



What Does the Future Hold for Our Children with ADHD?

by Chris A. Zeigler Dendy, MS

EVER WONDER what the future holds for a child who has ADHD? Well, you'll find out if you've lived as long as I have. I've followed four sets of youth with ADHD; some for ten years, others twenty, and the last group for forty years. Luckily, I've had the opportunity to watch our three children grow up and cope successfully with ADHD. And now I'm proudly watching our five grandchildren launch into young adulthood.

Several of my son Alex's high school classmates hung out at the "only unfunded ADHD drop-in center" in the country. One by one I referred all of them for treatment.

Quite by chance, I've also followed eleven teens for over ten years from early teens into late twenties. These youngsters were featured in the first edition of our *Bird's-Eye View* book. For the new, third edition of *Bird's-Eye View*, I found eleven of the original twelve teens who contributed to the book. This group constitutes my "accidental longitudinal study." These children were luckier than most: Their parents educated themselves about ADHD. So most of these young people were educated about their ADHD, received academic supports at home if needed, and took medication. This story is a celebration of what our children can be if their ADHD is properly treated.

Let me summarize some of the obvious lessons I've learned.

- **The earlier you intervene the better the outcome.** The second generation (our grandchildren) fared far better in school than their parents did. My grandchildren were diagnosed at a young age and started on medication. Of course, their parents were much better educated about ADHD than the average parent.
- **Most youth will face significant challenges on their way to young adulthood, but ultimately they cope well.** The secret here is having unconditional unfailing parental love and providing comprehensive treatment.
- **You don't have to be a college graduate to be successful.** And if your child does attend college, it may take longer than four years to graduate.
- **Nearly all of these youth prefer jobs that are hands-on and involve variety in daily responsibilities.**

Here's an update on all four groups:

- **Our children.** All three are productive adults; two are married and have children. They are college graduates, although two of them were on the six- or eight-year graduation plan.
- **Alex's classmates.** We have kept up with four of Alex's closest friends; two of them are featured complete with an update in the third edition of *Teenagers with ADD, ADHD, and Executive Function Deficits* (due late 2016). Although most of them had had their struggles, they're all doing well today. Lewis, the high school class clown, was a radio DJ for several years. Today he is the master of ceremonies and crowd entertainer for the Atlanta hockey team, as well as the supervisor of building construction for an Atlanta-

based company. Shawn, a former marine, is the national director of sales and top salesmen for his industrial battery company.

- **Our grandchildren.** Two are college graduates, one is a college senior, and two are still in high school.
- **Youth featured in *A Bird's-Eye View ... Ten Years Later*.** This informal longitudinal study shows most of the teens have done well. Of course, their young adult years were not without challenges. Today, they are involved in a wide variety of careers: a Le Cordon Bleu chef, a teacher, a minister, a bandleader, and an engineering designer of ejection seats for jets. One student praised their teacher by saying, "I think Mrs. Friedman's face should be on a postage stamp. She makes boring things fun, she does things with a happy heart, and she helps other people even when she's busy."

The final lesson my husband and I learned was to love our children unconditionally, just as they were, and not try to make them a clone of ourselves. I was a straight A student and a driven over-achiever who was a workaholic—and ignorant about ADHD. Of course, that was twenty-five years ago when medication choices were limited and before all the new brain research became available. Tommy, my husband, and I would joke, "Where did these kids come from?" He was a graduate of the US Naval Academy and a successful business executive. Accepting the fact that our children weren't good students like ourselves was really difficult. Before our sons were diagnosed at ages twelve and twenty respectively, we thought they just weren't trying hard enough.

As a result of the painful struggles our family experienced, my husband and I have been on a mission to help educate other families about the impact of ADHD and executive function deficits. We hope our experiences will help other parents avoid the mistakes we made and also avoid sleepless nights worrying about the future. To accomplish our mission, we have done ADHD training around the country and internationally. In addition, I have written four books on ADHD and executive function deficits, and we produced two DVDs; one for fathers and one for children, teens, and young adults. 📺

Chris A. Zeigler Dendy, MS, is a former educator, school psychologist, and mental health professional with forty years of experience. She was inducted into CHADD's Hall of Fame for her outstanding contributions to the field in 2006. Dendy is the author of *Teenagers with ADD & ADHD: A Guide for Parents and Teaching Teens with ADD, ADHD, & Executive Function Deficits* (Woodbine, 2006) and *Teaching Teens With ADD, ADHD & Executive Function Deficits: A Quick Reference Guide for Teachers and Parents* (second revised edition, Woodbine, 2011). She is the coauthor of *A Bird's-Eye View of Life with ADHD & EFD: Ten Years Later* (3rd edition, 2015). Dendy, along with her son, Alex, created a popular DVD titled *Real Life ADHD! A DVD Survival Guide for Children and Teens*. Her website is www.chrisdendy.com.