

## AD/HD & DADS

*Editor's Note: We are pleased to bring you this excerpt from author Tom Quinn's recent book, **Grandma's Pet Wildebeest Ate My Homework**, a practical guidebook for parents and teachers of kids with AD/HD. The excerpt takes a humorous look at what it's like to be a dad dealing with AD/HD.*

*Whether you're a dad with AD/HD or a dad who has a child with AD/HD, you have your share of challenges. Let's face it, being a dad in and of itself is a challenge these days. Couple that with AD/HD and your job is even more difficult. Not to fear. Here are some helpful suggestions.*

### Dads with AD/HD

In the last decade or so, we've discovered there are a significant number of children with AD/HD whose dads also have the disorder. Most of these dads were never diagnosed in childhood because, unless they were extremely hyper and fit the old stereotype of AD/HD, no one realized they had a disorder. We didn't know enough about the condition then.

One of the more common problems a dad with AD/HD experiences is that he may inadvertently turn a blind eye to certain inappropriate behaviors displayed by his children with AD/HD, primarily because he doesn't see why these behaviors are inappropriate in the first place. He engaged in those behaviors when he was a child and still may engage in them today! Nevertheless, he really is a good man, just a little misguided.

From a behavioral symptom point of view, we see many dads with AD/HD who display a variation of the following:

forgetting to give his children their medication

spending more money than they have

having moments of obvious hyperactivity

constantly forgetting to pay the bills on time

acting impulsively

- having problems with listening
- staring out the window during counseling sessions
- experiencing frequent job changes
- having tendencies toward gambling
- partaking in risky behavior, such as driving a race car or sky diving.

Another difficulty we often see is that dads with AD/HD and their kids are so alike that they spend most of the time butting heads with each other. Case in point: "Roger," a dad with AD/HD and his son "Billy" engaged in shouting matches any time Billy acted impulsively or misbehaved. The reason: Billy's behavior was a constant reminder of Roger's own shortcomings. This, in turn, created a great deal of anger and frustration for Roger that he took out on his son.

Roger's pet peeves:

- "That kid never listens."
- "He doesn't follow through."
- "He never does his homework on time."
- "He's always late for school."

Interestingly, Roger was on probation at work after his supervisor filed the following complaints:

- Doesn't listen
- Lack of follow through
- Never turns in paperwork on time
- Always late for work.

During a recent counseling session, Roger's wife "Missy" began crying with relief when she explained that for the first time in her memory, there was no screaming or yelling in the home. Both her husband and son were now in treatment for their AD/HD, taking medication, and making significant attitude and behavior improvements. With counseling, education, and treatment, Roger was able to see not only his own AD/HD behaviors, but also why his son's were so irritating to him. As a result, his patience and tolerance increased tremendously, a benefit for the entire family.

As a father, it can be difficult to accept that sometimes you and your child share certain behavioral similarities – especially if these behaviors are negative. What's even more difficult is acknowledging that maybe your wife has been right all these years – that you really do have AD/HD.

If you suspect you might be an "AD/HD Dad," you may want to consider the following suggestions:

**Educate yourself as much as possible about the disorder.**

**Talk with a counselor who's knowledgeable about AD/HD.**

**Don't be so defensive and sensitive when you make mistakes.**

**Accept that it's not just a childhood condition.**

**Join an adult AD/HD support group sponsored by CHADD or a similar organization.**

Your average dad with AD/HD has spent a lifetime trying to compensate for living with the disorder, even though he's usually unaware that's what he's been dealing with. To suddenly discover that he may have a "disorder" can be scary and threatening, one of the reasons I advocate that counselors and significant others use a gentle approach.

At the same time, most of the dads with AD/HD I've worked with not only begin to feel relief that there really is a reason for why they act the way they do but also that they can actually do something about it.

## **Dads of Children with AD/HD**

What about those dads who don't have AD/HD but still feel a constant frustration about their kids with AD/HD? Like motherhood, fatherhood is not easy, and many dads I work with are frustrated out of their gourds by their sons and daughters with AD/HD. "Why on earth can't these kids just do what needs to be done and get on with it?" they wonder. It all seems so simple! But as we know, it's not.

We dads often use rather primitive approaches to many of life's complications, such as watching sports, pretending we know how to fix things, and just being, you know, regular dads. All we want is some peace and quiet. (And, of course, the TV remote control.) The only problem is, we have a kid with AD/HD on our hands, so we can kiss our delusion about peace and quiet goodbye, not to mention wasting half our lives searching for the remote control!

Now, some of us think all we need to do is watch even more sports and buy bigger power tools, but you know what? Those of us who have tried that know it doesn't work.

So, fellow dads, how do you handle your child with AD/HD without having to overdose on ESPN or spend every waking moment hiding out at work?

**(1) Educate yourself.** If you're unsure about how to solve a problem at work, I bet you'll do anything to find a solution. You'll talk to colleagues, bosses, read up on journals, surf the Net, and discuss it with anyone who might have the solution, right? So why not use the same principles and apply them to the situation with your child?

Talk with other dads who know about AD/HD or read everything you can about the disorder. If you don't like to read, use the audio tape versions of books on AD/HD. Or, check the Internet – but make sure you steer clear from the sports web pages and other distracting websites!

**(2) Become more involved.** We dads also have a tendency to get caught up in our work. When we come home, (naive fools that we are) we may expect to have a meaningful conversation with our kids at some point in the evening. Does this scenario sound familiar?

**You: "Hey, Bud. How was school?"**

Child: "I dunno."

**You: "Learn anything new?"**

Child: "I dunno."

**You: "You do your homework yet?"**

Child: "Uh, sure."

**You: "You want me to go over it with you?"**

Child: "Yeah, right. Whatever."

**You: "Okay. How'd you do on that test today?"**

Child: "Test? What test?"

**You: "Gee, sometimes I get the feeling you don't like talking to me."**

Child: "Whatever. Can you loan me ten bucks?"

And you wonder why you're so frustrated? We haven't even come to the part about why he was suspended this afternoon or why he received a lousy grade in every subject! The point is: asking the same questions about how he's doing in school doesn't really give you much access to his private world, the one you're increasingly excluded from. However, there is one way to increase your odds of entering the Teenage Forbidden Zone, and that's for you to increase your coolness.

In case you hadn't noticed, we dads can be pretty boring and uncool. How do you find out how cool you are? Take the Teenage Coolness Test for Dads and find out.

**(1) Who is Marilyn Manson? (HINT: HE's not a girl.)**

**(2) Who is Trent Reznor?**

- (3) Who is Jenny McCarthy?**
- (4) Why does your kid like Jenny McCarthy?**
- (5) Who is Homer? (Not the Greek guy)**
- (6) Does Smashing Pumpkins refer to Halloween?**
- (7) What is South Park?**
- (8) What happens to Kenny on every episode of South Park?**

If you can't correctly answer at least half of these questions, then you're, like, tragically uncool, dude! And I'm not giving you the answers, either. If you really want them, go ask your kid, which is my point. Find out who really influences him.

Instead of asking, "How's school" day after day, ask if he thinks Beck is cool or is just a big dork? Implying you know who Beck is will blow his mind so much he may even start talking to you!

Make sure you spend time with him, even if it's not his top priority. Find something you both might be interested in (except Jenny McCarthy – then your wife may not talk to you!)

**(3) Be a decent role model.** One of the reasons we have so many troubled kids in our society is that there aren't enough good male role models to show them about true manhood, with the exception of Mark McGwire.

McGwire demonstrates commitment, achievement, humility, and generosity. He couldn't have come at a better time, either. Until McGwire came along, I asked the kids I see at my office who their role models were, and more than half of them would say, "Huh? What do you mean?"

Most of these kids are making up the rules of what it means to be a man as they go along. As a dad, one of your main responsibilities is to be an effective role model, to show what it means to be a responsible adult male. Reclaim your role, your position as Most Important Role Model. Our parenting goals – whether we're dads of kids with AD/HD or not – need to include becoming fully involved in our kids' lives, leading the way, setting good examples, and demonstrating maturity and responsibility.

**Isn't that the true essence of Dadhood?**

**Tom Quinn is a licensed professional counselor practicing in St. Louis, MO who specializes in the treatment of AD/HD. He is the author of *Grandma's Pet Wildebeast Ate My Homework*, a practical, how-to manual for parents and teachers. An adult with AD/HD himself, Quinn draws upon his own experience, giving the reader an insider's view and providing creative behavioral management techniques along with a keen sense of humor.**

