

# The Real Whirled: 8 Essential Life Skills for ADHD Teens

Every age is an adventure with ADHD, but teens and young adults aged 16 - 24 are facing a particularly big challenge in managing and fitting in to the real world. Read these tips for managing the transition from teen to twenty-something.

*by the editors of ADDitude*

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## When Bad -- or Good -- Habits Take Root

One of the most important phases in an ADHD young adult's life happens between the ages of 16 and 24. It's when you're establishing your character, career path, substance-use patterns, relationships, and independence -- all while battling an onslaught of hormones. While you're never too young or too old to fight bad habits, it's easier to avoid them altogether during your teens and twenties. Of course, that takes deliberate planning -- maybe not one of your strong points.

## 3 Types of Young Adult ADHD

There are three main character types found in young adults with ADHD — each with its own benefits and challenges:

- Optimistic
- Terrified
- Lost

What's true for all three: Anxiety and productivity (which have a curvilinear relationship) are out of whack. Too much or too little anxiety, for example, will hamper your productivity and ability to function. You need to worry just the right amount, and many ADD teens don't know how.

### Optimists

Optimistic young adults with ADHD do not experience enough anxiety or worry.

They just want to get out there, parent free, and live their life. Independence is great, but problems arise when they have unrealistic expectations about finances and responsibilities. They're very excited about freedom and what they don't fully understand is that freedom isn't free; it's really kind of expensive.

### Terrified Teens

Terrified teens suffer so much anxiety that they become paralyzed and unproductive. They wonder, even as young as age 12, how they'll succeed or get into college if they perform badly on one test. These ADHD young adults, need to feel reassured and comforted; they need to know that if they follow a logical plan with predictable steps, they will pass the 7th grade and move on to the next challenge in due time.

### Lost Ones

Lost ADHD teens don't have necessarily have anxiety, but they also don't have energy or a positive view on life. They might easily shut down when they feel depressed or defeated. Parents often struggle with telling them to buck up or comforting them out of their rut. The best strategy is to gently, repeatedly remind them what needs to be done and tell them you believe they can do it.

## The Solution is Hope

Hope has two parts: The way (or the plan to reach a goal) and the will (the belief in yourself to get there). Young adults with ADHD just need a slightly different plan than do their neurotypical peers. Remaining hopeful while

setting realistic goals and prioritizing ways to get there -- these are all exceedingly difficult tasks for ADHD teens. The following strategies will help, if you make them your mantra.

## The Case for Peer Mentors

A peer mentor can help young ADHDers figure out what success looks like. Mentors can listen to your ideas and let you know if they're valid or need realistic refinement. Mentors are great at delivering this message because they have your teen's best interests at heart, they're benevolent, and your teen learns to trust that they are seeing things around the corner they haven't glimpsed yet.

## Evaluating Goals

Once you have a goal in mind, the next step is assessing whether it's attainable: "Is this going to work?" For example, if a student is just graduating and wants to move to a big city, he should be able to answer the questions, "What kind of job do you need to afford it?" "Can you wait until graduation to start earning money, or do you need to get a job now?" Mentors can help suss out these answers.

## Cost/Benefit Analysis

Make a list of pros and cons and then give each a numerical weight. If you're talking about college, living in the dorm might have a cost of -4, while the meeting new people might get it a +5. Breathing room from parents can be a high +, but not being able to study surrounded by people should earn negative points. Once you lay it all out, the numbers will add up in one direction or the other. They rarely lie.

## Make Authentic Choices

To be authentic, choices must be made against a valid counter-choice. For example, young adults shouldn't choose college because their parents say so. To feel in control, they should sit down, look at all of the reasonable options, and then decide Yes or No to each.

## Don't Just Try

Yoda said it best when he said, "Do or do not, there is no try." When you eliminate "trying" or "wanting" and replace it with actions, you get a lot more done and make better decisions. It's easier to decide on next steps when you're thinking, "I will do it," or "I won't do it."

## Know Your Limits

Young adults with ADHD should be extra careful not to take on too many things – hours at work, courses at college, party invitations or video game time. Too much is too much — even if everything is a positive choice. When you know your limits, you can start to push them (a little at first), to see if you can achieve more than you first thought possible. The key is not pushing so far that you can't do anything at all.

## Pace Yourself

Many of us struggle with learning how to schedule down-time without losing sight of the final goal. When you take a break, do something that has a limited time span, like reading 5 pages in a book before you get back to work. Don't fall down the hole of video games. Or, try setting short-term objectives, like getting out of bed on time, and meet that every day. If you climb out from under the covers when your alarm goes off, reward yourself and build from there.

## Share Successes

Whenever you have a small victory, make sure to sit down and take note. You deserve it! Take a picture, tweet about it to your friends. Make sure to sing your own praises because it's not a small task you've accomplished. Make sure you celebrate it, commemorate it, so it will drive you on to your next success.

## Additional Questions?

For more information on young adults and ADHD, read the following resources:

- ADHD in Young Adults: Transitioning to Adulthood
- Stop Negative Thinking
- Find Your Place in the World
- Tips for Reaching Goals
- Get an ADHD Coach
- Advice from Young Survivors
- Define Your Own Success
- Is College the Right Choice?

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