

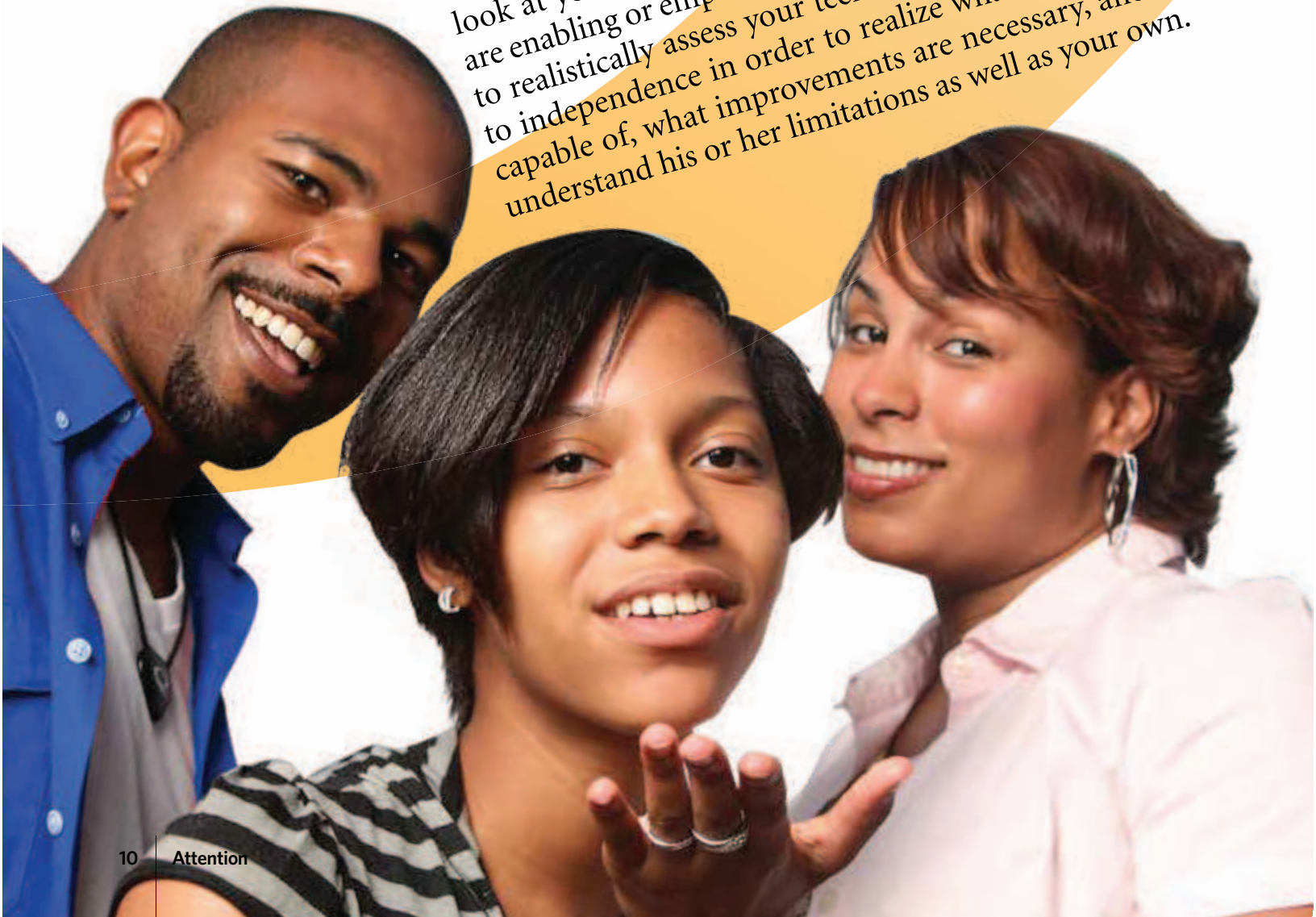
# Successfully Launching

Your Teen or Young Adult with  
ADHD into the World

By Patricia O. Quinn, MD

**THE FIRST STEP IN SUCCESSFULLY LAUNCHING**  
**YOUR TEEN** or young adult with ADHD is to take a

look at your own parenting and decide whether you are enabling or empowering your teen. You'll also need to realistically assess your teen's progress on the road to independence in order to realize what he or she is capable of, what improvements are necessary, and to understand his or her limitations as well as your own.



Preparing your teen for success will take time, persistence, and effort. In most cases it will not happen automatically, especially if ADHD is part of the picture. If you are ready to discover more about yourself, and to assume a more positive, solution-oriented approach to parenting that will allow you to empower your teen or young adult, and contribute to successfully launching them into the world, then read on.

### Failure to launch

At least three times a month, I receive a call from a desperate mother seeking an appointment for her son or daughter with ADHD. Not a particularly unusual request, until I ask the child's age and this mother reveals that her child is in his late twenties, thirties, or even forties, still struggling with ADHD, and usually living at home.

While many adult children have had to move back into their family homes for economic reasons, the failure of young adults with ADHD to successfully make their way in the world is all too common. It is usually the result of a failure to gain self-knowledge and an understanding and acceptance of ADHD, as well as a lack of the skills necessary to live independently.

### Parenting roles

When a child is diagnosed with ADHD, parents may often take on one of the roles that Dr. Theresa Maitland and I outlined in our book, *On Your Own: A*

*College Readiness Guide for Teens with ADHD/LD* (Magination Press, 2011). These roles include Parent Warriors, Parent Directors, and Parent Repairmen. Does one of these roles seem familiar to you?

- **Parent warriors** are on a mission to fight for their child with ADHD. Like the medieval knight in shining armor, they participate in every battle that needs to be fought to ensure that their child is understood, treated fairly, and given all the services and opportunities necessary for success. While we fully appreciate that without parent warriors, many young adults would never even be able to dream of attending college, the downside of this parenting pattern is that with parent warriors doing much of the fighting, the young adult may have missed out on the opportunity to learn to self-advocate and to handle the challenges that will be part of life after high school.

- **Parent directors** are naturals at noticing small problems, reading warning signs, taking charge, and problemsolving. Oftentimes, without being asked for help, they take responsibility for directing any challenges that crosses their radar screen. If you are a parent director, you may have fallen into a pattern of directing and telling your child how to get a difficult project done, clean their room, or handle a conflict with a friend. You might even quickly pitch in to help. As a result your child may not have developed problem-solving skills and learned how to direct him- or herself.

- Instead of fighting battles or warding off problems, some mothers or fathers act more like **parent repairmen**—fixing problems that happen as a result of their child's attention and self-management challenges.

These parents have a tendency to repair time-management issues or other common problems, like missing or late homework assignments, by always asking if homework is done, checking on progress on long-term assignments, and forcing their teens to work in the dining room or a non-distracting area when they are "caught" off-task during mandated homework hours. Repairmen don't step in as early as the warriors or directors; instead, they step in to fix problems once they happen. For example, rather than fighting for test-taking accommodations, they fix low grades by talking to teachers and arranging re-takes for tests. Or, instead of checking on progress and directing projects, they call a teacher when it's clear the project or paper won't get done and arrange an extension. By always double-checking, these parents prevent their teens from learning how to manage on their own—from waking up in the morning to getting to bed each night. Often, it's not until their teens are on their own or in college that everyone realizes the host of little things that these parents did daily that allowed their teens to be successful are now the cause of a failure to launch.

As a result of these roles and relationships, parents often have more knowledge of ADHD and how it affects their child, and the child lacks the skills to function and eventually live on his or her own. Be assured that, despite these past behaviors, teens with ADHD can be successfully launched into college or a career. Their success, however,

depends to a large degree on both their preparation and their self-determination.

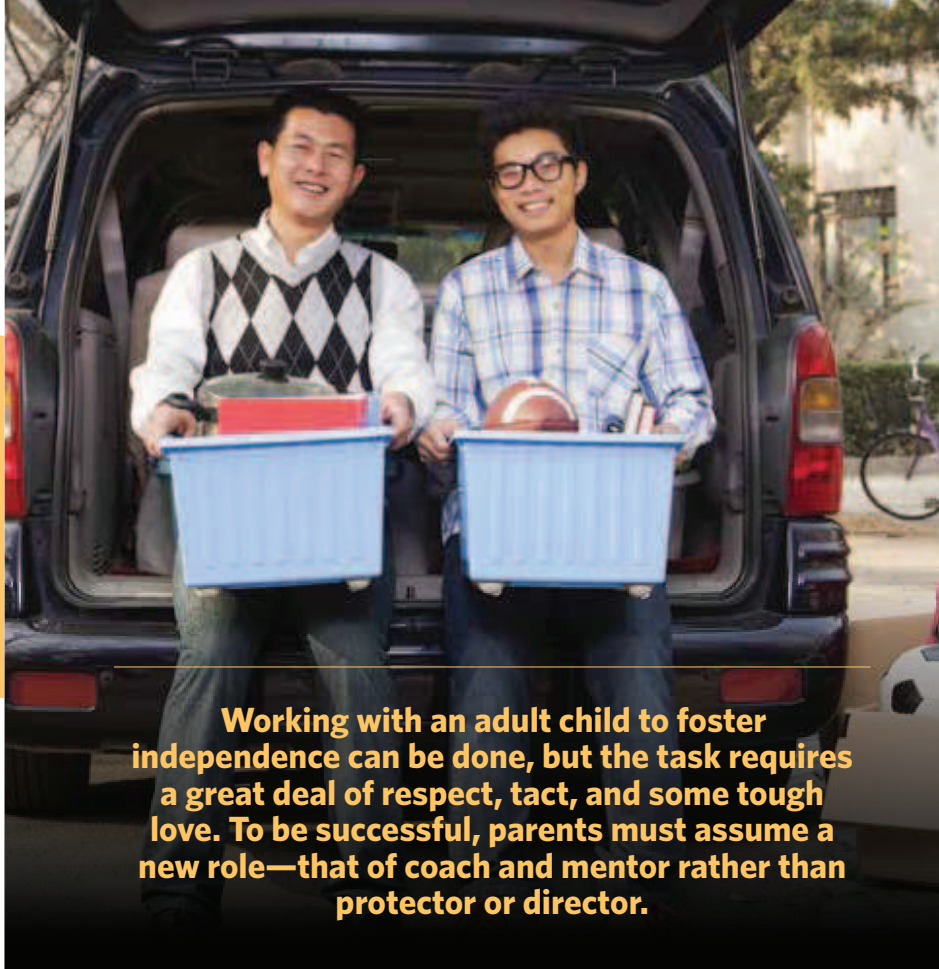
But it can also depend on your parenting approach, your willingness to honestly evaluate your teen's readiness, and your being proactive in developing a plan to use during high school to help your teen be ready for life on his or her own. The following sections discuss a more productive pattern: a coaching approach to parenting that will allow you to empower your teen to think and act for himself and find solutions to common problems that accompany ADHD.

### Change your parenting to assure success

By using a coaching approach to parenting, you can begin to prepare your teen for the day when he goes off on his own. The first step in this process would be to honestly analyze your role and assess if you are currently enabling your teenager, causing him to be overly dependent on you. If your teen is in middle or high school, you still have time to take a critical look at the role you now play in the life of your son or daughter with ADHD and determine whether a new, more productive pattern—a coaching approach to parenting—will allow you to empower your teen to think and act for himself.

The purpose of a coaching relationship is to help people find their own answers to the challenges they face in life. Through a coaching relationship, people are empowered to see the possibilities that exist in their lives and to make deliberate choices. A coach needs to be nonjudgmental, compassionate, curious, and truthful. The coach is not listening as a "know it all" or "expert" trying to think of all the answers even before the entire situation is discussed. Instead, the coach

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listens in a caring manner and with curiosity about what is being said. In addition, the coach commits to being truthful in a loving way when the other person isn't moving in the direction of his or her goals and dreams. Telling the "hard truth" allows the person being coached to see and face the truth.

Parents acting as coaches don't tell their children what they need to do to make their goals happen. Instead, the coach uses powerful questions that allow the young adult to really ponder and discover how to live the life of his or her dreams. While coaches share their observations as well as their suggestions, ultimately, the young adult decides if and how to use their coach's input.

Remember, the parenting approach you choose can make a real difference in your teen's life and either increase or decrease her chances for success. Now that you have

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some new ideas about parenting and after assessing your teen's skills in various areas, try the following:

- Select a recurring situation that you face with your son or daughter and think how you could respond by using a coaching approach. Better yet, involve your teen in selecting an ongoing problem that she wants to change. Let your teen know that you are trying out some new skills for addressing these issues!
- Write down the questions and responses you might try during each phase of a coaching conversation with your teen. How do you plan to apply coaching attitudes throughout this conversation?
- Now have a conversation with your teen about this issue. Keep a diary and jot down what you said and how your teen reacted. What went well? What didn't work? Why not? Be curious about what went wrong. Ask your teen for feedback. Having another adult to talk with as you try out a coaching approach might also be helpful.

### Fostering independence in young adults

Working with an adult child to foster independence can be done, but the task requires a great deal of respect, tact, and some tough love. To be successful, parents must assume a new role—that of coach and mentor rather than protector or director. Parent coaches don't focus on the past or their young adult's underlying emotional issues, but rather on what he or she needs to do today to start living the life he or she wants.

Remember, however, that a coaching approach focuses on more than task performance. It also works on issues such as fulfillment—helping teens and young adults identify their passion, dreams for the future and values and how to create a daily life that honors these and draws on them for motivation and inspiration—and creating a balanced life.

If your adult child with ADHD is living at home, goals might be to improve problem-solving skills, seek solutions that work, and to help find their passion. These goals can best be achieved through enhanced skill development and improved self-knowledge. The following are some suggestions to help get the conversations started around developing the skills necessary for independent living.

● **Family meetings.** Family meetings are the best place to set down rules and establish daily responsibilities. No roommate or landlord would make meals, do laundry, and schedule appointments. If a young adult can make calls for concert tickets, he can also make calls for doctor appointments and prescriptions. If your young adult cannot pay even nominal rent, then perhaps a barter system for chores can be set up. You will need to respect the privacy of your adult child and maybe even establish an adult relationship that involves asking them to dinner, to a sporting event, or other social outing, while reciprocally setting limits on their intrusion into the privacy of your home.

● **Financial advisor.** If money is an issue, it's probably best that you stay out of the picture altogether and instead recommend a financial advisor to assist your adult child develop money management skills. Most banks or credit card companies provide such services.

● **Self-knowledge.** An excellent way to foster self-knowledge is to turn over all previous test results, reports, and school information to your adult child. In addition, he or she may want to discuss their past experiences and emotional responses with a mental health professional to get a clearer picture of strengths and weaknesses.

● **Information about ADHD.** This can be accomplished by reading some of the excellent books available on ADHD in adults. Visiting websites of organizations such as CHADD and ADDA will provide more

information as well. In addition, YouTube has lots of videos on ADHD.

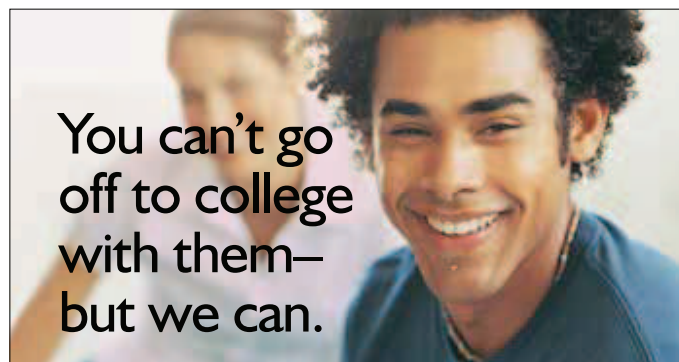
● **Career counseling.** Finding their passion is important to success in the future. When individuals with ADHD find their passion little can stop them. Disabilities fall away and excitement and enthusiasm for life follow along with success.

If things remain rocky even after addressing these areas using coaching techniques, consider whether you may need to involve a third party to coach your young adult. Is there another family member, neighbor, older cousin, or mentor who might be more able to play this coaching role with him or her? Do you and your young adult child need counseling or therapy to deal with some of the blocks to communication? What about finding a life coach in your community or using one of the organizations we have listed in the resource section below to find one?

Despite any difficulties that might arise, you certainly can still apply coaching skills and attitudes in daily life with your young adult child and do what you can to become part of the solution. 🗣️

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*A developmental pediatrician based in Washington, DC, Patricia O. Quinn, MD, is the co-author of Ready for Take-off: Preparing Your Teen with ADHD/LD for College and On Your Own: A College Readiness Guide for Teens with ADHD/LD (Magination Press, 2010).*



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