

Behavior therapy for young children with ADHD

Finding a Therapist



Behavior therapy is an effective treatment for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) that can improve a child's behavior, self-control, and self-esteem. It is most effective in young children when it is delivered by parents. When parents become trained in behavior therapy, they learn strategies to help their child with ADHD succeed at school, at home, and in relationships. Families can use the following information to help find therapists who provide behavior therapy training for parents of young children with ADHD.

How do I find a therapist who trains parents in behavior therapy?

Psychologists, social workers, and licensed counselors can provide this kind of training for parents. Therapists may be found through online provider directories (such as the [American Psychological Association Psychologist Locator*](#), the [American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy Locator**](#), or other professional association directories), or through health insurance provider directories. Parents can review the therapist's online profile or call and ask the therapist to describe their approach to ADHD treatment.

What should I look for?

Families should look for a therapist who focuses on training parents. Some therapists will have training or certification in a program that has been proven to work in young children with ADHD. Such programs include those listed in a 2011 Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) report***:

- Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)
- Incredible Years Parent Program
- Triple P – Positive Parenting Program
- New Forest Parenting Programme

While these may not be available in all areas, other programs have also been tested and found to work in children with ADHD. This list of questions can be used to find a therapist who uses a proven approach:

Does this therapist:

- Teach parents skills and strategies that use positive reinforcement, structure, and consistent discipline to manage their child's behavior?
- Teach parents positive ways to interact and communicate with their child?
- Assign activities for parents to practice with their child?
- Meet regularly with the family to monitor progress and provide coaching and support?
- Re-evaluate and remain flexible enough to adjust strategies as needed?

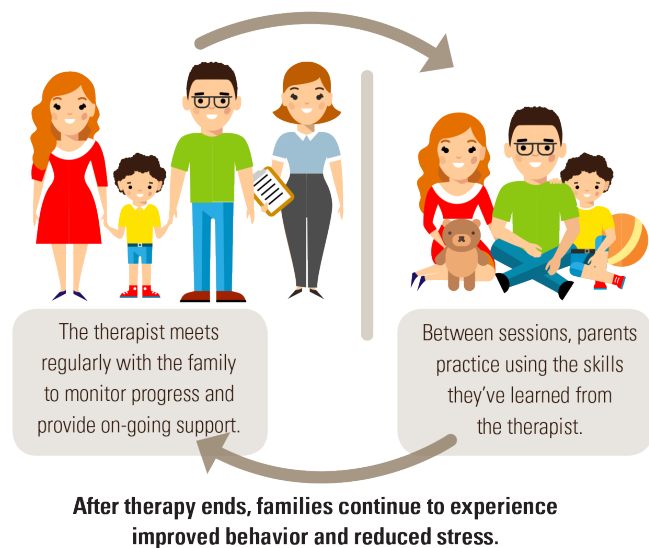
* American Psychological Association Psychologist Locator, <http://locator.apa.org>

** American Association of Marriage and Family Psychologist Locator, https://www.aamft.org/Directories/Find_a_Therapist.aspx

*** Charach A, Dashti B, Carson P, Booker L, Lim CG, Lillie E, et al. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Effectiveness of Treatment in At-Risk Preschoolers; Long-Term Effectiveness in All Ages; and Variability in Prevalence, Diagnosis, and Treatment. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality; 2011.

What can I expect?

Parents typically attend eight or more sessions with a therapist. Sessions may involve groups or individual families. The therapist meets regularly with the family to review their progress, provide support, and adjust strategies as needed to ensure improvement. Parents practice with their child between sessions.



What if a therapist is trying something different?

Parents have the greatest influence on their young child's behavior. **Only therapy that focuses on training parents is recommended for young children with ADHD because young children are not mature enough to change their own behavior without their parents' help.** Some therapists may use play therapy or talk therapy to treat young children with ADHD. Play therapy provides a way for children to communicate their experiences and feelings through play. Talk therapy uses verbal communication between the child and a therapist to treat mental and emotional disorders. *Neither of these has been proven to improve symptoms in young children with ADHD.*

What parents learn when trained in behavior therapy



Positive Communication



Positive Reinforcement



Structure and Discipline

Learning and practicing behavior therapy requires time and effort, but it has lasting benefits for the child. Ask your doctor about the benefits of parent training in behavior therapy for young children with ADHD.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/ADHD or help4ADHD.org.