

## Does Your ADHD Child 'Act Like a Baby?'

**Friendships with younger kids allow your child to take on a leadership role.**

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"How old are you?" "What grade are you in?" For some children with attention deficit disorder (ADD ADHD), who may lag behind their peers in maturity, such questions feel more like accusations than simple curiosity. For others, the questions don't register as judgments because they don't yet have the awareness to understand that their behavior is not considered age-appropriate.



Over the years, I've had many worried moms say to me, "My child just cannot get along with children his own age" or "I worry that he acts like a baby...."

After all, as children grow older, it is expected that they will mature emotionally as well as physically. Four-year-olds, for instance, should be able to share their toys, at least *sometimes*. Seven-year-olds should be able to wait to take their turns. Twelve-year-olds need to be good sports. And by the time kids reach the teen years, they are expected to complete assignments independently and to follow through on commitments. At each stage, parents and teachers expect a child to "act his age."

But wait...these behaviors are precisely the ones that are hardest for kids who have ADHD. Behaviors that usually indicate that a child is "growing up" are not easy for kids who might naturally be inattentive or overly impulsive to learn. Missing subtle social cues, over focusing on minor details, having difficulty transitioning—these are the very behaviors that can hurt a child's interactions with peers.

### **Welcoming friends of all sizes**

As parents report, ADHD youngsters often do better socially with children younger than they are. Among younger friends, your child may find someone who shares her interests and will bend to her agenda—something peers are unlikely to do. Younger children might also be less sensitive to restlessness.

Some parents are reluctant to encourage friendships with younger children, worrying that their child will start acting—or continue to act—immature for his age.

But, as I've assured many worried moms, friendships with younger kids allow your child to take on a leadership role, a dynamic that peer relationships might not allow for. It's perfectly OK to encourage your child to play with children at his social-development level.

You may also want to seek opportunities for your child to spend time with older neighbors or relatives who appreciate her enthusiasm, creativity, and spontaneity. This acceptance will bring self-esteem, which, in turn, will strengthen peer relationships.

At the same time, establishing friendships with a few well-matched peers is important. You'll want to know that your child won't be lonely during the school day, when he doesn't see his younger friends. After-school clubs, whether for stamp collecting or karate, can be a way to ease into same-age friendships. An ADD youngster may find it easier to strike up a conversation with a stranger if they already know that they share a common interest.

Friendships with kids your child's age may take time to develop. But growing older slower may not be all bad. Children who mature more slowly may not push to get that first car or rush into dating. And rest assured: Mature behavior eventually emerges for most of us—with or without ADHD.