

## INTRODUCTION

# **A Guiding Philosophy for Parents of Children with ADHD**

“Help me. I’m losing my child.”

**I**n 1990, I was part of the herculean effort by parents and professionals to gain access to special education services for children with ADHD. In the midst of my preoccupation with a battle waged on federal and state levels, I received one of life’s profound lessons—a lesson that shed much light on the monumental task this book encourages you to undertake on behalf of your child’s academic success.

The best clinicians say that they learn as much from their clients as their clients do from them, if only they will listen and be guided and moved by what they hear. This particular lesson was taught to me one very busy morning in my practice at our ADHD clinic several years ago, and the wise mother that offered it probably has no idea how her family’s dilemma affected me or how many subsequent families she may have helped through the change she inspired in my own professional practices. This was an experience that shook me mentally to the core. The wonderment of it lasted several days, and the lesson from it has stayed with me ever since.

The morning I was to meet this mother and her eight-year-old child, whom I’ll call Steve, was hectic even before our scheduled 9:00 A.M. appointment. I am sure I must have entered the clinic with a flurry of activity, charts,

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and papers about me, probably apologizing for running late. As I quickly scanned the chart for the demographic form and its information that we obtain routinely by mail before the appointment, I was fully expecting the usual complaints from the mother about how terribly her child and their family were doing. When I ask my typical first question—“What are you most concerned about with your child?” or “What brings you to our clinic today?”—it is a rare parent who does not immediately respond with a myriad of school-related problems; second to this is often an equally long list of all of the child’s negative and unruly behaviors at home. So conditioned are we clinicians to hear this response that we virtually hallucinate hearing this litany before parents speak it. I had, in fact, already headed my paper with “School Problems” and “Home Problems” in such anticipation.

Steve’s mother’s response was so astonishing to me, so unpredictable, that I was stunned into silence. I am sure my mouth must have hung open in surprise. For she did not say what I knew to expect: “My child is failing at school,” “My child is about to be suspended,” or “My child won’t listen to anything I say.” No, quite the contrary: What she said was “Help me. I’m losing my child.”

In shock, I must have said, “Pardon me?” She simply said it again. “Help me. I’m losing my child.” What on earth could she mean? I thought to myself. What new species of parent was this? “I see,” I said, nodding with a knowing, sympathetic glance. “You are in the midst of a custody battle with your ex-husband.”

A clinician who is caught off guard once can gloss over the fact quickly by moving on with the interview, but to be stunned twice by unexpected responses left me off balance and utterly bewildered. My only response to her “No” while trying to regain my composure was “I’m sorry, I don’t think I understand what you mean.” Clearly this was true. There was no place on my notepad for such a response.

Tears came to her eyes then, further adding to my own clumsiness and discomfort, and she proceeded to explain. “It has been going on for some time,” she said, “at least a few years. I can’t pinpoint when it started, but I sense it is happening as surely as a mother can know her own child. I am losing him; he is drifting away from me, and I may never get him back. That would be the worst thing in the world for me.”

I had no clinical hunches to guide me, so I softly asked her to go on.

“He is my first child,” she said, “and we were always very close until this all began to happen several years ago. Now I think he hates me. I know he doesn’t want to spend time with me.”

“Why do you say that?” I asked.

“Because when I come into a room, he becomes cool toward me, very clipped when I speak with him, and sometimes even sarcastic,” she replied. “If I suggest we do things together, which he used to love to do, he says ‘no’ and seems to find any excuse to avoid me. When I try to talk with him, he doesn’t look at me the way he used to do, but looks away and tries to quickly end the conversation. He is also spending more time away from home, at friends’ houses, and doesn’t bring his friends around here the way he used to do. He always seemed proud that I was his mom, until this began to happen. Now he doesn’t

even acknowledge that I exist unless he absolutely has to, and certainly doesn't introduce his new friends to me the way he used to do."

"Go on," I said, still not fully comprehending the problem or the exact nature of her grief. She then explained in detail how her relationship with her son seemed lost, ruined, and possibly even irreparable. This is what she had lost or was in the process of losing: her bond with her first child, the natural reciprocal love between parent and offspring, the foundation on which all of the rest of successful and fulfilling parenting truly depends. Oh, you can certainly raise a child without this bond—in some technical, logistical, or pragmatic sense, but not in the real sense, not in that emotional or spiritual sense of having fully brought up a child.

I have never known a parent to cut so quickly to the root issue in her life, the very crux of her own—and probably her son's—unhappiness. The loss she was describing is so deeply embedded in family life that it is rarely articulated even when it is happening. It is a loss that may be exceeded only by the real loss of a child through death. The relationship she was losing is the dynamic that truly drives all parent-child interactions and all actions by parents on behalf of their families. It has been said about death that when we lose our parents we lose our past, but to lose a child is to lose the future. How true for this woman who sensed the loss of her bond with her child. She could not see what meaningful future lay before her without the love and friendship of her child, whom she had once known so deeply.

She spoke so clearly of this change in her relationship with her child that I could not help examining, in parallel, my own relationship to my two sons. Was I losing them, as she was? What a fool I seemed to myself in the presence of this woman's profound wisdom about her life—our lives. How blind I was not to have seen in countless cases before her, in the unhappiness I had encountered in families who had come to our clinic, that this had really been the significant issue in their lives all along!

You may be reading this book because you, too, feel you are losing your child. Your child has been diagnosed as having ADHD, and you have been doing your best to help the child and the rest of your family to adjust. But it just isn't working.

Or perhaps you have not reached this stage; you know something is wrong with your child and are beginning to seek professional help. So far, however, you have more questions than answers.

Wherever you and your family stand, you are not alone. Current figures put the number of people with ADHD at over 2 million school-age children, conservatively estimated. Talk to a parent of any one of them and you're likely to hear a familiar story:

Something is clearly wrong with your child's behavior. He\* is losing precious parts of his childhood, and you feel frustrated and confused about what is causing this to happen and what to do about it. Your child is not at peace within

\*Note that throughout this book, I alternate between using masculine and feminine pronouns to describe a child with ADHD.

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the dynamics of your family. There is much daily conflict over chores, homework, relations with siblings, and behavior at school or in the neighborhood. Your child has few if any friends. The phone calls from classmates, the knocks at the door by neighborhood children, the adventures such playmates share in growing up together, and the invitations to birthday parties and sleep-overs that are daily events in most young lives are either missing or rare in your child's life. Success at school and excitement about learning—grades, certificates of achievement and citizenship, compliments from teachers—are not where they should be for your child's ability and talent, and you know it.

Valuable years and experiences of childhood are being tarnished by something you cannot see but know is there. Whatever this problem may be, it handicaps the very fabric of your child's daily interaction with others. And more painful than all of this is that you sense—as only a parent can—that your child is not at peace with himself. He is gradually becoming aware that he is not what he wants to be, cannot control as well as others what he knows he should do, cannot make himself into the child he somehow knows you wish he could be. He discourages you, dissatisfies others, and disappoints himself, and at some primitive level of awareness, he has come to know it. Perhaps you see a familiar sequence played out almost daily. The low self-esteem, the dragging through the door after school with a downcast look, the efforts to escape discussions about schoolwork, the lies to himself and others about how bad things really are, the promises to try harder next time that never quite materialize, and (for some children) the wish to be dead. You hurt; your child hurts.

What is wrong? Your child looks physically normal. Nothing outward suggests a problem. Your child is not mentally delayed. Most likely she walks, talks, hears, and sees normally, and has at least normal intellect or better. Yet with each passing year, she seems increasingly less able than other children to inhibit her behavior, manage herself, and meet the challenges the future is throwing at her. You know that if you do not do something to help soon, she is destined to lead a troubled life of underachievement as surely as today rises out of the past and the future out of today. Your desire for a normal, peaceful, loving family life with this child, your hopes for her educational and occupational success, your striving to give her a life perhaps better than you had yourself, your wish to have her stand on your shoulders to reach further ahead in life—now all these seem in jeopardy because of something you cannot quite see or understand. You are at times perplexed, puzzled, angry, sad, anxious, fearful, guilty, and helpless in the face of what afflicts your child. You seek answers and guidance.

Instinctively, you may have sensed that what you face with this child is in some way a disability of self-control or will. What constitutes our will? What makes us do what we know we should do, behave toward others as we know we ought, and complete the work that we know how to do and that must be done? More generally, what makes us self-disciplined and persistent so we can turn away from immediate gratification and meet the challenges of today to prepare for the future like others of our age? Whatever it is within us that permits us to act with self-control, to adhere to our morals and values, to “walk our talk,” and to act with a sense of the future is not developing so well in your child. Perhaps

that is what has brought you to this book. Perhaps your child has ADHD. This book can help you find out. It can also advise you on how to cope effectively if your child has the disorder.

## **The Challenge of Raising a Child with ADHD**

Raising a child with ADHD can be incredibly challenging for any parent. These children are very inattentive, impulsive or uninhibited, overactive, and demanding. Their problems can place a burden on your role as a parent that you never thought possible when you first considered having a child. These problems may even have caused you to rethink the wisdom of that decision.

In areas where any reasonable and competent parent *wishes* to be involved in child rearing, parents of a child with ADHD *must* become involved—doubly involved. They must search out schools, teachers, professionals, and other community resources. They will find themselves having to supervise, monitor, teach, organize, plan, structure, reward, punish, guide, buffer, protect, and nurture their child far more than is demanded of a typical parent. They also will have to meet more often with other adults involved in the child's daily life—school staff, pediatricians, and mental health professionals. Then there is all the intervention with neighbors, Scout leaders, coaches, and others in the community necessitated by the greater behavior problems the child is likely to have when dealing with these outsiders.

To make matters more difficult, the increased need of a child with ADHD for parental guidance, protection, advocacy, love, and nurturance can be hidden behind a facade of excessive, demanding, and at times obnoxious behavior. Margaret Flacy from Dallas, mother of two boys (now young adults) with ADHD, put it beautifully when she wrote to me: “. . . early in my career as a teacher [when] I was bemoaning my inability to cope with a particularly difficult child . . . who in hindsight was probably as [severely affected by] ADHD as they come . . . a wonderful and wise retired teacher took my hand and said, ‘Margaret, the children who need love the most will always ask for it in the most unloving ways.’”

Many parents with whom I have had the privilege to work find that the challenge of raising a child with ADHD elevates parenting to a new, higher plane. Bringing up a child with ADHD may be the hardest thing you ever have to do. Some parents succumb to the stress such a child can place on them, winding up with a child or a family in constant crisis or, worse, with a family that breaks apart over time. But if you rise to the challenge, raising a child with ADHD can provide a tremendous opportunity for self-improvement and fulfillment as a parent. You can watch your direct investment of time and energy pay off in the happiness and well-being of your child—not always, but often enough to make it richly fulfilling to many parents. To know that you are needed by such a child can bring a deeper purpose to your life than many other things can do.

The words of Margaret Flacy's mentor became the keystones for the rearing of Flacy's own sons and all the children she taught over 30 years. They also illus-

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trate the importance of centering your child-rearing philosophy on certain proven principles. If you view your parental responsibility as resting on a tripod, the first leg is the principle-centered approach. Add executive parenthood and scientific thinking, and your strategy for raising a well-adjusted child will have a firm and balanced base.

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### **Becoming a Principle-Centered Parent**

For almost three decades I have counseled hundreds of parents on the methods that seem most effective in managing children with ADHD. For the first five years of developing my clinical practice, that is all I did. Then, from both my practice and research, a feeling began to emerge that some larger, deeper principles were at work. As these became clearer, I wrote them down. They became some of the first things taught in my parent training classes on child management, and I passed them on to my junior colleagues and to others through my many workshops for professionals. The list eventually grew to the 14 principles presented in Chapter 9. They are useful because, simply, when you see the “why,” you are more likely to do the “how.” That is, you are more likely to use the special management aids your child with ADHD needs—and to apply them creatively—when you know why you’re using them and why they work.

Being principle-centered also keeps you on a straight course through a twisting, turning journey. It establishes a pattern whereby you act not on impulses, but on rules—from a sense of the future and what is right, not from the transitory feelings of the moment. It frees your behavior from control by the immediate actions of your child and the negative emotions these actions may elicit, and it directs your behavior according to your ideals. Being principle-centered allows you to disengage from the downward spiraling of hostilities with your child (or others) and to act from a plan and sense of what is right. In short, it enables you to hold yourself to higher standards of parenting than others may follow.

Being principle-centered in your interactions with your child is both liberating and encumbering. It means you have far more control over the outcome of the interaction than your child does, because you have the freedom to act to change what happens. It means you cannot blame your child entirely for the conflicts or hostilities between you, that you cannot blame professionals or others who counsel you if things go wrong between you and your child, and that you cannot divert the responsibility for your actions with your child to your past or to others who raised and taught you. Principle-centered parenting means owning the responsibility of your self-determined actions. It makes you both immensely free and awesomely accountable.

As I continued my study of ADHD and my own journey of self-improvement, I came to realize that another set of principles, which I now think of as first-order principles, applies to *all* parents. Dr. Stephen R. Covey has spelled them out far more clearly and forcefully than I could in *The Seven Habits of*

*Highly Effective People*, a book I highly recommend, but here I have rewritten them to apply to raising a child with ADHD:

1. “*Be proactive.*” Far too often we *react* to our children’s behavior, often on impulse, without regard to the consequences and with no plan for what we are trying to achieve. In those instances we are being acted on and not consciously choosing to act. Seeing a situation from a reactive frame of mind can sometimes make it seem hopeless—your destiny with your child is being controlled by the child or other outside agents. Negative interactions with your child simply wash over you unpredictably, knocking you off balance like waves when you stand backward (and unprepared) in the surf. You feel helpless, and your relationship with your child can become hostile, negative, discouraging, stressful, or dysfunctional. But it is not *what your child does* or does to you that creates these problems for you, but *your responses*. Take responsibility for your own behavior as a parent and for the interactions and relationship with your child. Take the initiative to change what you do not like in the way you act toward your child, and accept the responsibility to make this relationship happen the way you would like it to be. You have the ability to subordinate your impulses to your values, Dr. Covey says. You have the freedom to choose your actions with your child. Develop that sense of choice, practice it, and exercise it.

2. “*Begin with the end in mind.*” When faced with a problem, try to envision how you want it to turn out. You can apply this principle on a small scale, such as envisioning how you wish the evening’s homework session to turn out before you begin, or on a larger scale, such as how you would like your child to reflect on your having helped him complete an important goal, like graduating from high school. Even more broadly, you can try an exercise Dr. Covey recommends. Picture your own funeral service. Your child with ADHD has been asked to say a few words about you during the service. What would you want him to say you were like as a parent? Beginning with the end in mind helps us focus more clearly on what matters most and see what we must do to make situations turn out the way we would like. You cannot have a plan without a goal, a map without a destination, or a set of strategies to use with your child without knowing what outcome you desire. For instance, at a time when you might be prepared to get your child to work with you on putting together a science project or just doing daily homework, envision how you want this homework time to conclude. Probably, you not only want to see the work done but also want the time to end peaceably, with your relationship with your child intact and possibly enriched by this experience. Having it end with smiles or even some laughter would be great. You will notice how these images guide you in your decisions and reactions to your child. You are choosing to act to keep the interaction positive, upbeat, instructive, guiding, and even humorous. And so it is likely to be. Your relationship with your child and the manner in which smaller interactions turn out by design or by default are entirely up to you. I find that this principle is most needed in situations of potential conflict. Before acting, see the end in your mind and clarify the goal; the steps toward your goal will emerge from this process.

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3. “*Put first things first.*” What is important in your relationship with your child? What matters most in your role as a parent to this child? What are the major hurdles and responsibilities you must assist your child in overcoming or fulfilling? I have often counseled parents of children with ADHD to distinguish the battles from the wars—that is, to separate the trivial and unimportant things they must get done with their children (e.g., making a bed before school) from the far more important goals to be accomplished (being prepared for school and leaving home in a peaceful, loved atmosphere). Too often the parents of these children find themselves caught in struggles over trivial matters. Children with ADHD can do so many things wrong that parents could confront them on their transgressions throughout much of the day. But is this the kind of relationship you want with your child? Parents of children with ADHD must develop a sense of priorities.

Learn to distinguish among the four categories of work and responsibilities with your child: (a) urgent and important, (b) urgent and not important, (c) important but not urgent, and (d) not important and not urgent. As parents we are likely to accomplish category *a* and unlikely to waste much time on *d*. The hard part is distinguishing *b* from *c*. Racing around and arguing with your child to meet deadlines for less important activities (sports, clubs, music lessons, etc.) can often take precedence over more important but nonurgent things. For instance, you may well get your child to a piano lesson on time but destroy your relationship with that child in the process. On Sunday evening as you contemplate the busy week ahead, think about what is important for you and your child, and concentrate on doing these things first. Insert them into your calendar first, so they don’t get swept away by the onrush of the seemingly urgent but relatively unimportant things that you will have to attend to that week (such as returning calls to others, doing housework, preparing meals on time, getting children to bed on time, etc.). And it is not just your activities with and for your child with ADHD that require sorting out by this method. Think about your own work and obligations apart from this child. Have you overcommitted yourself to committee work, volunteer activities, babysitting for others’ children, or the like? Do you need to learn to say “no” to others who call and ask you to help with things about which you do not feel strongly?

4. “*Think win/win.*” Throughout your daily life with your child with ADHD, especially as the teenage years approach, you will have to ask your child to do schoolwork and chores, keep social commitments, and adhere to household rules. Each of these requests constitutes a negotiation. As Dr. Covey says, when you enter into a negotiation with anyone, think win/win. That is, approach the interaction with the idea that whenever possible you want both you and your child to get what you want. Don’t concentrate only on what you want the child to do; you must try to understand how difficult it may be for her to do as you ask. Do you ever find yourself simply spewing forth commands for obedience all day long? It’s certainly easy to do, but is it the kind of relationship you want with your child? Begin with the end in mind, and ask yourself how you wish to be remembered: as a tyrant or a respectful negotiator?

Say you typically have your daughter clean up her room once a week, usu-

ally on Saturday. As you approach the designated cleanup time, think about what might make this chore a winning situation for your child, not just for you. Would she enjoy some extra time on her favorite video game, the chance to rent a videotape for the evening, the opportunity to play a game with you, or the chance to earn some extra money for the week? Choose any reward you think will be appealing, and make it part of the verbal contract you make with your daughter on Saturday morning: “If you clean up your room by noon, we can spend the afternoon at the beach,” for example.

5. “*Seek first to understand, then to be understood.*” Dr. Covey uses the metaphor of an emotional bank account to convince us of the importance of this principle. It refers to the amount of trust that has been built up in a relationship with someone—in this case, your child with ADHD. By being honest, kind, and courteous and keeping your promises, you make deposits into this account. Avoiding discourtesy, disrespect, dishonesty, overreaction, threats, insults or putdowns, and betrayals of trust increases your balance with your child. Then, when it is most important that your child seek you out and follow your advice, he is likely to do so; when you most need him to understand and help you, he will be there for you.

Remember that your love for your child with ADHD is a bedrock of emotional support that he can count on because he is your child and belongs to your family. Be sure he knows that it has no strings attached—that your love is not dependent on how well he behaved that day, how well he did in school, how many friends he has, or how terrific he is at sports or other recreational pursuits.

Dr. Covey describes six types of deposits you can make into this account, but the first is the most important: (a) Understand your child’s point of view and make what is important to him important to you. Be a good listener—reflect what you think he has said in your own words, and see the situation from his point of view. (b) Attend to the little things, the small kindnesses and courtesies. (c) Keep your commitments to your child. (d) Make your expectations clear and explicit at the beginning of any task or negotiation with your child. (e) Show personal integrity; do not be two-faced or dishonest; make your behavior conform to your words. (f) Apologize sincerely to your child when you make a withdrawal from that account; that is, admit when you are wrong, have been unkind or disrespectful, have embarrassed or humiliated your child, or have failed to make the other five deposits. Only when you have really tried to see things from your child’s point of view should you seek to make yourself understood.

6. “*Synergize.*” Work with your child in creative cooperation, and strive to combine all of the foregoing principles into your interactions with your child. The combination, as Dr. Covey says, unleashes the greatest power within people, freeing us to act imaginatively with others. This means being open to whatever outcomes this creative cooperation with your child may bring forth. If you truly strive not to have everything go your way but to incorporate the other five principles into your parenting of your child with ADHD, the course and outcome of your relationship will not be entirely predictable. They will flow and change as your child grows, and you must be open to that change. Some parents will be frightened of this uncertainty, but if you come to relish the adventure,

you will be prepared for whatever may come, secure in the strength of your relationship and your trust in each other. Value the differences between your child and others, be open to new ways of solving difficulties you may face together, and remember that there is no one “right” way to raise your child. There may, in fact, be several excellent ways to work together in facing the challenges life holds for you both.

7. “*Renewal.*” This principle supports all of the others. It recognizes that you are the most important resource that you and your child with ADHD have, and that you must care for yourself to renew that resource. As Dr. Covey says, just as machinery requires downtime, effective people need rejuvenation. Dr. Covey identifies four dimensions of our lives that require renewal: physical, mental, social/emotional, and spiritual. Renewing the physical dimension of your life may mean proper nutrition, exercise, and stress management. Mental maintenance may mean reading and broadening your knowledge, continuing education, engaging in creative pursuits, visualizing and planning your goals, or writing. Socially and emotionally, you may want to be of service to others, show empathy, act synergistically with others, create a close relationship with your spouse or partner, and draw on your inner security that comes from habits 1–6. Caring for the spiritual dimension may mean continuing to clarify your values and commitments, studying your relationship to your world, and thinking about your morals and your life’s purposes.

Too often parents of children with ADHD dedicate so much of their time and energy exclusively to their children that they exhaust themselves. Such martyrdom may seem heroic and altruistic at first glance, but is actually foolish and destructive in the long run. Failing to take time to renew yourself leaves you increasingly less to give your child. Industrial machinery that is never shut down may be tremendously productive in the short run but will have a brief life, says Dr. Covey. The best gift you can give your child with ADHD is your gift of self-renewal.

If you find that you are not using many of these seven effective habits, you are hardly alone—nor are you a bad parent or a horrible person. All of us get tired, stressed, angry, and shortsighted at times, and this interferes with our ability to keep these principles in mind and to act accordingly. It is the striving toward self-improvement that matters most, and all of us can succeed at committing ourselves to that course even though we fall short of it occasionally.

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## **Becoming an Executive Parent**

Many parents of children with ADHD have told me of the shame and humiliation they have experienced at the hands of educators and professionals involved with their children. Some have described feeling lost or misunderstood or being treated like children themselves during school planning meetings. They felt that their views and opinions were dismissed as biased or naive. Their overall impres-

sion was that those involved simply wanted to reach some quick conclusion—to do what was cheap and expedient for the school system or a professional, and not what was best for a child. The outcome of such meetings is often disillusionment, dissatisfaction, and distrust in the parent–school relationship as well as a sense of loss of control over a child’s fate. In encounters with physicians and mental health specialists, parents of a child with ADHD have been dismissed as hysterical, easily stressed, or naive, especially if the child was well behaved during the appointment. Or the professionals have launched the child on a treatment program without asking about the parents’ concerns and without explaining the program’s rationale, goals, or side effects.

“The last time we had a school meeting there were six people there—his teacher, a psychologist, a social worker, someone called an LD specialist, his counselor, and the principal. I couldn’t understand most of what they said. What can I do next time to avoid feeling intimidated and make sure my son gets the help he needs?”

Meetings with *your* advisers—which is how you should view the educators and professionals involved with your child—do not have to go that way. Maintaining an attitude of executive parenting gives you the self-confidence of knowing that *you* are ultimately in charge of this meeting and of what happens to your child.

You are the *case manager* of your child’s life, and you must be a proactive executive prepared to take charge—and to keep it longer than most parents must. As you watch other parents increasingly relinquish responsibility and control to their maturing children, your child’s deficits in self-control and willpower guarantee that you will have to retain much of the management and control of her behavior. You are the child’s advocate with others in the community who control the resources you will need. You are the child’s buffer from excessive criticism and rejection.

No doubt you already know all this, but your encounters with those who are supposed to work for you and your child may have left you feeling disenfranchised and disenchanted. Being an executive parent is the way to take back that power. No matter how much help they offer, you cannot rely on professionals to take on this role for you. There are, of course, many competent and compassionate professionals available for consulting. But professionals come and go, and even when they stay put, they have other things on their agenda.

Only you are in a position to make your child a top priority. Others can provide medication, special education, counseling, tutoring, and coaching in sports, among other special services. But you are always the pivotal person who coordinates these activities, and who ultimately determines when and how much of these services your child requires and can stand at one time. You can change or terminate your child’s involvement whenever you believe it is not in your child’s best interests to continue with those services. Yes, you should listen and actively evaluate information given to you, but any professional who bullies or browbeats you into submitting your child to activities or services just because the profes-

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sional has more advanced degrees or higher education than you have should be replaced.

This theme of being an executive parent to your child with ADHD echoes throughout this book. Explicitly reminding yourself of your role as decision maker will encourage you to act more like an executive: to solicit advice and information, to ask questions of others when they are unclear, to make your feelings about your child's care in each system (the school system, the health care system, etc.) known, to help flesh out the variety of options before you, to select among them, and to give your consent to the best of these choices. Use the information in this book to empower yourself as an executive parent who takes every step with your child's best interest in mind.

The benefits can be extraordinary. Just thinking in the executive mode provides you with an inner sense of control over your fate and that of your child. It removes the sense of helplessness or second-class status that can come from allowing others to usurp your role. All of this makes you a far more effective decision maker as a parent of a child with ADHD. As a side benefit, it will also bring with it a deeper sense of respect from the professionals and specialists with whom you must deal, and of pride and respect for yourself as you strengthen your role as a parent.

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### **Becoming a Scientific Parent**

Buttressing your work as an executive parent is an approach I call *scientific parenting*. Scientists admit their uncertainty about something and then seek as much information as they can on that subject. They question everything. They remain open to new information, but also are generally skeptical toward claims not supported by facts. Finally, they experiment with new ways of doing things and revise their plans based on the results. These steps can be just as useful in being a parent of a child with ADHD as they are in discovering a cure for cancer.

#### **Admit Uncertainty**

To be a scientific parent, therefore, means to start out admitting that you (and I as well as any other professional) do not know everything there is to know about raising your child with ADHD. When you face a new problem with your child, remember that it is when you are most certain about something that you are most likely to be wrong. Many parents become so wedded to an idea about the cause or treatment of their child's ADHD that they are blinded to other potentially useful information.

#### **Seek Knowledge**

Admitting that you don't know something naturally leads to the second thing that good scientists do—seek knowledge. So should you. Be voracious about it.

You need to learn as much as you can about ADHD and the treatments that may help your child. You cannot be an executive or a scientific parent without the facts. Before scientists study a problem, they conduct a search of the available literature on the topic. Even if they don't find the answer to their questions, they can discover what mistakes others have made and thus avoid repeating them. But they are also likely to find information that points them in a better direction than they might have taken originally. You must do the same. Read! Listen! Seek! Question! Find out as much as you can, reasonably, about your child's disorder. You have started this process just by reading this book. Like a scientist, the more you know about ADHD as a parent, the less likely you are to fall prey to the past mistakes of others and the better prepared you will be to discover the right direction to take with your child.

### **Evaluate Information Critically**

A good scientist remains open to new ideas but challenges those ideas, subjecting them to experiments before accepting them as part of the body of scientific findings on the topic. So whatever you discover, be open-minded about it and entertain the value of the information to your research, but question everything. Be prepared to abandon any theory or hypothesis that does not stand up to critical scrutiny.

Be an especially critical consumer of new information on ADHD. Do not accept everything you hear or read. Be open to an idea, but challenge it, test it, criticize it. Ask others what they think about it. If the new information can stand up to this kind of logical inspection, maybe it is true and can be of help to you in understanding and raising your child with ADHD. But always ask for the evidence that supports a new idea, especially if it disagrees with information you already have.

Call national parent support groups like Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder (CHADD) or the Attention Deficit Disorders Association (ADDA)—addresses and phone numbers are at the back of this book—to see what they know about this new concept. Talk with local professionals about their opinions on the subject. Ask the people promoting a new treatment for any copies of published research articles that support their claims. This can keep you from leaping into an unproven treatment that may be a waste of your time and money or may even be detrimental to your child.

If you are among the many families with home Internet access, you might consider going on-line to get more information about ADHD, but be very cautious about what you find. A search is likely to produce a list of hundreds of Web sites, many of them commercially oriented. This means that, along with information and advice, these sites have products to sell. In my experience, the information offered is not especially accurate, can be heavily biased, and typically progresses into sales pitches for proprietary products, many of which represent unproven “alternative” therapies. The best, most informative, and most helpful sites I have seen were created by professional organizations or nonprofit groups

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that are devoted to advocating for children with ADHD and have nothing to sell. I have listed these sites at the back of this book.

Also be particularly critical of opinions expressed about ADHD. In the 10 years since the original edition of this book was published, the popular media and various special-interest groups have made false and misleading claims about the legitimacy of ADHD as a disorder, about the rate of diagnosis, about its causes, and about the medications used to treat it. Despite the fact that these claims lack the support of scientific fact, they have become widespread and are passed along as if backed by valid research. Objective, fact-based discussions of these issues are presented throughout this revised edition, particularly in Chapters 1–4, 8, and 18.

One point that will be made frequently throughout this book is that truth is an assembled entity. It comes from no single source, text, or person, but emerges as we acquire more and more information about a subject.

### **Experiment and Revise**

The logical next step is experimentation. This means trying new ways of parenting or managing your child's behavior, including some of the methods recommended later in this book, when the old ways just don't seem to be working. Use the results of your experiments to revise your thinking about the problem and to chart the course for your next experiment on the problem. Indeed, experimenting and revising are never-ending processes for parents of a child with ADHD.

When an experiment fails, do not be discouraged. Use what you have learned to try solving the problem a different way. This time, what you do might just help your child. Above all, keep trying. Never conclude that the failure of a particular plan means you are a bad parent. As you go back to the drawing board, reassure yourself that you are doing the best you can as this child's executive parent to develop plans that may help.

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### **What You'll Find in This Book**

The ultimate purpose of this volume is, therefore, to empower you—to help you become a scientific, principle-centered, executive parent who is as effective as possible in meeting the many challenges involved in raising any child with this disorder. In the following chapters you'll find the most up-to-date information available, as well as guidelines for finding the ever-emerging new resources that can keep you informed as our knowledge of the subject evolves. You'll find advice for taking care of your child, preserving your family, and protecting your own health and welfare in the process. Throughout the book I'll remind you of those fundamental truths that thousands of parents have helped me to see—the principles that can keep you on a steady course in your daily effort to raise a happy, healthy child, and keep you from veering off into a downward spiral of knee-jerk reactions, frustration, and resentment.

The book is divided into four major sections. Part I tells you what the latest research has revealed: what ADHD is, what causes it (and, just as important, what doesn't cause it), and what all of this tells us about how to treat it. Integral to this discussion is my recently formed theory that ADHD is more than just a deficiency in attention and impulse control. Rather, I believe it is a fundamental deficiency in the ability to look toward the future and to control one's behavior based on that foresight. You'll also learn in this section about what features and problems you can expect to encounter as a child with ADHD grows, and how ADHD in children typically affects their families. With this knowledge in hand, you should be well equipped to pursue your responsibilities as a scientific parent.

Part II prepares you to become an effective executive parent, beginning with your child's evaluation for ADHD by a professional. Knowing what to expect and what resources may be at your disposal will help you take charge of your child's destiny from the start. Here you will also find my 14 principles for managing children with ADHD. Use these to supplement the more general habits of effective parenting discussed here, and you will have a solid framework for meeting a wealth of everyday challenges that ADHD in the family can present. Because all smart executives take care of themselves as well as their job responsibilities, Part II also attends to *your* needs, telling you how to cope with the natural emotional reactions to your child's diagnosis of ADHD and how to renew yourself throughout your years in this demanding role.

In Part III, you will find full descriptions of the most effective methods for managing ADHD symptoms and associated problems with your child, whether a preschooler or an adolescent. Here are dozens of proven techniques designed to acknowledge and work with your child's disabilities rather than to deny and struggle futilely against them. Maximally applied, these methods can restore harmony to your home; help your child fit in with peers, improve achievement at school, and enhance the all-important self-esteem that goes with these things; and generally improve behavior to set your child on the road to well-adjusted adulthood. I cannot and will not promise miracles, but you will undoubtedly be surprised by how much you and your child can accomplish together with perseverance—and understanding.

Finally, Part IV provides current information on the medications that are often recommended for helping to manage the symptoms of ADHD.