

"He Reminds Me of Me"

by Karen K. Lowry, RN, MSN

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD with ADHD may be the hardest thing to do. When you don't have it, but the other members of your family have the symptoms and impairments that result from an invisible wiring difference, it's hard to grasp what really makes them tick!

But I often think that it's even more difficult for my fourteen-year-old to understand himself. I believe the oppositional defiance he shows when encountering academic challenges is rooted in self-esteem deficits. A relationship in his life has begun to enlighten me.

Sam is a fourteen-year-old boy who attends a school for learning differences with Jon. They have quite a friendship. Sam has shown Jon the beautiful brilliance of being an entrepreneur. Jon tells me about how his friend runs a business selling video games on Amazon. Together, these two gifted children monitor this business—at times during school hours. They both keep a close eye on the stock market, using their very handy iPhones.


But in addition to the respect Jon has for Sam, there is something else. Sam's impulsivity and hyperactivity get in the way of classroom expectations. From Jon's point of view, teachers can at times be intolerant. Once Sam was so frustrated that he ran to a classroom win-

dow to jump out. The teacher was aghast... and Jon ran to Sam's side to pull him away.

He did face some unknown disciplinary measures. But often, the negative, disdainful looks and behaviors from teachers or students do the most damage to how Jon views himself. How do I know? Because, through his words, I have finally figured out why Jon defends this friend so vehemently: "He reminds me of me. He gets in trouble as much as I do. People don't understand him."

It seems that Jon is gentler on his friend Sam than he is on himself, though. He will always verbally defend Sam to his peers. No one is allowed to speak badly of Sam or exclude him from activities. The two boys once listened in on a conversation that included negative statements about Sam and how he should not be included in a special lunch. Jon was there to defend and protect his friend once again.

In this young friendship between two kids with ADHD, I have seen an ability to accept. I have also seen the boys' genius in figuring out that, despite the impairments that rear their ugly heads in the school setting, they have gifts and they really do have something to offer this world. I am proud of my son, who displays so much courage

for his age as he defends his friend's behaviors to his peers. And I am so pleased that, for now, he has found a way to feel good about himself through his friendship with Sam. 


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It's Never Too Late

by Mike Perkins

UNTIL RECENTLY, "friend" was not a regular word in my son's vocabulary. As a child in and out of foster care, he lived in many places with many people. Frequent moves and inconsistent care, exacerbated by untreated ADHD, was not a formula for fond memories with good buddies. As you can imagine, Louie (not his real name) had a lot of catching up to do because of his lack of experiences. Even though he is bright, funny, friendly, and athletic, he had lots of gaps in his understanding of protocols and making friends. He was beyond the age of arranging playdates. He was the new kid in middle school, and his ADHD wasn't effectively treated with medication.

We feared we were too late.

Things seemed to be moving along adequately at home for awhile, but the demands of school became overwhelming. We discovered that being educators did not adequately prepare us for being the parents of a child with ADHD. The most accurate descriptors of our household by this time were stress, conflict, and hopelessness. My wife and I were waking up every day with a constant feeling of dread and helplessness over what direction the day might take. What would happen on a moment's notice to 



disrupt life? How many hours would be wasted in arguments or de-escalating out-of-control behavior? Our anxiety was further heightened by continually witnessing our son desperately trying to manage the personal struggle that individuals with ADHD experience every hour of every day. Forming and maintaining relationships were a constant strain. Although ADHD as a medical condition directly affected our son, its indirect impact certainly consumed the entire family. Our daughters became resentful over losing time with us and the general atmosphere in the house.

We began a process of educating our son about a year ago, and within that time have experienced a dramatic decline of conflict in our home. We taught Louie about ADHD, self-

responsibility, and self-advocacy. We discovered how to de-stress the micromanagement he needs while promoting independence, and he is appreciative of the help and the strategies we teach him. He is more independent now, more compliant (including with chores and schoolwork), and more accepting of his situation and the non-negotiable things that he has to do every day to treat his condition. Now, there are more opportunities to laugh and spend enjoyable time together.

The journey has been difficult, yet very rewarding. Louie is learning to self-reflect and is beginning to anticipate consequences. He has an increased connectivity at home and school. His sisters no longer want to leave home (just

kidding) and more than occasionally find him endearing and funny. He is on the football team, had his pick of invitations to go sledding yesterday, and a girl has been calling (too much if you ask me). He has an expectation of success and he knows he has family and friends to support him along the way. 🗨️

*An assistant principal who has worked with children of all ages either as an administrator, teacher or coach, **Mike Perkins** is the coauthor of *Empowering Teens and Pre-teens with ADHD to Succeed Not Just Survive*. As a speaker, his passion is to share the strategies that have yielded such positive results for his son who is diagnosed with ADHD.*

What More Could a Parent Ask For?

by Jeanne Kraus

CULTIVATING FRIENDSHIPS is a difficult task for many kids in elementary school. If your child happens to have ADHD, well, buckle your seat belts. You're in for a bumpy ride to adulthood. I'm speaking from years of experience. My son, Cory, was diagnosed with ADHD when he was six years old.

Many children with ADHD get along pretty well with adults one-on-one. We always thought of Cory as a "little old man" because of his advanced vocabulary and adult observations. But put him in a group of his peers, and problems often erupted.

My observations throughout his life, and lives of other children I have worked with as an elementary school teacher, is that many of the kids don't know how to approach other children socially.

They may be intrusive, invading the body space of other children. They may need to touch other kids constantly and talk in louder voices to be heard. Taking turns can be a problem and impulsive comments don't win them any congeniality awards. Not meaning to, they annoy other kids.

Children with ADHD need a lot of guidance on the home

front in making friends. For many, team sports are not a good choice. Cory tried soccer, but had a great deal of difficulty focusing on the game, preferring to remain on the inactive side of the field to avoid the soccer players. Bowling in noncompetitive leagues and karate lessons were better choices for him. Cub Scouts and Indian Guides also worked well, since there was parental guidance.

I have always recommended that kids just have one friend over at a time. I always wanted the child to come to my house, so that I could monitor what was happening with Cory and his friend. I also practiced with him. He learned what he could say and do to help him with appropriate interactions.

Making friendships was just another set of skills that I had to help him learn, just like arithmetic and grammar. Social skills were reviewed before school, playtime, and in casual conversation.

All of the guidance we gave Cory throughout his formative years has paid off. He is now twenty-nine, married, and works for Apple as a Mac Genius. The best part: He has a particular strength in dealing with customers and is well-liked by all who know him. He is compassionate and caring to people who need help. What more could a parent ask for? 🗨️

Jeanne Kraus is a mother, a teacher, and the author of *Cory Stories: A Kid's Book About Living With ADHD* (Magination Press) and *Annie's Plan: Taking Charge of Homework and Schoolwork* (Magination Press).

