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9 therapeutic factors in the treatment of ADHD

1. **Achieve healthy**, daily, stable nutritious **eating** pattern; **sleep** schedule, and consistent **aerobic exercise, in which one sleeps a minimum of 7-8** hours a night, eats protein breakfast and lunch meals, and exercises aerobically at least 20-30 minutes a day. For teens and adults, it is critical to be aware of tendencies to self-soothe with alcohol, drugs, or other distractors such as video gaming, social media, and excessive spending as a way to avoid facing one's challenges in life.
2. **Increase level of structure completing basic activities** of daily living at home, school, and work. Examples of increasing structure in one's life include utilizing calendars, alarms, and check-lists to ensure that tasks are completed in a thorough and successful manner, as well as employing tutors, study buddies, spouses, siblings, or parents to provide needed structure.
3. **Increase level of cooperation with significant others** (spouse, parent, best friend, sibling, teacher, or tutor) while attempting to complete activities of daily living and achieving life goals. For example, when attempting to master a topic, activity, or behavior, having a mentor first demonstrate the skill; then working together with mentor to complete the task; and finally completing the task while mentor observes the successful completion of the task leads to mastery of the skill, such as self-care, completing chores, and doing academic work. This three step process may need to be repeated several times before the one coping with ADHD masters the targeted skill. Developing mastery of the skill could be compared to developing muscle memory when playing a memorized song with a musical instrument.

4. **Create an internal reward system** to successfully complete low frequency behaviors prior to engaging in pleasurable activities. For example, completing homework, studying for exams, and doing chores, before engaging in high frequency behaviors such as playing video games, spending time on social media, or spending time with friends or loved ones.

5. Create an **external reward system** in which the ADHD individual receives rewards/celebrations typically from parents or spouses for completing low frequency behaviors before engaging in pleasurable activities (high frequency behaviors). Asking one coping with ADHD what he/she would like to earn for successfully completing basic activities of daily living is critically important. Further, creating immediate rewards, short term, midterm and long term rewards are vital to insure success. Each individual tends to have a preference of types of rewards to earn, and should be taken into account in developing these positive reinforcers.

6. Create **natural consequences for ADHD individual's refusal to complete basic activities** of daily living. These consequences are most effective when they are of shortest duration possible to get the desired response. Never give consequences as retribution for defiance such as taking away vacations, birthday parties, or Christmas gifts. It is important to note that giving the consequences should be doled out when parent(s) and child/teen/adult child are relatively calm. Also it is important not to take away positive socialization opportunities or exercise activities which would likely create more side effects than benefits, such as rebellious behavior, and symptoms of depression and anxiety, which could include self-harm behaviors.

7. **Individual therapy is recommended to teach mindfulness of breathing techniques** which improves concentration, organizational abilities, work performance, and task completion. Individual therapy is also helpful to improve emotional stability, acceptance of one's strengths and weaknesses, to develop emotionally intelligent communication skills, and the ability to be honest with oneself regarding his or her challenges.

8. **Couple's & Family therapy** is recommended to develop emotionally intelligent communication skills in real time, in a safe place so he or she takes those skills into the real world of work, school, and relationships. Parent counseling is helpful to develop and maintain healthy boundaries in the parent and child relationship, to avoid the development of disabling dependence by the one coping with ADHD, and enabling/codependent behaviors of parent toward child/adolescent/adult child. This therapy is also useful in reducing and eliminating the common resentments that family members experience as a result of living with one suffering from ADHD. Finally, couple's and family therapy is also utilized to direct and encourage the successful movement toward independence for the adolescent/young adult struggling with ADHD symptoms.

9. **Medication evaluation/treatment is recommended** to reduce ADHD symptoms, improve academic performance/impulse control and overall success in completing basic activities of daily living. It is beneficial to continue in psychotherapy while beginning trial of medication to ensure that dosing is appropriate and that side effects are kept to a minimum. Additionally, once medicated, it is helpful to have regular communication between physician and psychologist regarding the ADHD individual's progress in the treatment process.