

Dr. Hallowell's 8 Step Strength-based Approach to Treating Adult ADHD

Dr. Edward M. Hallowell, practicing child and adult psychiatrist, founder of the Hallowell Center, and former instructor at Harvard Medical School, goal is to help people master the power of ADHD while avoiding its pitfalls. Whether for children or adolescents, the treatment of ADHD should be comprehensive and include a wide range of possible interventions provided over the long-term. The following eight-step plan for treating adults and children and with ADHD, will show you how to find the buried treasure by approaching ADHD as a gift that is often difficult to unwrap. Each step need not be implemented, but each should be considered:

1. **Diagnosis**, which should include identification of talents and strengths.
2. **Implementation of a five-step plan** that promotes talents and strengths: Connect, Play, Practice, Mastery and Recognition.

Connect Connectedness is the first—and most important—step. Creating a connected life takes time and maintenance. But a balanced well connected life leads to a kind of joy that hard times cannot easily strike down. The connected individual, of any age, feels safe and secure enough to go to step 2, which is Play.

Play When you play, your brain lights up. This is where you could find joy for the rest of your life, so take note when it happens. You will not be able to play at everything you do. But when you do find an activity you can play at, an activity where your brain lights up, you have found gold. The best way to mine the gold in the ADHD brain—or in any brain—is to play.

Practice Once you find an activity in which you can play, you want to do it over and over. This is called practice. Practice that emerges out of play is practice you want to do. You can feel enthusiastic about encouraging practice and discipline if you understand and believe one basic fact: practice and discipline build the bridge between play and mastery.

Mastery: The Great Motivator From practice comes mastery. The feeling of mastery and the wish to experience it again is the key to self-esteem and confidence, as well as motivation.

Recognition: Although mastery is its own reward, another crucial element reinforces mastery while also leading onto a wider feeling of connectedness. That element is Recognition, the feeling of being valued by others, especially others whose opinions the person respects.

The five steps constitute a cycle, one step naturally leading to the next. Once started, it can continue for a lifetime, like a giant flywheel of joy, feeding off its own momentum.

3. **Education about ADHD. Learn what ADHD is, and what it is not.** A diagnosis of the mind, like ADHD, must be fully understood if it is to be mastered and made good use of. At its best, ADHD can become an asset, rather than a liability, in a person's life. But, for this to happen, the person has to develop a deep appreciation for how ADHD works within him or her.
4. **Changes in lifestyle** that promote a healthier mental and physical life: Sleep, Diet, Exercise, Prayer or Meditation and Positive Human Contact
5. **Structures and other non-medical interventions** that augment your lifestyle and needs.
6. **Counseling** of some kind, such as coaching, psychotherapy, career counseling, couples therapy, family therapy.
7. **Various other therapies** that can augment the effectiveness of medication or replace the use of medication altogether, such as an exercise program that stimulates the cerebellum, targeted tutoring, physical exercise, or nutritional or occupational therapy
8. Medication (only if desired)

Adapted from *Delivered from Distraction*, Edward M. Hallowell, M.D., John J. Ratey, M.D., Ballantine, 2005