Helping Your Daughter with ADHD: What PCIT Teaches Parents

Simple, research-backed ways to build connection, reduce overwhelm, and support regulation

What is PCIT?

Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) is an evidence-based approach that helps parents strengthen their relationship with their child, reduce challenging behaviors, and support emotional regulation. It focuses on changing how parents and children interact in real time.

Why It Works Especially Well for Girls with ADHD

Girls with ADHD

- Overlooked or misunderstood
- Highly sensitive to correction
- Working hard to 'hold it together'

PCIT helps by

- Building emotional safety first
- Reducing shame, criticism, and demands
- Supporting regulation and confidence through connection

3 Core Ideas Parents Can Use Right Away

1 Connection Comes First

Before correcting behavior, build connection.

Try this:

- Spend 5 minutes a day following your child's lead in play
- Avoid directing, correcting, teaching, or questioning during this time

2 Notice What's Going Right

Children repeat what gets attention.

Say:

- "I love how you kept trying"
- "You stayed with that even when it was hard"
- "You're focusing so well right now"

3 Keep Instructions Clear, Direct, and Calm

Children with ADHD struggle with overload.

Instead of:

"How about you clean your room and then get ready for bed?"

Say:

Calmly tell your child one thing to do, then quietly wait 5 seconds to let them process.

E.g., Please put your shoes in the closet. Praise them for listening, then give the next step.

In the Moment: When She's Overwhelmed

Stay calm and model regulation.

Lower your voice and keep a neutral tone.

Label the emotion.

Describe what she's doing in real time to solve the problem.

Say:

- "I'm right here. We'll figure this out together."
- "It's frustrating when you can't figure something out."
- "You're picking up the pieces again and looking for the next thing to try. You're looking at it from different angles to see if you can get a clue. Oh, you noticed you need a different piece."

What to Remember

- Your child's behavior is often a signal or a clue, not necessarily a desire to be disrespectful.
- Connection reduces overwhelm.
- Co-regulation, consistency, and confidence improve behavior.
- Small, consistent moments matter more than big efforts.