discipline approach that will work for every family.

That said, some of our best ideas come from other parents who have walked similar paths. “What is your most effective discipline approach when your child with ADHD acts up or acts out?”

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## Discipline Approaches: 15 Tips from Parents of Children with ADHD

“My son has the hardest time with transitions, which used to lead to gargantuan meltdowns all the time... We have found that giving him space to have his big reactions – even if it means screaming and stomping – in a way where he doesn’t feel judged has been most effective. We can’t outperform the intensity of his fits, so we make sure he is safe, and then wait a bit before sitting quietly near him to offer support within his control.” – Samantha, Washington

“I created a chart that shows three behavioral and emotional levels. The top level is when he’s feeling out of control and oppositional (‘being a jerk,’ as my child worded it). The middle level is ‘doing OK,’ and the lower level is neutral, calm behavior. We go to the chart often, especially when he’s at the higher levels, and he uses his words to describe his feelings. He knows that he should live in the low and middle levels, but that everyone reaches the top levels sometimes.” – Anonymous

“I tell him to pause and ask him what he needs. Then I suggest that he run up and down the stairs at least five times. It never ceases to work for him. He returns calmer and with a more organized brain.” – Sunny

“I remind myself that all behavior is communication, and I try to identify my child’s unmet needs at that moment. I tell them which behaviors won’t work for me and offer a couple of alternative behaviors that will, while leaving room for their ideas. As an example: When my child would have a meltdown while shopping, the choices were to either control the meltdown behavior in the store or go out to the car and have a meltdown. I was fine with both options, just not screaming in the store.” – Cathy, Oregon

“Try to help them understand the rationale behind the tasks we ask them to do.” – Mark, PA

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“When my child acts up, I try to run through a series of questions to decide how to handle the situation. 1. Is the behavior caused by an ADHD symptom? If yes, I tell myself: ‘This is how his brain works, give him some grace.’ 2. Was there a trigger that I missed (e.g. over-stimulating environment)? If yes, can it be mitigated now? If not, give more grace and redirect to something that minimizes the impact of the negative behavior (e.g. send him outside if he’s being overly loud). Then, I give him one simple and direct command, and remind him that he gets technology time taken away if he doesn’t follow directions. I also try like hell to give him all the positive praise I can when I see him doing things he’s supposed to without asking!” – Stephanie, Texas

“I remind myself that my child’s brain is developing two to three years behind the brains of kids without ADHD, and I step back and picture how I would handle a younger child. That means I lower my expectations, do more hands-on guidance/teamwork, and anticipate having to remind my child about things.” – Megan, Michigan

“I use the ClassDojo Beyond app as well as a chores motivation chart to provide her with incentivizing rewards. If she isn’t following our rules, she doesn’t get points for a specific skill.” – Anonymous

“Redirection. Take a moment to breathe, to notice the environment. Then discuss the issue.” – Laura, Canada

“Our best strategy is to always review what is about to happen. We remind them of the rules right before an activity or outing, and what we are expecting in terms of behavior. We get a lot of ‘We know,’ but our reminders are helpful.” – Ellen, Georgia

“We ensure that basic needs are met first (hungry, thirsty, tired, hot or cold) and then communicate about the dysregulation that has occurred. We discuss feelings around it, and come up with a plan to address it (e.g. break up tough homework into smaller chunks, do clean up together, etc.).” – Catherine, Canada

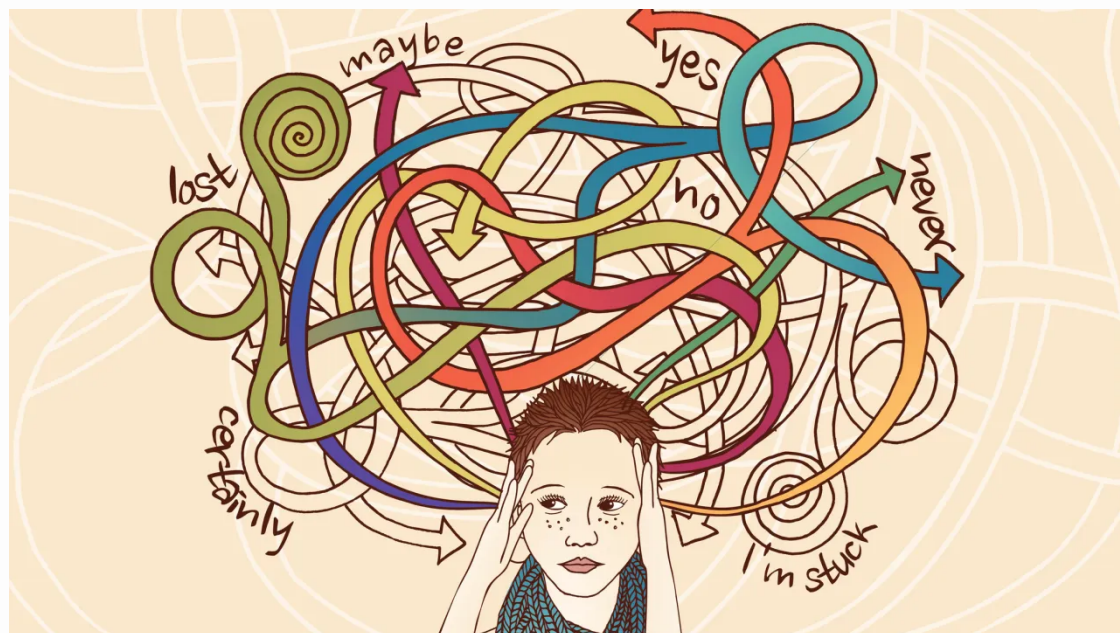
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“Kids with ADHD need immediate intervention. Delayed discipline methods don't work for them. We give my son a look that says, 'Stop.' Then we explicitly tell him to stop. Then we have him go sit on a mat as a 'time-out' for several minutes. (We use a timer to keep track.) If he's upset, we let him express his feelings and empathize with him. We don't start the timer until he's done expressing himself.” – Terri, Missouri

“I try not to use 'No!' as my first response. Instead, I ask my child a question: 'Is that your best choice?' Or, 'Have you thought of a different action?'" – Anna, Australia

“The 1-2-3 approach works for us. We clearly state what we want (stop fighting, pick up a mess, quiet down) and state the consequence (you will lose your iPad time, etc), and we start the count slowly. It almost always works, usually by 1, because they cherish their iPad time.” – Sarah, Australia

“Discipline equals teaching, and I know from my classroom experience that the heat of the moment is NOT a good time to teach. When my child is acting out, my focus is on redirection and preventing escalation. Once my child is calm and able to think, we can figure out what triggered the behavior, and how to deal in the future. Eventually, this teaches my child how to independently deal with strong emotions or impulsive behaviors in a constructive way” – Ari, New Jersey





# 10 Rules for Parents of Defiant Kids with ADHD

Your child is blatantly defiant and confrontational, and standard discipline doesn't work. So what's next? Follow this action plan.

## 1. STAY POSITIVE:

Rewarding good behavior works better than punishing bad behavior. Boost your child's self-esteem by "catching" him behaving well and doling out praise. Higher self-esteem and fewer transgressions will follow.

## 2. TREAT BEFORE YOU PUNISH:

Never discipline your child for behaviors that are symptoms of ADHD. Once your treatment plan has symptoms under control, you will know which behaviors are punishable.

## 3. USE YOUR WORDS:

Instead of overreacting — and teaching your child to fear mom or dad — be a model of how to behave when you're upset.

## 4. AVOID MELTDOWNS:

Plot an escape strategy for tough events like family parties in order to ensure a quiet, tantrum-free goodbye. Conspire with your child, and say, "It's time to be a magician and become invisible." Then, stage your exit.

## 5. KEEP YOUR COOL:

Your child is fiery and mad, yelling and pushing your buttons. Human nature is to yell back, but this rarely accomplishes anything positive. Instead, work diligently and deliberately to stay cool-headed and under control. Breathing exercises may help you achieve this unflappability

## 6. BE CLEAR ABOUT RULES AND CONSEQUENCES:

Explain what behavior is not allowed, and exactly what consequences are at risk. Then, consistently enforce the rules.

## 7. PLAY BEFORE PUNISHING:

Make time to have fun with your child, and strengthen your bond in a positive way by completing creative projects together, for example.

## 8. KNOW YOUR CHILD'S PATTERNS:

Probe your child's quirks and hypersensitivities. True understanding will help you differentiate willful defiance from emotional overwhelm. Know his triggers, and have a plan for potentially explosive situations.

## 9. DETERMINE THE TRUE CAUSE:

Comorbid conditions — like oppositional defiant disorder — may cause behavior problems. See a specialist if you think your child might have more than ADHD.

## 10. ASK YOURSELF IF YOU'RE CONTRIBUTING:

Could you have ADHD, too? It's commonly genetic, so an undiagnosed parent might have a temper that flares more often, or impulsivity that undermines discipline efforts. Take our [self-test](#), then seek a diagnosis and treatment.

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# The Secret to Better Behavior? No Punishment at All

If you're exhausted and running out of ideas to correct your child's difficult behaviors, you're not alone. As I've learned, disciplining children with ADHD often means trying a few key strategies with one great twist - there's actually no punishment involved at all!





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As a psychotherapist who specializes in ADHD and related conditions, I work with parents who feel frazzled and confused about how to best help their neurodivergent children with behavioral challenges. It is a thing I easily relate to, as the just-as-frazzled mother to three grown children who came into this world with a not-quite-neurotypical cocktail of fun.

How to best parent and discipline my children was rarely obvious or straightforward. At times, they were defiant. They ignored me. They threw major tantrums. They lied. They were often verbally and sometimes physically aggressive. No punishment seemed to work. Sound familiar?

Then years later, as I was completing a master's in counseling psychology, I came to understand something that completely changed the way I approached parenting: ADHD is actually not a behavior disorder! It is a neurological difference. My kids' difficult behaviors were not happening by choice. This realization allowed me to find and exhibit true compassion for my children — a game changer.

If you're exhausted and running out of ideas to correct your child's difficult behaviors, you're not alone. Improving behaviors in children with ADHD often means trying a few key strategies and one great twist — there's actually no punishment involved at all!

## **5 Steps to Dealing with Difficult ADHD Behaviors**

### **Step 1: Accept That ADHD is Physiological**

You can't begin to correct your child's difficult behaviors until you acknowledge this truth.

Children with ADHD largely struggle with executive functioning — the brain skills we all need to function in our daily lives. They include the ability to sustain attention, to organize and plan, to recall information, and to control emotions, among other skills. The prefrontal cortex — where attention, emotions, and behaviors intersect — is also implicated in ADHD.



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Children with ADHD are also about three years behind their neurotypical peers in terms of brain development, meaning that they are often asked to function at higher levels than their brains can manage.

It's these circumstances that bring about difficult behaviors that are often out of a child's control. What's more, these behaviors will still appear no matter how well-versed a child is in the consequences. Harsher punishments will not make a dent.

Punishing a child with ADHD for difficult behaviors is ineffective and counterproductive because they don't have the luxuries of regulating their emotions and behaviors like a neurotypical child would. Punishment only results in them feeling guilty and ashamed for what they couldn't control. The guilt and shame can turn into frustration, defiance, and emotional outbursts — and they often do.

The true meaning of the word "discipline" is to teach, not to punish. Teaching helps to shape behavior positively so that difficult, impairing behaviors are less of an issue.

So how do we change problem behaviors and teach better ones without punishment?

### **Step 2: Be a Detective, Not a Judge**

All behaviors serve a purpose. Problem behaviors are representative of an unmet need and, in ADHD's case, can be due to impulsivity.

Rather than act like a judge and issue punishment to your child after a problem behavior occurs, it is better to put on your detective cap and try to decode the root or cause of the behavior. Determining the unmet need behind your child's difficult behaviors will give you the chance to meet the need and decrease the chances that the problem behavior occurs again.

Problem behaviors can broadly be divided into two categories:

- Chronic behaviors, which tend to happen at the same time and in the same situations. (e.g. refusing to go to bed or to wake up; temper tantrums after getting off video games.)
- Impulsive behaviors (e.g. your child hitting their sibling or having a meltdown out of the blue.)

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The next time a problem behavior occurs, take note of all its surrounding factors and context. You'll come to find that your child's most difficult behaviors can be traced back to these common causes:

- They don't know how to start the task and may not know how to ask for help.
- They don't understand the task and the finish point. If you tell your child to clean their room, they may not know what 'clean' looks like.
- The task is too difficult. If your child is unwilling to do homework, for example, it might be that the work is too challenging, or that there's too much to work through organizationally.
- They need a transition time. ADHD is associated with time blindness. Telling your child they have five minutes left before stopping their video game is futile. You'll have to "show" them what five minutes looks like so they can really understand.
- They are overwhelmed with too many instructions and can easily forget multi-step tasks. They will need large projects 'chunked' up.
- They could not control their impulsivity.
- They are ashamed of their behavior (especially if they lied).

Avoid assuming that the problem behavior is because your child is lazy, defiant, or because they simply want to "cause trouble." No one, not even your child, wakes up with the intention of having a bad day.

### **Step 3: PREP Your Child**

Once you've truly thought through the causes behind the problem behaviors, you'll have to PREP your child to replace the bad behavior with a better one, or at least decrease its severity. PREP stands for:

- Peaceful moment: It's much easier to deconstruct problem behaviors when your child is calm and tensions aren't running high.
- Request good behavior: Ask your child open-ended questions to guide them to better behavior. If they are being disruptive during dinner time, for example, calmly ask them to remind you of the family rules. (Do we throw food? Do we interrupt one another?)
- Explanation from your child: As your child answers your guiding questions, it will reinforce the information in their brain, allowing them to be more mindful of the situation.
- Praise: Notice your child's efforts toward better behavior and do your best to ignore problem behaviors (so long as they are not dangerous). Your approval and enthusiasm can be a great motivator to your child.

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## Step 4: PREP Yourself

It's not easy to keep your cool as your child engages in difficult behaviors. At the same time, if we show them that we are annoyed, frustrated, and dysregulated, we are modeling these behaviors to them.

As parents, we tend to skip checking in with ourselves and making sure we are at our best to handle tough, stressful situations. To be a good behavior detective and undo unhelpful notions of parenting, we need to be level-headed and fully present. We must PREP ourselves, too:

- Pause before you react, and practice mindfulness frequently.
- Recharge often and engage in self-care.
- Evaluate situations where your child's problem behaviors occur before you...
- Proceed with next steps

## Step 5: RE-MAP Your Parenting

Once you've prepped your child and yourself, you're ready to RE-MAP what parenting and disciplining your child is really about:

- Regard your child with an unconditional, positive assumption that they want to do well.

- Externalize misbehaviors. Remember that the behavior is not their fault - it is caused by a brain difference.
- Mistake Acceptance. Learn to view misbehaviors as mistakes. Provide your home as a safe place to make those mistakes so that they can be used as learning opportunities to PREP your child about what to expect next time.
- Praise your child often. Children with ADHD field lots of negativity and criticism every day. We may hardly ever stop to notice their efforts to fit into a neurotypical world - because it's behavior we expect and typically do not reward. Praising your child often, even for the little things, will go a long way.

## Re-mapping in Action

How can we use these parenting principles to address common situations at home?

Behavior Problem #1: My child doesn't want to do their homework

- Prep your child
  - Check that they have everything they need for the assignment and that they understand what is expected of them.
  - Break up the homework to smaller chunks and provide breaks.
  - Talk to teachers about reducing the homework amount.
- Prep yourself

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- RE-MAP
    - Regard: Assume your child wants to do their homework.
    - Externalize: Know that ADHD and other factors make it so that the task is the problem, not your child.
    - Mistake Acceptance: If your child doesn't finish homework even if you've prepped them fully, accept this turn of events and move on. Learn from it and collaborate with your child on what might work better next time. Know that this is not the end of the world. (Things rarely are.)
    - Praise: Even if your child didn't finish the assignment, recognize how long they spent working on the task.

Behavior Problem #2: My child refuses to stop playing video games

- Prep your child
  - Make sure they have clear guidelines around when they should stop playing.
  - Build in transition times.
  - Use a Time Timer or another visual aid to help your child see the passage of time.
- Prep yourself
  - Understand how video games work. Consider having your child stop after a segment or level attempt is completed as opposed to a specific time.

- RE-MAP
  - Regard: Your child doesn't want to disobey you - they just really enjoy the video game.
  - Externalize: Your child may have trouble stopping due to the dopamine rush he's getting with the game.
  - Mistake Acceptance: If they stopped playing well after you asked them to, ask them what happened and what can be done next time to make the transition off of gaming easier.
  - Praise: Even if they didn't stop at the agreed-upon time, recognize if they were closer to the stop point than last time; if their tantrum didn't last as long, etc.

Parenting a child with ADHD often involves a full reassessment and overhaul of everything you thought you knew about discipline. In following these steps, remember that it will take time to address problem behaviors, and that there will be mistakes along the way. Prep yourself as best as you can, but don't be afraid to own up to your errors and apologize to your child and to yourself. At the same time, keep problem behaviors and situations in perspective - a messy room or missing homework is not the end of the world. In the end, it's most important to create a happy, safe, and supportive environment for your child.



# **ADHD**

# **Holiday Tips**



### **1. Pick and choose holiday events.**

**You don't have to accept every invitation you get. If your child gets antsy or overexcited, just go to the most important events. The family gathering at Grandma's house might be a must. But maybe you (or your child) can skip the party at your neighbor's house. You could also stick with smaller or more active events, like building a snowman with a few friends.**

### **2. Give your child a heads-up.**

**Kids with ADHD can get overwhelmed by changes to routines or new situations. Talking through what to expect can help. Explain timelines ("We'll be there for about an hour") and outfits ("You don't need to dress up, but please no gym clothes"). Be clear about your expectations, too ("Please no headphones once we get out of the car").**

### **3. Explain the "house rules" of wherever you go.**

**Maybe it's OK for your child to roughhouse in your basement at home. But the family hosting a holiday party might not want the cushions pulled off their rec room couches.**

**Likewise, your house of worship may be OK with kids chatting in the community room during services. But that might not fly at the one you're visiting with extended family. Learn the rules of wherever you're headed, and prepare your child.**

### **4. Check in with your child at events.**

**Before you go to an event together, agree on a hand signal (like touching your earlobe). Your child can use it to show you if things aren't going well.**

**If your child has trouble with hand signals, try something else. That could be a light pat on the shoulder and asking, "Are you OK?" Small gestures like these give kids a way to let you know when they've had enough or need a break. And that helps cut back on behavior problems.**

### **5. Find an escape space.**

**Whether you're headed to holiday worship services or a tree-lighting ceremony, it helps to have an "escape space" in case your child feels antsy. Once you get there, find a spot where your child has permission to retreat to. That could be a quiet chair in the corner or the church playground.**

### **6. Keep entertainment handy.**

**Some kids with ADHD get bored easily. Pack games and activities to keep your child busy. Include quiet items like books and crayons, devices with headphones, or simple card games kids can play with another child. If your child needs to move, bring a ball to kick around outside. Or plan a group activity for during the party. (Just get the host's buy-in first.)**

### **7. Give your child a job.**

**Kids with ADHD often do better at events when they have a job. Ask what your child wants to do to contribute. You could “assign” your child to take pictures of the family with your phone. Or to entertain younger cousins. (Just make sure your child knows it’s OK to peel away and spend time alone if need be.)**

### **8. Shop wisely — or online.**

**Lots of kids with ADHD have trouble with self-control . A trip to the mall this time of year could be a lot to handle. All the hype around new toys and clothes might lead to your child pestering you to buy things you don’t need or can’t afford. If your child tends to be overwhelmed by stores, consider shopping online instead.**

### **9. Make a “comfort kit.”**

**For some families, the holiday season is also peak tantrum and meltdown season. Lots of kids with ADHD have trouble managing emotions . And if you can’t head home when you notice your child getting upset, you’ll need some backup. You might be able to avoid or delay meltdowns by packing a small bag with comfort items. That might be healthy snacks, a bottle of water, and even comfy clothes that can double as pajamas in a pinch.**

### **10. Give small, immediate rewards.**

**In the weeks leading up to the holidays, it’s tempting to use presents as a bargaining chip. Try to avoid saying things like “Be good or Santa will find out!” It’s more helpful to offer your child small short-term rewards . For example, you can say, “If we can work together to clean up this morning, we’ll watch a show this afternoon.”**

### **11. Praise good behavior.**

**When your child is behaving well during a holiday event, show that you notice. Lean over and whisper, “You’re doing great at listening to other people without interrupting. I’m proud of you.” Recognition and**



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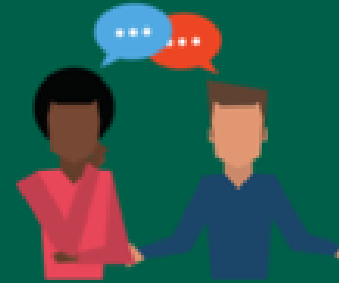
IF YOU NEED  
HELP, PLEASE  
MAKE THE CALL



GET THE SUPPORT  
YOU NEED



YOU ARE NOT  
ALONE



National Suicide  
Prevention Hotline:  
1-800-273-8255

National Domestic  
Violence Hotline:  
1-800-799-7233

Runaway and  
Homeless Teen  
Hotline Help:  
1-800-246-4646



Coalition for the  
Homeless:  
212-776-2000

Drug and Alcohol  
Hotline:  
800-622-2255

Food and Hunger  
Hotline:  
866-888-8777

Homeless Services  
Hotline:  
212-533-5151

Rape Crisis Hotline:  
212-227-3000

National Child  
Abuse Hotline:  
1-800-422-4453

National Teen  
Dating Abuse  
Helpline: 1-866-  
331-9474

Crisis Lifeline for  
LGBTQ Youth:  
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Behavior Management Consultants believes that, "No Child is Born Bad". Our mission is to educate, mentor, and assist parents, caregivers, and professionals to cope with, socialize, and identify values important to today's youth.

The goal is to serve public and private social service organizations including, but not limited to:

- Residential Treatment Facilities (RTFs)
- Juvenile Detention Centers
- Residential Treatment Centers (RTCs)
- Public Schools
- Community Based Organizations (CBOs)

We are confident that we will meet our goals thereby ensuring that our clients are being kept abreast in the ever-changing landscape of Human/Social Services.

## **Quote of the Month**

"The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any."

-Alice Walker



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