



MENTAL HEALTH MONDAYS



Key Takeaways – April 27, 2020 | 6 p.m.

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“Calming the Storm: Virtual Learning & Staying at Home with ADHD”

It's been an adaptation for everyone. You know your child best, so you have an idea of what's going to work for your child and family. It's important to know that the strategies I suggest below may not work for every child. If you are in need of additional support for your child, please call our office to schedule an appointment to connect with a provider at (239) 343-6050.

1. **Virtual learning is challenging for most people.** Schools have been fine tuning the craft of teaching children for a long time. They have more resources and trained professionals to engage children. They have strategies and interventions in place to maximize a child's capacity to learn. They develop IEP's and 504 plans to help children with special needs. It's not realistic to expect a parent to know everything; you likely did not go to school to become an educator. Many parents may be working from home and unable to supervise. To further complicate it, children have distractions at their fingertips that they would not have at school. Schools can't compete with a video game. Distance learning is not the hands-on learning style that most ADHD children require. There are few to no external prompts. The little cues teachers use to get a kid back on track are not possible in a virtual learning situation. There is less social assimilation, where children can see what other kids are doing. ADHD children are generally not intrinsically motivated for work that requires concentration on a task that they do not find interesting. They are often not as disciplined, they are easily distracted, and because it is so difficult for them they often find it frustrating. Now, every child has been forced to a virtual learning format because of the circumstance, and some kids are more successful than others. It's important to know that you are not alone and to acknowledge that everyone is in the same situation.
2. **Figure out what works and what doesn't.** One size does not fit all. Use trial and error to figure out what motivates your child. The key with anything, especially with ADHD, is consistency and to quickly implement a reward. When you see your child do something correctly, the goal is to reinforce that behavior as quickly as possible.
3. **Reinforcement of correct behavior is a better long-term strategy than consequences for bad behavior.** Establish a reward system. For some its electronics, some its quality time, some its time outside, some it's activity. Use homework as an example. If you

complete your homework, you can play a video game. Or, consequence, if you don't complete your homework, you can't play a video game. The way we frame it has a huge impact on how the child processes it and the effort they will put towards it.

4. **Praise effort over outcome.** Since often the outcome, like grades, isn't known immediately, it's important to reinforce the good behaviors. How do you reinforce the act of doing work over the outcome? Set up short term and long-term rewards. But be cautious about how much you use electronics as a reinforcer. Attempt to find more physical activities as a reward.
5. **Be consistent so your child knows what to expect.** Establish patterns, continually try to give feedback and as much supervision as possible. The goal is to have more supervision in the beginning and then less as the child shows mastery.
6. **Time out can be an effective strategy for children.** Children with ADHD have a difficult time understanding how their behaviors affect others. Timeout is an opportunity to slow down and think about their behavior. Time-out is not meant to be a punishment.

Questions from viewers:

Q: Why is it so difficult to motivate a child to do schoolwork?

A: School was setup in order to help children be successful. When it goes to virtual, it's very difficult for parents to be on top of that. Look at how the school handles breaks. In elementary school they have frequent breaks built in to the day, because they know that children can only focus for a certain amount of time. As the child grows the breaks become less frequent. Most young children are not able to identify when they need a focus break. Parents must build in those breaks. The goal is to increase their ability to focus over time. It is important for parents to establish a baseline of what a child is capable of at this stage. If you know they can go for 10 minutes gradually try to increase it to 15. With ADHD children, that window is much shorter. Come up with small breaks that won't get them incredibly distracted but will be enough to set the reset button so that the clock starts over.

Children are much more efficient in the morning. Try to get the more difficult things done in the morning, saving the easier things for later in the day. When it comes to reinforcers, identify short-term and long-term reinforcers. Short-term reinforcers may include verbal applause or a small snack. Long-term reinforces can be to go outside, watch TV show, throw the baseball. Get them focused on what they can earn when they finish a task, i.e. they will be able to have the privilege. This often helps them stay motivated and on track.



Q: How do you manage Zoom classrooms?

A: It is difficult. The virtual learning format is not hands-on. It's tough for kids who are not particularly motivated to stay focused. Managing the Zoom environment is difficult because there isn't much self-monitoring. There aren't other kids in the classroom who are able to help keep them on track. The teacher is unable to individually address behaviors. As parents, it might make sense to sit down with your child for Zoom meetings. Maybe that's the time we carve out for close supervision because that's going to be when the information they need to complete the assignments they are given. Many teachers have reduced the length of Zoom meetings in response to seeing children getting off track.

Q: What coping mechanism do you suggest when you are absolutely done and need your child to cooperate?

A: There are a lot of different facets of this. The pandemic has caused everyone to change their style of living and the way they operate. When things are abnormal and chaotic we start to have an emotional response rather than a rational one. During these emotional times when tempers are elevated we are less likely to make sound decisions. As a parent, when things start getting crazy, our response is often to raise our voice. Be cautious. That will result in diminished returns. I encourage parents that when things are going crazy, the last thing you should do is raise your voice. It creates tension/stress in our bodies and the bodies of our children. Kids have less emotional resources to handle stress. They are going to react more, which can lead to a meltdown. My advice is to "s l o w d o w n." Try to talk more calmly. Identify what you have at your disposal. By raising our voice, we are training our children to only respond when we raise our voice. The goal is to find those reinforcers that encourage them to do things. You want to use reinforcers for after the task is complete. "Here's what you can do once you complete these things." If you make consequences you aren't going to hold to, kids will begin to call your bluff.





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About Kids' Minds Matter

The goal of Kids' Minds Matter is to raise awareness about the need for pediatric mental and behavioral health care services and to raise the funds required to make these services available in the region through Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida and Lee Health. An estimated 46,000 Southwest Florida children are impacted by mental and behavioral health disorders like anxiety, depression, eating disorders, psychosis, substance abuse, autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. As part of the region's strategic solution to the children's mental and behavioral health epidemic in Southwest Florida, Kids' Minds Matter is dedicated to fostering partnerships that support existing services, identifying and filling gaps in the continuum of care, and innovating new treatments.

Philanthropic support for Kids' Minds Matter has allowed Lee Health and Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida to: implement a tiered model of care that clinically aligns community, inpatient and outpatient care; hire additional psychiatrists, child advocates and other mental health professionals; offer Mental Health First Aid training to local pediatricians, emergency service providers and others who work directly with children; renovate an outpatient center in Fort Myers where a child's needs can be addressed in a therapeutic setting; and launch a first-of-its-kind Pediatric Digital Cognitive Behavioral Health diagnostic and treatment protocols interlaced with Tele-Psychology support to treat anxiety, depression and trauma. Most recently, Kids' Minds Matter introduced mental health care navigators into Lee and Collier County schools who will help families find resources and care to address their child's mental healthcare needs.

The "Mental Health Mondays" segments are a public forum, designed for open discussions that benefit a large audience, and to provide real-time resources and advice from pediatric mental health professionals and advocates. The information shared on this platform is intended for general public consumption and not intended for individual treatment. The views, advice, and resources shared by each guest speaker are solely their own and are not endorsed by Lee Health, Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida and Kids' Minds Matter. Kids' Minds Matter is dedicated to raising awareness and essential funding to enhance pediatric mental & behavioral health programs, services and access to care in Southwest Florida. To learn more about Kids' Minds Matter, visit [KidsMindsMatter.com](https://www.KidsMindsMatter.com).

