

The Bell Rings. Is Your Child Ready?

Dr. James Anderson

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(NAPS)—Back-to-school is an incredibly important moment to get ADHD treatment right.

Every August, I watch the same thing happen. A family walks into my office, and someone describes a version of the same story. The mornings that spiral before 8 a.m. The homework that takes three hours every afternoon, ending in tears. The teacher who pulls a parent aside in the first week to say, “I’m a little worried.”

And the parent, exhausted and quietly heartbroken, says something I will never stop taking seriously: “I don’t know where my kid went.”



Dr. Anderson

I have been practicing for 30 years, and I have seen what ADHD looks like when it is well-managed and what it looks like when it is not. And I can tell you with certainty back-to-school season is not just a scheduling challenge. The demands of structure, sustained focus, and social navigation hit all at once and whatever gap exists between a child’s needs and their treatment gets exposed fast.

ADHD does not live in my office

Here is something I think is worth saying aloud: I see your child for thirty to forty-five minutes, every three months. I am not there when the alarm goes off and they cannot transition out of sleep, when they have lost their backpack for the third time this week or when the lesson has moved on, but their attention has not. I am not watching them experience the isolation that comes when their classroom seat is repeatedly moved to keep



them from distracting others. I am not there at 3:30 p.m. when the school day ends and they still have hours of homework ahead, that often includes assignments not completed in class.

That is where ADHD lives. In the friction of daily life, all day, every day.

And that matters enormously when we talk about treatment because the question shouldn’t only be “does this child have ADHD?”. The question should be “at what moments in this child’s day are they struggling most, and are we actually helping them through those moments?”

Mornings set the tone of the day

I do not think parents always hear this clearly enough. The morning routine for a child with ADHD is genuinely hard. It is not defiance. It is not laziness. The executive function demands of getting up, getting dressed, eating, remembering what they need, and walking out the door on time can be overwhelming. The feeling does not just impact the child with ADHD, the entire family feels the spiral, the chaos, and the daily effort to get out the door. The arguments and the frustration fill the air of these homes, and the day feels lost before it begins.

What I have learned to ask parents

is not just “how is your child doing at school?” I ask them, “What does 7 a.m. look like?” Because if every morning is a battle, that is a sign that we need to think more carefully about the timing and duration of how we are treating this child.

The right medication, timed appropriately, should ideally be helping your child before the first challenge of the day arrives. If your child’s morning looks like a daily emergency, it is worth having that conversation with your prescribing physician.

What I ask of every family this time of year

As you head into a new school year, I want you to think about your child’s entire day, not just their report card. Think about the moments of friction. Write them down if you can. When does your child struggle most? What time of day? What kind of task? Is the morning worse than the afternoon, or the reverse?

Bring that information to your child’s doctor. Advocate for a treatment approach that matches the actual shape of your child’s day.

The bell is about to ring. Let’s make sure your child is ready when it does.

Learn more at www.SchoolStartsBeforeTheBell.com.