

Parent to Parent (P2P): Family Training on AD/HD

by Karen Sampson, M.A.

THE JOURNEY WITH ATTENTION-DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (AD/HD)

is difficult for many families and individuals, creating turmoil and damaging parent-child and spousal relationships. CHADD's unique family training addresses this turmoil and helps families to move forward in positive and healthy ways.

Parents, educators, health-care providers and well-informed consumers are finding creative ways to address the needs and daily challenges of those who struggle with AD/HD. In each issue of *Attention*, we highlight one innovative program, model, or practice and pass on appropriate contacts so you can implement similar efforts in your community.

Parent to Parent: Family Training on AD/HD, called P2P for short, began as a small project based in Utah. Linda Smith of CHADD's Utah chapter started a program to address the needs of families when a family member was newly diagnosed. Beth Kaplanek of New York and Mary Durham of Texas were working on similar projects. The three women joined forces in 2005. During the next two years, with funding from CHADD's President's Council, they created P2P, using the National Alliance on Mental Illness's "Family to Family" program as a grounding template.

The course, a series of two-hour classes offered during a span of seven weeks, covers a variety of topics about which parents are searching for information. Certified P2P teachers—who are parents themselves—present an overview of AD/HD and available assessment and treatment options. The curriculum incorporates information on managing the impact of AD/HD on a family, behavioral interventions that work, and effective parenting strategies. School issues are covered, such as special education and IDEA, classroom accommodations and Section 504, and how to work with school administrators. Issues surrounding growing older, including the disorder's impact in the teenaged years and during adulthood, are addressed as AD/HD through the lifespan.

Shared experience

The impetus for the program came from Smith's own experience as a parent of a child with AD/HD. "It was frustrating because I needed help," she



Parent to Parent founders (left to right) Beth Kaplanek, Linda Smith, and Mary Durham with Terry Illes, Ph.D., a member of CHADD's board of directors and the editorial advisory board of *Attention* magazine.

explained. "The best information I could get was talking with other parents and hearing what they went through."

"The information is communicated to parents by parents who have been there and are there," said Ruth Hughes, Ph.D., CHADD's Deputy CEO for Public Policy and Community Services. "That makes a huge difference because there is a bonding that takes place. It is somebody who has been in their shoes. This is another parent who has lived their experience."

Parents are hungry for practical information, Durham said. "How do we take what the doctor tells us and what the schools say needs to be done and make it work for our families?" This is a huge piece of information addressing the gap in parents' education."

Filling that gap with information taught by another parent has a special and deeper impact than information from an expert or a book dedicated to AD/HD, according to Hughes. The information has greater validity coming from another parent.



MORE INFO: For more information about Parent to Parent, visit www.chadd.org/Parent2Parent.



CHADD and the founders of Parent to Parent (left) have a strong commitment to update the P2P curriculum regularly. Parent to Parent Coordinator Tom Montague (right), the father of a teenaged son with AD/HD, says many techniques he learned through P2P trainings have greatly benefited his family.

Hughes said, “It is the ability to talk about using this information. It’s the exchange among a group of people who are using this information, the shared experience of other parents in the class. Each one increases the power of the other.”

The P2P course addresses AD/HD as a disorder affecting the family, not as a motivation or discipline issue. In addition to educational concerns families and parents need to address with their children’s schools, the course teaches life skills needed to create happier homes. Parents are presented with tools and skills to help their children who have AD/HD or to better manage their own lives as they deal with AD/HD. The idea is to help change how parents view their children’s AD/HD.

“It helps parents get back to loving their kids, and it helps parents begin to heal any disruption to their relationship with their kids caused by the AD/HD,” said Hughes.

“A parent who signs up for this class is exasperated at this point and doesn’t know how to deal with their child’s issues and behaviors,” according to Kaplanek. “They want to understand what is going on with their children and how to help them. Most of the time we hear from people who say it has saved their lives.”

Empowering and practical information

Based on the science of AD/HD and the lived experience of AD/HD, the training program provides families with practical information. Participants are provided with verifiable information on all aspects of the disorder and proven tools for addressing the situations

that arise from AD/HD.

“It really addresses their questions about why AD/HD is having such an impact on the family, and why their child is different and not responding like other children,” Kaplanek said.

“It gives parents an incredible number of practical, day-to-day techniques to support their child and manage his/her disorder,” Hughes explained. “It helps change how parents think about their child’s AD/HD. This is not a discipline issue; AD/HD is a disorder, a disability. Instead it helps them focus on what they can do as a parent to help their child with AD/HD.”

Parent to Parent Coordinator Tom Montague is a certified P2P teacher and father of a teenaged son with AD/HD. The course, he says, has benefited his family in many ways.

“As a parent, I have to stay on my toes and be proactive,” he said. “It’s helped me to identify and act preventively against some of these impulses that challenge his daily routine.”

Montague has used checklists, one of the techniques offered in the course, to help his son make it through the day. Checklists for family chores, preparing for school and daily routines combined with clearly understood actions-and-consequences have helped to reduce the tensions in his family’s home.

“If it’s not done, he can count on a conversation taking place,” Montague said. “Parent to Parent has also helped me to identify ways he can become involved [in managing his AD/HD].”

The course has made a difference in how Montague views his son’s AD/HD and how he can best help his son. “It gives you a bet-

ter understanding of what is happening,” he continued. “It’s empowering me to feel more successful down the road as a parent.”

Studying and updating the program

Hughes pointed out that other similar parent training programs have been found to have a major impact in improving participants’ quality of life. P2P has been so successful

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that it has attracted the attention of Susan Pickett-Schenk, Ph.D., of the University of Illinois at Chicago, who will soon be studying P2P.

Pickett-Schenk has done research on other parent training programs, including a randomized clinical trial funded by the National Institute of Mental Health on the Journey of Hope, a family-education program similar to NAMI’s Family to Family program. “We are considering a similar proposal to research the effectiveness of CHADD’s Parent to Parent,” said Hughes, adding that Pickett-Schenk’s study will focus solely on P2P. “She’s a very savvy researcher on this type of program.”

In the meantime, CHADD is doing its own study with pre- and post-course evaluations by participants. Soon there will be enough evaluations to analyze the information.

One of the important aspects of P2P, according to Hughes and the program founders, is the annual review and modification of the curriculum. The newest information and most effective plans of treatment and coping skills keep the program fresh, research-based, and effective.

“CHADD and the Parent to Parent founders have a very strong commitment to update the curriculum regularly so the information remains state of the art and incorporates any new information and practices as they

come out,” said Hughes. “It gives parents a lot of information so they can better negotiate getting good healthcare for their kids. They can have informed discussions with their healthcare providers. It gives very good information about working with schools and teachers effectively to build a team of support. It instills a strong sense that their child can and will succeed.”

In addition to her role at CHADD, Hughes is also the mother of a young adult with AD/HD. She has attended many P2P courses and is intimately familiar with the content. “Every time, I personally get something out of it,” she said. “The whole feeling that you’re not alone makes such a huge impact.” 