A guide for the moments that feel impossible

When your ADHD child says...

"I hate myself"

10 answers every parent needs — from someone who has lived this from every angle.



ROOTED TOGETHER: THE CONNECTED ADHD FAMILY

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You are not alone in this.

If your child has ever said **"I hate myself," "I'm so stupid,"** or **"nobody loves me"** — you know the gut-punch that comes with it. You're not imagining it, and you're not alone.

> This guide gives you real, practical answers in plain language — for the moments that feel impossible.

And it comes from someone who has lived this from every angle: as a parent, an educator, as someone with ADHD, and as a coach who has walked alongside hundreds of families just like yours.

These are the questions that come up again and again in my workshops, podcasts, and live events — born from the hardest, most heartbreaking moments.

I'm sharing them with you because I want you to feel less alone, and to help you and your family find a little more calm, connection, and hope.

Sometimes all it takes is knowing you're not the only one.

A PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

A note from Laurie Bloyer, your guide



I want to start by saying something I mean completely: I see you.

I know what it's like to sit across from your child while they say the words no parent should ever have to hear. I know the gut-punch. I know the midnight Google searches. I know the feeling of trying absolutely everything — the books, the therapists, the strategies, the charts, the reward systems — and still feeling like you're failing your kid, (and the kids in my classroom)

I know it because I've lived it. I have ADHD. My child has ADHD. And for years I was that parent (and educator) — exhausted, isolated, and desperately searching for someone who actually understood what this felt like and how to "fix" it from the inside.

That's why after 20 years in the classroom I chose to become a coach. Not because I read about ADHD in a textbook — but because I lived it in real time, in my own nervous system, in my own family, and with the countless children I taught. And when I finally found the right support and the right framework, everything shifted. Not overnight. But steadily, sustainably, for real, from the root, the core.

Now I work with families every day who are exactly where I once was. And I can tell you with confidence: there is a way through. This guide is the beginning of that path.

You are not failing your child. You just haven't had the right map yet, I am here to be your guide.

— Laurie M.Ed., ADHD Family Coach

Question 1 — My child just said "I hate myself." What do I do right now?

It is shocking and frightening to hear your child say words like that. The instinct to fix it immediately is completely natural — but in this moment, there is a better way.

Breathe first

Before you say a single word, take a breath and settle yourself. Your nervous system is the first tool you have.

Move close

Sit near them — not across from them. No fixing, no lecturing yet. Just be near.

Say simply

"I hear you. I'm right here." That is enough for right now.

What NOT to do in this moment

- Don't argue or correct — Launching into "that's not true, you're wonderful!" feels dismissive and often makes them dig in harder (see question 2).
- Don't interrogate — A string of "why do you feel that way?" questions can feel overwhelming when they're already flooded.
- Don't disappear — Walking away to "give them space" can feel like abandonment in a moment of vulnerability.

Rooted Tip — You can't regulate a dysregulated child from a dysregulated place. Your calm IS the intervention — before any words.

"The first time my son said 'I hate myself' I panicked and started listing all the reasons he was wrong. He just shut down completely. The next time it happened I just sat next to him and said 'I'm here.' He cried for five minutes and then fell asleep. That was it. That was what he needed."

— Sarah, mom of a 10-year-old with ADHD

Question 2 — Should I say "No you're not — you're amazing!"?

This is the hardest one, because every instinct says yes. **But don't.**

That instinct is so strong because you love them, and it hurts to hear your child say something so painful about themselves. Wanting to rush in and protect them is completely natural — and honestly, this is one of the hardest things to override as a parent.

Why it backfires

When a child is in emotional pain and you jump straight to "no you're not!" they feel unheard — and often argue back harder. You've accidentally made them **defend their negative belief.**

Think of it this way: if you were crying and someone immediately said "don't cry!" — would you feel better?

The better path

Stay with them in the feeling first.

> **Validation before correction. Always.**

⚠ **Watch Out**
Avoid jumping in with: "No you're not! You're so smart and wonderful!" — it shuts down the conversation before it even starts.

What we want to say
No you're not! You're amazing!

What actually helps
That sounds really painful. I'm here.

What we want to say
You have so much to be grateful for!

What actually helps
Tell me more about what's feeling hard.

What we want to say
Don't say that about yourself!

What actually helps
I hear you. I'm not going anywhere.

> "I used to jump in so fast with 'No, you're not! You're the kindest kid I know.' Every time, my daughter would just get quieter and more upset. Once I tried sitting next to her and saying, 'That sounds really heavy — tell me more.' She cried, but she kept talking. That changed everything."
> **— Megan, mom of a 9-year-old**

Question 3 — What do I actually say instead?

You don't need a perfect script. What matters most is that they feel **heard before they feel corrected.**

It's normal to freeze when you're scared of saying the wrong thing. A lot of parents get stuck there because they don't want to make the moment worse. But in these moments, the words matter far less than your presence and the intention behind them.

"That sounds really hard. I'm listening."

Opens the door without pressure. Signals safety and presence.

"Tell me more."

Two words that invite without demanding. Keeps the conversation alive.

Silence with presence

Sometimes just sitting together without words is the most powerful thing you can offer. You don't have to fix it. You just have to show up.

What these phrases have in common

They don't try to fix, they don't minimize, and they don't redirect. They simply signal, "I see you and I'm staying."

No fixing

You're not trying to solve the feeling, just hold it with them.

No minimizing

You're not telling them it's not that bad. You're saying it matters.

No redirecting

You're not changing the subject. You're staying right here.

> "I was so afraid I would say the wrong thing that I almost said nothing at all. My son was 8 and crying on the floor of his room, and I just sat next to him and rubbed his back. I didn't try to fix it. I didn't try to cheer him up. After a while, he leaned into me and said, 'Thanks for staying.' That was enough."
> **— Jenna, mom of an 8-year-old**

Rooted Tip
You don't have to have the right words. You just have to stay.

Question 4 — This happened at bedtime when everyone was exhausted. Does timing matter?

It can feel cruel when the hardest moments show up at the exact time everyone is most depleted. But that isn't a coincidence — it's biology.

ADHD brains are often at their most dysregulated at the end of the day — the enormous effort of holding it together all day finally releases. Therapists call this the **"after-school restraint collapse,"** and it's real.

If it's late and everyone is running on empty, your job is **not** to solve the self-worth problem tonight. Your job is to gently close the day with connection.

> "Our worst meltdowns always happened at 8 pm. I kept trying to talk it through right then and it always made things worse. When I finally started just saying 'let's get you to bed, we can talk tomorrow' — everything changed. He actually came to me the next morning on his own."
> **— James, dad of a 13-year-old**

A calm bedtime routine — soft voice, proximity, predictability — is doing more than you know. The deeper conversation can wait for a calm moment tomorrow.

You don't have to resolve it tonight. Closing the night with warmth IS the intervention. The conversation can wait — the connection cannot.

How to close the night with connection (even after a hard moment)

Lower your voice

Literally softer, slower. Your nervous system sets the tone for the room.

Get physical

A hand on the back, sitting close, a gentle hug if they'll allow it. Bodies regulate through bodies.

Name the love, not the problem

"I love you. We're okay. We'll talk more tomorrow." That's it. That's enough.

Let the night do its work

Sleep is genuinely regulating. Tomorrow they will be different. So will you.

Question 5 — What do I say the next day when things are calm?

When you're both regulated and the heat of the moment has passed, you can gently revisit it. Keep it **curious, not clinical.** You're not diagnosing — you're connecting.

But timing still matters. Read the room. Not every child is ready to talk the next morning, and that's okay. Some need a day. Some need a week. The goal is to leave the door open, not force it open.

Open gently

"Hey, last night you said something I've been thinking about. Can you help me understand — what was feeling so hard?"

Normalize the brain

"Were you really tired? Sometimes when everything piles up at once, our brain tells us stories that aren't true."

Follow their lead

If they shut down or say, "I don't want to talk about it," don't push. Say, "That's okay. I'm here whenever you're ready." Then drop it — for now.

End with connection, not conclusions

You don't need to solve it in this conversation. End with something warm: "I'm really glad we talked. I love you no matter what."

What you're really doing in this conversation

Building trust

Every time you come back calmly, they learn: this is a safe place to fall apart.

Modeling repair

You're showing them that hard moments don't have to end relationships. They can be revisited, gently.

Planting seeds

They may not respond much now. But they are listening. And they will remember.

Rooted Tip

Curiosity before conclusions. Ask what was frustrating, what felt hard, what happened that day — before you offer any reframes or reassurance.

Question 6 — Why does my ADHD child have so much negative self-talk in the first place?

It can be a painful question to sit with, because it can feel like it points to the world around them — and sometimes even to us. But understanding this is not about blame. It's about seeing clearly, so you can become part of the solution.

ADHD children hear corrective feedback **far more often** than their neurotypical peers — from teachers, coaches, siblings, and even well-meaning parents.

Over years, that constant stream of *"stop, wait, no, not like that"* becomes an internal voice.

> It's not a character flaw. It's a nervous system response to an environment that was never designed for their brain.

Understanding this shifts everything — because it means the solution isn't more discipline. It's **more connection, more safety, and a new kind of evidence.**

"It's not who they are. It's what they've been told — and we can change the story."

What that inner critic sounds like

"I always mess everything up."

Often internalized from years of being corrected before being understood.

"I'm too much for everyone."

Absorbed from moments of being shushed, sidelined, or asked to be different.

"Other kids don't have this problem."

The comparison trap, fed by classrooms and systems built for neurotypical brains.

How to start building a new inner voice

01

Name their strengths out loud

Not to counter the negative, but just to make the positive visible. Regularly. Casually. Like it's just true.

02

Let them hear you brag

Tell someone else something wonderful about your child — within earshot. It lands deeper than anything said directly.

Question 7 — Will affirmations help?

Affirmations alone don't work if the child doesn't believe them yet. Telling a child who feels stupid that they're brilliant often backfires — it feels dismissive of their real experience, and they push back.

For ADHD kids, this is especially true because their brains are wired to reject anything that doesn't match what they've lived through. When they've had years of evidence that they struggle, a cheerful *"I am smart and capable!"* can land like a lie. That doesn't mean affirmations are useless forever — it means we have to build the foundation first.

What works better: Building evidence over time

Noticing and naming **specific, real moments** of capability:

- "I noticed you kept trying even when that math problem felt impossible."
- "You remembered to pack your bag without being asked today — that's huge."

Small. True. Specific. That's what lands.

> "I used to write affirmations on sticky notes and put them on the mirror. My daughter peeled them all off. When I started just quietly noticing things out loud — 'hey, you handled that really well' — she actually started to listen. Six months later she told her teacher: 'I'm actually pretty good at figuring things out.' I nearly cried."
> **— Michelle, mom of twin girls (11) with ADHD**

How to make it stick over time

01

Keep a "wins" list together

A simple notebook or note on the fridge where you both add one small win each day. Not achievements — moments of effort, kindness, or resilience.

02

Revisit it when they're low

When they say *"I hate myself"*, you can gently say: *"Let's look at our list."* The evidence is already there — in their own words.

03

Let them add to it themselves

Over time, invite them to notice their own wins. This is where the internal voice starts to shift — when they begin to catch themselves doing something right.

The goal isn't to convince them they're great. It's to give them enough real evidence that they start to convince themselves.

> "We started a tiny wins list on a sticky note by the kitchen counter — one line a day, nothing fancy. At first my son just rolled his eyes, but I kept writing things like 'finished homework after a hard start' or 'helped his sister without being asked.' About a month later, he began adding his own notes. The biggest surprise was hearing him say, 'Actually, I did do a few things right today.'"
> **— Dana, mom of an 10-year-old with ADHD**

Question 8 — How do I talk to their teacher without sounding like I'm blaming the school?

Come in as a **partner, not a prosecutor.** Lead with what you're observing at home, not with accusations.

It can feel nerve-wracking, especially if you've had experiences in the past where you felt dismissed or unheard. But the way you frame the conversation makes an enormous difference — and most teachers are genuinely relieved when a parent comes in as a collaborator instead of an adversary.

What *not* to lead with: don't open with a diagnosis lecture, don't bring a stack of research, and don't start with "my child has ADHD and you need to understand that..." Even if all of that is true, it puts the teacher on the defensive before the conversation has even started.

What to say

"We've noticed she's been saying some really hard things about herself after school — things like 'I'm stupid' or 'I can't do anything right.' I wanted to share that with you so we can figure out together if something's happening that we can address."

The mindset

Most teachers genuinely want to help — they just need information, not indictment. You're on the same team.

What to ask for (specifically)

More noticing, less correcting

Ask if the teacher can try to catch your child doing something right once a day and name it out loud. One specific, genuine comment can shift a child's whole day.

A signal system

A private, low-key signal between teacher and child — a tap on the desk, a sticky note — that means "I see you, you're okay" without drawing attention.

A check-in at the door

A brief, warm greeting at the start of class. For ADHD kids, the first 30 seconds of an interaction sets the tone for everything that follows.

You don't need the teacher to understand ADHD perfectly. You just need them to see your child as someone worth rooting for.

> "I was so nervous going into my son's conference because I didn't want to sound like I was blaming anyone. But once I started by sharing what we were seeing at home, his teacher softened right away. We agreed on one small thing: she'd greet him at the door every morning and give him a quick thumbs-up before the work started. It sounds tiny, but within a couple of weeks he stopped coming home saying school was 'already ruined' before lunch."
> **— Melissa, mom of a 9-year-old with ADHD**

Question 9 — I have ADHD too and I recognize my own voice in what my child says.

This is one of the hardest things about being an ADHD parent with ADHD: you're being asked to regulate and respond wisely in a moment that is also touching your own deepest wounds.

This one is real, and it is heavy.

When your child voices the same thoughts you've carried about yourself, it activates your own pain in ways that make it much harder to stay regulated for them.

You are not just their parent in that moment — you are also a child who needed someone to say the right thing and maybe didn't get it.

What to do

The most important thing you can do is **your own work** — not perfectly, just honestly.

When you model self-compassion out loud *("I made a mistake and that's okay, I'm learning too")*, your child learns that the inner critic doesn't always tell the truth.

Rooted Tip
You cannot pour from an empty cup. Your healing matters — not just for you, but because your child is watching how you treat yourself.

What this can look like in the moment

When they say "I'm so stupid"

You might hear your own voice from 20 years ago. That's real. Take a breath before you respond — you're answering for both of you.

When they shut down

Your own shame response might kick in. Notice it. You don't have to fix their shame and yours at the same time.

When you lose your patience

It happens. Repair matters more than perfection. Coming back and saying "I'm sorry I got frustrated" is one of the most powerful things you can model.

Question 10 — When should I be worried — and when should I get more help?

This question can feel terrifying, especially when you love your child deeply and want to get it right. Most parents asking it are not being paranoid — they're trying to stay attentive. Knowing when to worry is not about panicking; it's about noticing what needs care.

Watch Out — Take These Seriously
If your child says things like **"I wish I wasn't here"** or **"nobody would care if I was gone"** — take it seriously, even if they seem to move past it quickly.

ADHD children can express big, impulsive thoughts in the heat of the moment and genuinely mean them right then. Don't dismiss it and don't panic — just stay calm, stay close, and follow up.

Signs this may be more than a hard moment

It's happening frequently

If these statements come up regularly, not just in moments of peak frustration, that's worth taking seriously.

The intensity is escalating

Statements that are getting darker, more specific, or more hopeless over time are a signal to act.

They're withdrawing

Pulling away from friends, activities, or family — especially combined with negative self-talk — is worth a conversation with a professional.

Your gut says something is wrong

You know your child. If something feels different, trust that. You don't need to be certain to ask for help.

Rooted Tip
Getting help is not a sign that you've failed your child. It's a sign that you're paying attention — and that you're willing to do whatever it takes.

What to do next

Stay calm and close

Your regulated presence is the first and most important step.

Follow up

Don't let it pass without a gentle check-in when things are calm.

Reach out to a professional

Talk to your pediatrician or a therapist who specializes in ADHD.

Where to start

Talk to your pediatrician first

They can screen for depression and anxiety, rule out other factors, and refer you to the right specialist. You don't need to have all the answers before you make the call.

Look for a therapist who knows ADHD

General therapists can help, but someone who understands the ADHD nervous system will get there faster. Ask specifically about their experience with ADHD and emotional dysregulation.

Don't wait until it's a crisis

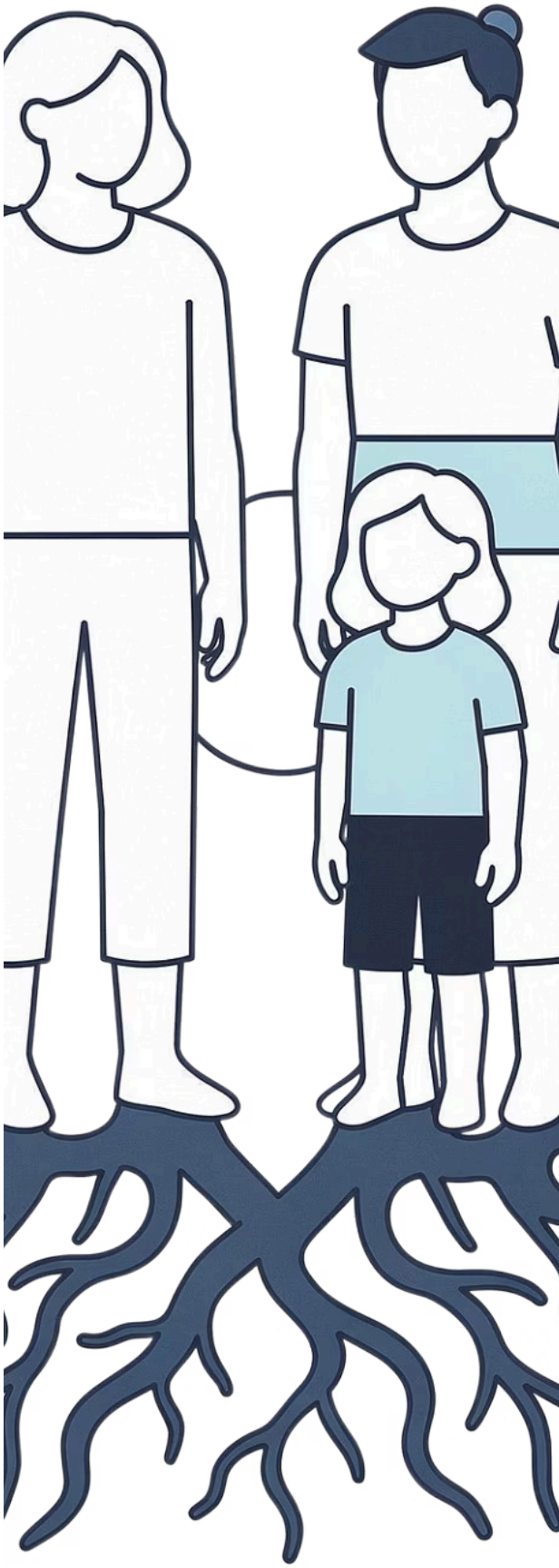
Early support is always easier than crisis support. If you're wondering whether to reach out, that wondering is enough of a reason.

> "I almost brushed it off when my 11-year-old said, 'I don't want to be here anymore.' But something in me said this felt bigger than a bad day, so I called our pediatrician that afternoon. It turned out we were dealing with anxiety and depression, and getting help early changed everything for our family." — Maya, mom of 11-year-old Eli

CONCLUSION

This guide has offered practical answers to the challenging questions many parents face when raising an ADHD child. You've navigated through strategies for immediate crises, long-term conversations, and even self-reflection. But knowing what to do is only the first step toward genuine change.

Building a family where your child's ADHD is genuinely understood and nurtured from its roots, rather than just managed on the surface, is a transformative journey. It's a journey that demands consistent effort, deep understanding, and unwavering support. And it's one you don't have to embark on alone.



Your family's next chapter starts here.

This is precisely why Rooted Together was created. It's the membership I wish had existed when my own family was in survival mode – a place where parents of ADHD children (ages 8–18) come to stop white-knuckling it and start building something that actually works.

Clear Transformation Path

Practical, step-by-step guidance designed to lead your family from exhaustion to connection.

Supportive Community

Connect with other parents who truly understand your unique challenges and triumphs.

Expert Coaching

Guidance from someone who has lived this journey from every angle – personally, as a parent, and professionally.

This isn't just another program filled with tips and tricks. This is about fostering root-up change, equipping your family with the tools for deep understanding and lasting connection. If this guide resonated with you—if you found yourself nodding, tearing up, or finally feeling seen—then Rooted Together was made for you.

I can't wait to meet you inside!

Join us at rootedadhdfamily.com