

## **Best After-School Activities for Children with ADHD**

### **Karate or Tae Kwon Do**

These activities require intense mental and physical involvement so they tap into your child's need to immerse him/herself in an activity. They also provide positive role models, clear directions and rules, and peer interaction.

### **Scouting**

Scouting is perhaps one of the best activities currently available for boys and girls with ADHD. Scouting includes many of the elements that can help your child to focus, including lots of physical stimulation, highly structured activities that make use of various learning styles, consistent peer interaction, close adult supervision, competition, and, most of all, fun. To *really* make scouting effective, consider becoming active in the troop and helping the scout leader get training in how to work with children who have ADHD.

### **Team Sports**

Baseball, basketball, football, soccer - nearly any team sport that's highly physical and requires total involvement can be a good choice for your child. Team sports offer him/her a chance to learn social skills and be around peer models, but make sure s/he finds a sport s/he's really interested in because learning the rules, taking turns, and cooperating with other kids can be difficult.

### **Drama Clubs or Acting**

Being able to act out different characters and scenes is a terrific outlet for a child with ADHD.

### **Model Building, Carving, Woodworking, or Mechanical Activities**

Children with ADHD often love to solve problems or puzzles. Building models or making things out of wood or metal will help your child learn how to turn his/her ideas into concrete reality. Successfully completing a project where s/he has something solid and visible to show for it can be extremely rewarding to your child.

### **Swimming**

Swimming requires physical effort and concentration, plus it's fun.

### **Art Classes or Music**

Art and music are two great ways to help your child express him/herself. Just remember that it's not about how well s/he draws, sings, or plays an instrument; the most important thing is that s/he gets a chance to say something about him/herself.

## **Worst After-School Activities for Children with ADHD**

### **Excessive Television**

Current medical studies show that viewing a lot of violence and advertisements on television can hurt a child with ADHD. These children are ill-equipped to choose which messages to pay attention to. Also, watching TV is a passive, isolated activity that takes time away from developing important learning skills and social interactions, and from the physical exercise that children need to grow into healthy adults.

### **Video Games**

Research shows that these games reduce baseline brain activity in children with ADHD, causing them to continue to seek the reward of doing well in the game to compensate for the diminished dopamine levels in their brains that give them a sense of well-being. This is why some children with ADHD become addicted to video games and have trouble turning them off.

### **Games with Long Waiting Periods**

Any game or activity that involves long periods of inactivity, or a long sequence of steps to complete, can be tough for children with ADHD who just don't have the patience necessary to succeed at these games. Common examples include standing in long lines at amusement parks, complex card and board games, or physically demanding games where your child is on one of many teams who must wait long periods of time before starting to play. If your child wants to play a game that involves waiting in line or sitting patiently for long stretches, have snacks and small items that s/he can fidget with (a ball or toy) available, and be prepared to play a talking game or tell a story.

## **What to Think about when Choosing Activities for your Child**

The best after-school activities for a child with ADHD make good use of his/her time, teach essential life skills, are educational, use surplus energy, are fun, and make him/her feel good about him/herself. Activities that are interesting to children with ADHD tend to have the following characteristics. Understanding these concepts will help you pick activities that are fun and beneficial for your child:

### **Novelty**

Children with ADHD constantly crave novelty. Everything they see and hear seems equally valuable and deserves the same amount of attention. These children have difficulty isolating single events from all the others in their environment. Many try to compensate for this barrage of stimulation by focusing on the loudest, most exciting, or most novel event. For instance, if you watch an ADHD child channel surf, s/he'll stop only for the next gunshot, explosion or attention-grabbing commercial. Activities that are fast-paced or very stimulating are usually best.

### **Immersion**

Children with ADHD tend to think ahistorically, meaning they have a poor sense of past and future and primarily focus on the here and now. For instance, if your child had a great week at school but had a problem ten minutes ago, s/he'll focus on the problem and the bad feelings associated with it

and may be unable to remember the successful week s/he's had. Conversely, if his/her week was filled with frustrations and failures yet ended with a success, your child will focus on the good feelings, making it difficult for him/her to learn from his/her mistakes. So the best activities are ones that require or allow for your child's complete physical and mental immersion. The more intense the activity, the better your child's chance of sustaining the attention necessary to complete the activity.

### **Reward**

Many experts believe that children with ADHD experience Reward Deficiency Syndrome. This is because they don't produce enough of the neurotransmitter dopamine, which works to satisfy a person's natural need to feel safe and rewarded. Without enough dopamine, these children may feel more driven than other children to obtain recognition, praise and reward. Activities that provide frequent praise and short-term recognition in the form of awards or healthy treats tend to be the most gratifying for them.

### **Peer Modeling**

Gaining acceptance and a sense of belonging are powerful motivators for children with ADHD. If your child has a history of getting into trouble and has made few friends, s/he may start to believe that maintaining friendships is impossible. Children learn to get along with their peers by watching each other and seeing how to look, talk, and act. If your child has no peer role models, s/he may become isolated and withdrawn. Team and group activities can help build your child's self-esteem and social development.

### **Adult Support**

Children with ADHD are often clumsy and may have trouble verbalizing their thoughts, controlling anger or moods, reading and following directions and behaving appropriately. This can keep them out of many activities. As a way to cover up for these problems they may isolate themselves, refuse to play or have angry outbursts. One way around this is to have a knowledgeable adult nearby who can offer support and positive encouragement. Choose activities overseen by someone who can praise and support your child, and provide him/her with the reassurance s/he needs to face new challenges.

### **Physical Activity**

A hyperactive child feels driven to keep some part of his/her body moving all the time, so let him/her do it! Physical activities are essential to your child's well being and also help his/her brain "normalize" in a way that allows him/her to focus, remain calm and stay on task.

### **Fun**

Children with ADHD will usually need more time completing homework and household tasks than non-ADHD children; they may even feel like they need to work all the time just to keep up while other kids get to have fun. But it's important for their happiness and well being to have a balance of work and fun in their lives. Don't make the mistake of denying your child fun activities until his/her work is done. Sign him/her up for a weekly class or activity and make having some fun a priority in his/her life.