

## Fathers and ADHD Treatment

From [Keath Low](#),  
Your Guide to [ADD / ADHD](#).  
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Fathers can be an important part of the treatment process for children with ADHD. One About.com user wrote in to encourage dads to be involved. "A dad's influence is enormous," she writes. "As for my husband, I wish he'd realize that he has the ability to help our son just as much as I do. He feels helpless and maybe a little ignorant, I think, and it stymies him from taking an active role in dealing with the ADHD and helping our son to deal with it."

### Why Does This Occur?

[Gregory A. Fabiano, PhD](#), Assistant Professor of Counseling, School, and Educational Psychology at the [University at Buffalo](#), says that fathers overall tend to be less actively involved in formal parenting programs for children with ADHD.

Recent research has suggested that fathers may be less likely to connect behavioral issues to parenting strategies. Parenting an ADHD child can be difficult, exhausting, and frustrating, so parent education and behavioral strategies are an important part of treatment. According to Dr. Fabiano, mothers appear to be more aware of the contribution their approach to parenting may have on a child's behavior, and because of this, more likely to participate in a program that targets parenting.

"Another reason for a lack of father involvement relates to the typical topics covered in parenting classes - interfacing with the school, getting the child ready for school/bed, and monitoring self-care skills," says Dr. Fabiano. Research has shown that, in general, mothers are primarily responsible for these activities, and programs that focus solely on these activities may be less relevant for fathers. "Thus, in some cases, the traditional approach to working with parents of children with ADHD may be more engaging for mothers rather than fathers."

### Getting Fathers More Actively Involved

Dr. Fabiano notes that fathers positively involved with their children tend to have children with fewer mother-reported behavior problems and that fathers also contribute uniquely to their child's academic achievement and academic sense of competence.

"Fathers are also highly likely to be responsible for the child's behavior during recreational activities when peer interactions are emphasized," explains Dr. Fabiano. "Many children with ADHD struggle to initiate and maintain appropriate peer relationships, and it is important to work with fathers to help them support the child in these settings."

To engage fathers, Dr. Fabiano works to make the first treatment session non-threatening and encourages dads to share their point of view. "It is typical that moms and dads have different views on parenting and on their child's behavior, and it is often helpful for a clinician to point out this is normal and to suggest how it could contribute to some of their different opinions regarding treatment. There will also typically be some areas where the parents agree treatment is needed, and these are good areas to begin treatment."

"Even if they are not interested in attending treatment, I think dads can be positively involved by simply supporting the mother's efforts," explains Dr. Fabiano. It is important that the door to participation in treatment

be kept open, even if dads are not participating initially. Maintaining a positive and consistent approach to discipline at home is essential, as is becoming more educated and aware of how ADHD impacts their child's daily activities and interactions.

## The COACHES Program

The **Coaching Our Acting Out Children: Heightening Essential Skills** (COACHES) program is a parenting program designed specifically for fathers of children with ADHD. The program is modeled to be similar to a community little league.

In the COACHES program, fathers and children attend for eight weeks. During the first hour of the program, fathers attend a group parent management training meeting and the children work on soccer-related skills in drill activities.

During the second hour, the dads and children join for a soccer game. The fathers help manage the game, but also use it as a venue to practice the parenting skills introduced during the class. Dr. Fabiano provides an example.

Fathers may be introduced to the parenting skill of using labeled praise ("I like the way you followed through with what I asked you to do," or "Great attitude about playing as the goalie this quarter"), and then each quarter of the game have an "assignment" to practice the skill within the context of the sport. After the game, fathers are asked to share the skill with any other caretakers at home, and to continue to implement it in the home setting.

The COACHES program is currently being investigated in a series of studies funded by the [National Institute of Mental Health](#).

Click on the following link to read more: [Getting Fathers Involved in Children's ADHD Treatment Programs](#)

Source:

Gregory A. Fabiano, PhD. Personal interview/correspondence. 04 March 08 and 14 March 08.

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