

"I know ADHD kids need consistent routines, but what can working parents or parents with inconsistent schedules do to help their children?" one parent of an ADHD child asks.

The Experts| posted by [Linda Karanzalis, M.S.](#)

Being constant with [schedules](#), [instructions](#), and [discipline](#) as [parents to children](#) with [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder \(ADD/ADHD\)](#) is hard enough for parents who work regular hours, so I understand your dilemma, but hopefully my experiences as an adult with ADD/ADHD and as a special education teacher and ADD/ADHD coach will help.

Just because your schedule is inconsistent doesn't mean the basic [structure that ADD/ADHD children need on a daily basis](#) has to be. If you can incorporate the following routine-builders -- even at varying hours of the day or with help from a partner or another adult caregiver -- your child will benefit.

Because children sometimes have the comorbid condition of [sensory processing disorder](#), I recommend that you set up a scheduling system based on visual and tactile input. If you have non-ADD/ADHD children, they will benefit as well. Putting everyone on the same system creates a smoothly running household, and your child with ADD/ADHD will be more likely to participate if he doesn't feel singled out.

The scheduling system can be tailored to the age and needs of each child. To be effective, it needs to be simple so that you can actually maintain the schedule along with other aspects of your hectic home life.

Here is one example of a way to create a visual, tactile system to structure your ADD/ADHD child's daily schedule.

- **Decide on the activities you would like your child to do on a daily basis.** Start with [getting up in the morning](#) and [end with bedtime](#). Be sure to break down each task.
- **Adjust activities to the age of your child.** Remember, even if your child is older, children with ADD/ADHD are usually three years behind in maturity in scattered areas when compared to their peers.
- **Take photos or find pictures online to represent what your child needs to do.** Find a photo of a bed for when your child should make his or use a drawing of a toothbrush to remind your child to brush his teeth. You can also incorporate after-school activities like homework, snacks, and chores.
- **Include your child in the process of gathering pictures** to increase compliance, personal ownership, and long-term success.
- Cut pictures to the same size and laminate.

- Laminate a piece of poster board.
- Place a long piece of Velcro on the left side of the poster board and another on the right side.
- Place Velcro on the back of the pictures so they will stick to the Velcro on the poster board.
- Place pictures in order of your child's schedule.
- As each activity is completed, have your child move the picture from the left side to the right side.
- Add pictures of places you go and the people you visit to use with your schedule.
- **Put the schedule somewhere your child will see it every morning and have easy access to it.** This could be in her bedroom or on the refrigerator in the kitchen.

A consistent, structured method will allow your child to better learn how to manage time, how to pre-plan, and how to transition, which are often the root causes of [behavior problems](#). This system develops independence, creates less stress, and improves self-esteem. Instead of repeating yourself over and over, you can simply say, "Check your schedule." When your child is ready, you can add time breakdowns to the schedule.

Once your child has mastered the system, you can also add a behavior-management component. This can be accomplished by setting up a [reward system](#) based on completing tasks each day. Some examples of rewards or privileges your child may earn through good behavior are time to watch TV, surf the Internet, and listen to their favorite music. For example, if he completes all activities, he gets all privileges. If you have 10 activities on the schedule and he only completes between six and nine of them, he will receive fewer privileges.

You can also change the rewards and privileges that can be earned each day, which will offer different unpredictable opportunities for your child to work on completing tasks on his best behavior.

Linda Karanzalis, M.S., is an adult with ADD/ADHD, a learning specialist, the founder of [ADDvantages Learning Center](#), and an ADD/ADHD coach who specializes in helping both children and adults with ADD/ADHD and learning disabilities