Linda Roggli:

It's October 2020, and even in the midst of a crazy year, it's still ADHD awareness month. And we're still here with TADD talks from ADDA, the Attention Deficit Disorder Association, nine minutes short, pithy soundbites on living with adult ADHD. Stay tuned, here it comes.

Terry Matlen:

Hi, welcome to TADD talks with ADDA. I'm Terry Matlen and I'm the founder and director of ADDConsults.com and QueensofDistraction.com. And I'm also the author of *The Queen of Distraction*. Today I would like to share my thoughts about "Moms with ADHD: How to Survive at Home with Your Kids During the Pandemic." As we all know, these are very unusual and stressful times. So, I want to try and help you out during this pandemic, because as a mom with ADHD, there's a lot going on for you. And I really feel for you. You know, if my kids were still school-aged, I don't think I could easily take this on like many of you are doing. So, let's talk briefly about the challenges for all women, which is - oh, gosh, to start with - juggling multiple and many responsibilities, like caring for your family, often while working full time.

Terry Matlen:

Women are still taking on the majority of childcare and home responsibilities, like cooking and keeping the house up, talking to or meeting with teachers, setting up doctor/dental appointments for the whole family, planning the holidays, planning social events, shopping for food and clothes, cooking . . . And I could go on and on and you have the idea here, but men are much more involved these days, but women really do still carry on most of these responsibilities. So, what happens when we're in a pandemic and kids are staying home, learning remotely, parents are either working from home or they're scrambling to find childcare becomes very, very tricky. So, this is difficult for anyone without ADHD. It's so stressful and frustrating, but most of us don't have teaching degrees and don't feel adequately prepared to help our children learn from home. Now let's add ADHD to the mix.

Terry Matlen:

Some common symptoms of ADHD, as we know, are distractibility, procrastination, disorganization, and not being able to pay attention consistently, especially if the topic or situation is boring. Well, some women are hyperactive and impulsive. So, sitting at a desk concentrating for long periods of time is well, I would say it's equivalent to supreme suffering. I think that could be the title of my next book - Women with ADHD, Moms with ADHD, Supreme Suffering. But inattentive moms, which is a little different than being a mom with hyperactivity and impulsivity. You - and I am a mom with inattentive subtype - find it difficult to keep your focus. Yet these are all things we need to do if we're home with our kids and helping to educate them. Then comes the biggie - the disorganization part of our ADHD. I've been working a lot with women lately who are struggling terribly trying to keep up with their kids' school requirements.

Terry Matlen:

Remember some of these kids have ADHD as well - you know that it's highly genetic. So, it's doubly difficult for the mom to manage theirs and her ADHD. And if this isn't hard enough to deal with, how about the feelings of shame and guilt, even though we're living through what I believe is in a sense of psychological trauma for just about everyone to some degree, and we keep putting tremendous pressure on ourselves to be the perfect parent, even through what we're going through during these very, very stressful and unusual times. In fact, many of you are working even harder than ever to make sure that your child is safe and healthy, and hopefully, you're giving yourself that same consideration. So, if you're helping your child with school, if he or she is learning virtually, from what I'm seeing anyway, there's the sense of even more pressure that you're placing on yourself.

Terry Matlen:

This is from just in recent months talking to so many of you who are struggling during these times. Maybe it's the whole wanting to do it right or the perfectionism as often seen in adult ADHD, or maybe it's the fear

of being judged by teachers or other parents and trying so hard to be like them. Well, they don't have an ADHD brain. You, however, do, which makes many things much more challenging for you compared to other moms. You're overworking your brain, so please, please give yourself some slack. And we're not even getting into the whole possibility and probability that your child also has ADHD, which makes this so, so complicated. So, let's get through some tips to help you through these tough times. I'd say the number one thing for, in my opinion, is to make it easier for you and your child, is to find a quiet place for your child to do his or her homework and classwork. Clear the space away from distractions.

Terry Matlen:

That could be tricky, but especially if there's a lot of kids or other adults in the house, but try and find something that works for you, away from the rest of the gang. That's number one. Number two: take frequent breaks, especially if your child also has ADHD. I was talking to a mom the other day, consulting with her. She was just fried because her child and her have ADHD and the teacher - I couldn't believe this - the teacher was just giving her such a tough time and her child a rough time by saying, your child must sit still. Now we all know that kids with ADHD, well, many of them, maybe most of them, have a terrible time trying to sit still and so-call behave. So, instead of fighting it, I'd say, go with it. So, give your kids frequent breaks.

Terry Matlen:

Number three: bring fidgets to the workspace. I'm doing a lot of work on zoom right now. So, I have fidgets on my desk. Of course, you can't see me, thank goodness. But I have this fidget that I probably should write a little blog about because it's very interesting. So, squishy kinds of things to put in your hand and in your child's hand or those kinds of things would be very helpful, and get up and move. Fidgeting is also a physical thing that your whole body can do. And that's just something that we all need to do when we're supposed to be sitting for hours at a time. Number four: have a healthy brain. So, bring in frequent friendly snacks, high protein like peanuts, cheese and then fruit is really great with lots of healthy drinks and lots and lots of water. Tea would be great too.

Terry Matlen:

So along with your frequent breaks would be, you know, giving yourself something to drink and eat. Five: consistent communication with teachers; making suggestions on how the teacher can help you and your child. So, for instance, ask for assignments via email. I know for me, I do much better in email than I do on phone calls because then I have a record of how to refer back to the information instead of trying to jot down notes because I cannot read my own handwriting. So, talking to the teacher in ways and express ways that that teacher can be helpful to you and your child. Six: using a whiteboard to track assignments and exams and study time; using posts, any kind of visual cues. So, one mom I was working with actually had a whole whiteboard and she broke it up into the child's schedule.

Terry Matlen:

So, from like 9:00 to 9:30, the child was studying English. And then after 9:30, from 9:30 to 10:30, I believe, was working on the assignment and then the breaks, the whole thing. So, a whiteboard is a great visual and I highly recommend that. Seven: using a separate notebook for each subject, each subject that your child is working on in school. I happen to use notebooks a lot in my own work because I juggle a lot of different projects. So, I have - and then with my own children now that my kids are grown, but when they were younger - I had a notebook for everything, a notebook for their doctor's appointments, a notebook for their meetings I had with teachers, all kinds of things, what medications they might be on - what, when they started, when they stopped, what were the side effects?

Terry Matlen:

So, notebooks, visual cues are my best friend. Number eight: check-in for YOU. Are YOU getting enough rest exercise and good diet? I know that when I hear these kinds of recommendations, I just cringe because they're so obvious. But even though they might be obvious they may not be things that you're

doing for yourself. So, self-care is crucial right now, whether you have kids at home or not, you need to take care of yourself. And here's a biggie that we don't talk enough about. And that is, are you on the appropriate treatment for your own ADHD? A lot of women that I talked to kind of let that slide because the focus seems to be so much on the child. But if you can't take better care of yourself, how are you going to be optimally available for your child? So, don't let that go, check in with your doctor, make sure if you're on medication that you're taking it consistently as prescribed.

Terry Matlen:

Number nine: change your expectations. This is something I talk about a lot, regardless of the topic that has to do with ADHD, is we all need to change your expectations. So, let things go that aren't crucial. Right now, we are in survival mode. And I think that if you remind yourself of that, you can maybe let go a little bit of these expectations and try - just get through these difficult times. Nothing has to be perfect right now. We just have to get through this as best we can. Ten: if teaching your child is turning into a battlefield, reach out for help. I remember when, it's my youngest daughter who's - both of my children are now young adults - but when my youngest was in school, we had these head-to-heads, and I just got to the point of telling myself, is it worth losing a good relationship with my child just so that she can get her schoolwork done?

Terry Matlen:

What is more important? So, at that point, and this was many years ago, I gave up on trying to be her homework assistant or whatever. And I hired - I started off by hiring high school and college students to come into the house to help her with her homework. That, unfortunately, wasn't even enough, because she has some other issues and homework was just a huge problem for us after school. She had already put in a full day of work, just trying to stay in class and keeping her attention going. So, what I ended up doing - now, she was on an IEP because, like I said, she had more than ADHD going on - but I went into an IEP meeting and asked the school, actually I demanded it - there was no way around it - that all of her homework be done during school.

Terry Matlen:

So, this is not something that can work for you, but it's something to think about if your child is on, has an IEP or a 504 plan, think about what kinds of strategies would work for you that your child needs, some extra help. So, that's one thing to think about, but also to ask your partner or your husband to take on some of these responsibilities. It's not that you're weak or incompetent - we are so hard on ourselves - but you have an ADHD brain, and that makes this whole thing so much more difficult. So, when you add the stress of your own work, because many of you are working from home, plus COVID, and your brain and your nervous system, well, that's all being really taxed right now. So, if they can't help, reach out and find a tutor or a teacher who can. There's plenty out there.

Terry Matlen:

I go to nextdoor.com. A lot of you who are in the US probably have that available to you, and you can see there's a lot of neighbors who are looking to reach out and help, and also, you know, to earn some extra money. A lot of people are out of work. So, even, you know, again, a high school or college student would probably be thrilled to come over or work with your child through zoom if it's just too much for you. And please don't, don't take on the guilt of that. You don't need that. Number eleven: if you're working, try and find ways to make that easier on you. If you're working from home, especially, and your kids are at home too, carve out a space for yourself without interruptions. You can even use a sign - I did this when my daughter was younger - this is a time you can ask mom questions; this is a time when mom is working, cannot be distracted or interrupted.

Terry Matlen:

And I would put that on my door because I have a home office because kids with ADHD also do well with visual cues. So, again, bring in babysitters, if at all possible, I know that's kind of tough right now and

uncomfortable, but there might be people that you feel very safe having in your house, and a babysitter who can distract and play with your child, young child or older child, even though you're home, could be something that would be really, really helpful to you while you'll get your work done, but also just to get your downtime. We don't have a whole lot of space right now when we're all kind of cooped up in the house. Also, again, working with your partner, your spouse, so that you can be freed up so that you can have your downtime. It's really, really essential now to work as a team.

Terry Matlen:

Number twelve: can you cut back on your hours at work or ask for more time to complete your work? Think about what works for you. And even if it means, you know, getting a piece of paper and writing down what's not working. Start off with that. What's not working for you at work? And then figuring out some ideas to run by your boss. And then thirteen: working with an ADD coach to help you put this all together. Sometimes we just need another pair of eyes, someone who is very familiar with how ADHD brains work can be just pretty much essential. So, look for an ADHD coach who can help you through these tough times. So, to finish up, remember these times are unusual and extremely stressful and it's essential to make things work for you, your child and your ADHD.

Terry Matlen:

So, don't try to do things the same way as other people are doing them. Your family is unique. So, take a deep breath, think about what's not working, but also what is working? And go with your strengths and understand that your challenges will need some workarounds and strategies that will help support your unique needs. Now, to just end this with some notes, which I'm trying to find, which I can't seem to find, huh - I lost them. So, bear with me. Anyway, this is Terry Matlen, again, talking to you through ADDA's TADD Talks. You can reach me or find my work at ADDConsults.com and QueensofDistraction.com, where I offer online group coaching for women with ADHD. And feel free to drop me an email at Terry@ADDConsults.com - that's Terry T-E-R-R-Y at ADDConsults dot com. It's great talking with you. Stay calm, stay relaxed. I know it's not easy and I will see you next time. Take care.

Linda Roggli:

Okay, that's today's ADHD wisdom. Much more to come. And why not join us for the virtual 2020 international ADHD conference coming up in November? Details at add.org. And while you're at it, why not join ADDA? It's a great investment in your ADHD life.