



More Naysayer Encounters Part Two

FOR THE FRIDGE

by Marie S. Paxson

WHEN CHILDREN ARE YOUNGER, it is somewhat easier to disclose that they have ADHD. Some experts feel that keeping a child's ADHD secret contributes to stigma. I've heard a special education attorney assert that children may think they have something shameful if during school meetings they hear their parents ask whether information is kept confidential or if the IEP is kept in a locked file cabinet.

The way their peers reacted to my children's ADHD surprised me a few times. Once a group of boys let my son use a dictionary during a Scrabble game because they knew that spelling was difficult for him. Who would have thought of that—an accommodation for a board game!

When my children became teenagers, I felt they were entitled to confidentiality, and they could choose whom to tell and whom not to tell. Some teens are more comfortable about their ADHD diagnosis than others—I've heard psychologists say that during a treatment session a teen will answer a cell phone with "Dude, I'm in therapy. Can I call you right back?"

When you disclose, you may be surprised at how many other people also have the disorder and would like to talk to you about it. But if you are holding back, then your instinct may be telling you that you are dealing with some potentially judgmental people.

In the last issue, I wrote about typical

scenarios people with ADHD face when they are put in a position to defend the disorder and how they manage it. Here are some additional examples.

**Doubts about adult diagnosis:
"You didn't have a problem as a kid,
why do you have this now?"**

Depending on how old an adult is now, the diagnosis may not have been very common back when he or she was a child or adolescent. Baby boomers certainly had the symptoms, but didn't receive accurate diagnosis and treatment. But regardless of a person's generation, many supports were in place during their childhood years. Because they had fewer responsibilities and managed fewer details, their childhood ADHD was easier to manage.

**Assertions like: If more kids played
outside, there would be fewer
diagnoses of ADHD, which is caused
because kids watch TV too much.**

There have been some studies indicating that children with ADHD see improvement when they participate in outdoor activities. John Ratey's book *Spark* looks at the effects of exercise on the brain, and *Last Child in the Woods* by Richard Louv makes a strong case for the importance of unstructured outdoor activities for child development. You could respond, "There have been headlines about too much TV causing trouble with attention span and distraction, but they were talking about the distractibility we all struggle with. A diagnosis of ADHD means that symptoms of inattention and inability to tune out distraction are severe enough to be an impairment and occur in a variety of settings. That's very different from the effects of too much technology."


**What if the
naysayer is your
spouse? And he/she doesn't want
your child labeled—or treated?**

People are afraid of labels, sometimes

with good reason. But the child has ADHD whether we acknowledge it or not. Often the best route is to have a third party try to educate your spouse; most likely he or she is tired of hearing it from you.

You could try to have your spouse talk it over with someone he or she respects or go to a well-regarded professional. Perhaps you could introduce some reading material on the subject. When I was a new mom and wanted my husband to read articles on parenting, someone told me to take all the sports magazines out of the bathroom and replace them with books about babies.

You could also bargain for open-mindedness on this topic in exchange for the same deal on the topic of your spouse's choice. For instance, your spouse will read some literature or watch a video on ADHD for a specific amount of time and you will do the same on the topic of his or her choice.

I have found adults with ADHD to be a good source of insight about childhood issues. Often they inspire a sense of urgency to address ADHD symptoms in childhood because of the impact that the lack of a timely diagnosis had on their lives. There are several books and videos by adults with ADHD on the market, and adults with ADHD often speak at CHADD meetings and conferences. 

Marie Paxson, CHADD's immediate past president, is the mother of two grown children with ADHD. Over the years, she has been on the receiving end of many myths, misconceptions, and judgmental remarks. Sometimes these were handled with diplomacy, sometimes not.



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