

# Behavior Modification Treatment for Children With ADHD

Children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) often have problems at school and difficulties with behavior at home. Behavior modification is effective at improving a child's academic performance and family relationships. Most experts recommend that a behavior modification program be a part of the treatment plan for most children with ADHD. There is no evidence that other psychological treatments, including cognitive behavioral therapy, family therapy, or conventional talk therapy, are effective for ADHD.

## What Is Behavior Modification?

Behavior modification is the use of positive reinforcement or rewards and mild punishment to shape behavior. Behavior modification targets the ABCs, modifying the *antecedents* (triggers), *behaviors* (target behaviors that cause problems), and *consequences* (responses). Adults are trained to identify problematic target behaviors, describe them in clear and simple terms, identify the setting in which they occur, and use strategies to decrease their frequency. These strategies can include preventive strategies (modifying triggers), reactive or consequence-based strategies (using rewards or punishment), or teaching the child alternate behaviors to achieve his or her goal.

## Home-Based Behavior Treatments/Parent Training

Parent training programs use a therapist to teach parents behavior modification techniques. Instruction usually occurs over 6 to 12 weeks, allowing parents to build skills over time. Individual and group training are equally effective, with the choice depending on family preference, availability, and cost. Parent training is especially helpful for parents of preschool and elementary school-aged children.

## School-Based Treatments

School-based behavioral modifications are similar to home-based treatments, but the interventions are made by teachers, peers, parents, or the students themselves.

## The Role of Combined Treatment

Stimulant medication decreases ADHD symptoms, but this does not always translate into improvements in academic achievement and peer relationships. By combining medication and behavior treatments, a lower "dosage" of each intervention can be effective. Combined treatment reduces symptoms, improves function, causes fewer side effects, and yields greater satisfaction than either treatment by itself.

Adapted from Wolraich ML, DuPaul GJ. *ADHD Diagnosis & Management: A Practical Guide for the Clinic & the Classroom*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing Co; 2010

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