5 Things everyone needs to know about helping young people with ADHD by Kate Horstmann

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Sometimes it is hard to know where to start when supporting young people with complex needs, including those who have Attention Deficit Disorders. When my colleague Jo Steer, a Clinical Psychologist, and I sat down together to reflect on our years of working with young people, and their families and schools, we realized that all our â€˜success storiesâ€™ had a few common themes. Those times when things worked best, we had dealt with the complexity by providing support from multiple directions. They were also the times when we took the â€˜onusâ€™ of making changes from the shoulders of young person and shared the responsibility for success between all of those on board â€“ teachers, parents, professionals AND the young person.

The 5 â€˜secret successâ€™ elements we identified will not surprise you, and in fact many people use these strategies every day. However we found that once we put them down in writing, they helped us to create a format for designing our support packages. When working with families and schools, we now make sure that we had at least one action point in each of these areas.

Understanding is the key: Providing support to young people is all about forming positive relationships, and relationships will struggle without understanding. It is important that adults learn about ADHD and also how it impacts on the young person as an individual.

Adapt the environment: ADD/ ADHD impacts on many areas of function, and often creates a very real disability for a young person. Changes to expectations and support need to be made in order to enable engagement, participation and learning. There are many effective ways to structure the environment and tasks in order to provide scaffolding and maximize performance.

Teach skills: Sometimes we get stuck dealing with problems and crises and overlook opportunities to teach skills that can make a real difference in day to day life. Skills can also enhance self-esteem and protect against the experiences of repeated â€˜failureâ€™ that are unfortunately all too common for kids with ADHD.

Make the young person an active partner: The direct involvement and participation of the young person is often what leads to real and sustained progress. This is particularly essential during the teenage years and ensures that individuals learn life-long skills in helping themselves.

Consider changes to the system: Strategies that work well for kids with ADD/ ADHD often work really well for all young people, and therefore implementing changes across the family, school or sports club is very likely to have benefits for all!

In upcoming Articles I will share some more strategies as we look at each of these 5 areas in a little more detail.

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Kate Horstmann - About Author:
Kate Horstmann is an occupational therapist working in the Evolve Behavior Support Team, Disability Services Queensland, Australia. She has over ten years' experience of working with children and adolescents with a range of difficulties including a Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, a autism and developmental disorders.

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