

## Our First Year with ADHD

by K.C. Freeman

**OUR YEAR BEGAN** in the psychologist's office. My husband and I sat in a mix of shock, pride, relief, and sadness. The doctor had just told us our seven-year-old son had ADHD, dyslexia, and dysgraphia—with a touch of genius. It was hard to hear. Yet it did give us the explanation we were seeking, and hey, he had an extraordinary verbal IQ.

In the office, we remained calm, tried to listen to the doctor's analysis, and peppered him with questions. It wasn't until the ride home that we began to process the information. I saw a long, rough road ahead and became a little teary. My husband saw answers and a direction and was glad. It turned out we both had it right.

It's been an interesting year and, like the

diagnosis, it's been a mixed bag. Of course, there are the behavior problems, the school problems, the social problems. But we've discovered, much to our surprise, there are a lot of positive aspects to ADHD.

We've had a lot of frustrations, but a lot of triumphs too. We've done a lot of learning and some teaching as well. Our son, Jake, has made incredible strides.

In the first weeks and months after we were given the diagnosis, I began reading all about ADHD, how it affects school and life. I felt overwhelmed and lost in it all. How was I ever going to be able to handle this seemingly all-encompassing situation?

The first thing I had to address was school. Jake's second-grade teacher found him irritating and did not see his intelligence or even his fantastic, fun personality. Now it was April and I was not about to open up to her about all this personal information. So, when she suggested the best thing we could do for Jake was to have him repeat second grade (even though he was very successful academically), I politely refused and we muddled through the rest of the year.

Meanwhile, I made an appointment with an Orton-Gillingham-based tutoring center recommended by the psychologist who'd tested Jake.

### Soldiering on

After receiving the psychologist's written report on Jake a few weeks after our office visit, I tried to soldier on. It was difficult to see it there in black and white—all the problems and hurdles and steps to be taken. It seemed too much and I was confused.

I went back to the psychologist's office with two pages of questions in-hand to gain some understanding and much-needed direction. That appointment helped immensely. I came home no longer dwelling on why we were in this situation—just how we were going to deal with it.

It was (and sometimes still is) a frus-

trating process. I had to think about doctors, medications, tutors—and third grade loomed. I needed to get it organized during the summer so third grade wasn't the disaster that second grade was.

I found a psychiatrist and Jake began taking ADHD meds. At first the medication seemed okay, but after three weeks he began having huge crying fits, attacking his three siblings and even tearing his room apart in a rage. We stopped that medication and tried another.

This process repeated several times with dosage adjustments and medication changes. Each time we changed, it was very disrupting. Sometimes Jake couldn't sleep, sometimes he became zombielike, sometimes he would fall apart during the transition period of the medication.

We're still tweaking his meds after a year. We've learned to listen to Jake about how he feels on the medications, as he's now aware of the differences and can tell us if it helps or not.

Soon after we started the medication, Jake began meeting with a specialized language tutor three times a week. It was summertime and he did not love going.

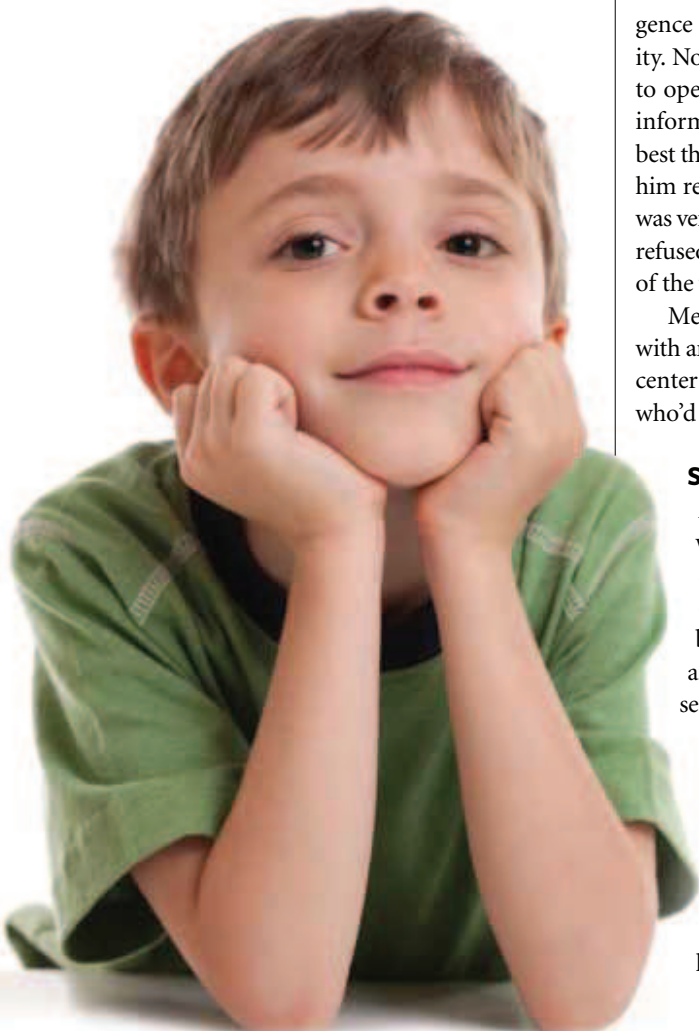
A week or so into his tutoring sessions, he flew into a rage on the way home and then disintegrated in sobs telling me how unfair it all was. Everyone else was normal, but not him, he was different and he had to go to tutoring when everyone else was playing, he cried. I cried with him. I agreed and I told him so.

We established a reward system for going willingly to tutoring and continued with the sessions. After a month or so he began to like it. He was feeling successful for the first time in a long while.

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**K.C. Freeman** has four great kids.

Her youngest son, Jake, was diagnosed with ADHD, dyslexia, dysgraphia, and an extremely high verbal IQ in 2010. Having always been a pessimist, K.C. was surprised to find the upside of ADHD. She welcomes your comments and stories at [adhdupside.com](http://adhdupside.com).



### **Hurdles and strides**

The new school year was another hurdle. Before the year started, I came up with a plan for Jake's third-grade year. I met with the school administrators and luckily they were willing to accommodate most of my wishes, even without a 504 plan in place yet.

I requested he not go to school full-time as his psychologist and tutor thought it was too much for him at that point. I didn't want him to go to gym or art as those were classes where he would surely feel like a failure.

In the end, Jake came home early three times a week while the rest of the class went to gym and art. Also,



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four days a week, Jake would leave his classroom and meet his tutor in a small room down the hall for an hour.

I had decided to be as open as I could about Jake's learning problems without sacrificing too much of his privacy. It was often difficult to balance protecting Jake by making sure those adults dealing with him were aware of his difficulties, while also protecting him from the embarrassment of everyone knowing he needed special help.

The school year has gone fairly smoothly. I'm sure Jake's teacher could do with a little less communication from me, but working together has really helped Jake. I tell him he is lucky because he has his own team—me, his teacher, his tutor, and his doctors—all working together to make sure he succeeds. He loves that idea.

I keep the teacher and tutor informed as to any medication or behavior changes so they can be prepared. They in turn, give me honest feedback about how he behaves and focuses at school. His teacher even called one day to say although he was being a great student, his personality was disappearing. She wanted to let me know she thought his medication dosage might be too high.

We also make sure to keep Jake in the loop. So he not only feels cared for, but feels some control over his own well-being. School has become a much more positive experience and Jake is growing in confidence.

He told me recently that he's kind of glad he has ADHD, because if it weren't for ADHD he would never have met his tutor or his doctors, who he's come to love so much.

That comment made me realize that, remarkably, there are a lot of good things associated with having ADHD. Jake is correct, of course, we've met some amazing people we never would have known. But it's more than that. Jake is who he is partly due to having ADHD. His brain is different, so he is different. He is surprising, funny, witty, empathetic, and kind. I don't think he would be the same amazing kid if he didn't have ADHD.

It's been quite a year. Jake has made incredible strides, improving up to seven hundred percent in some areas of testing. He is much happier and much more accepting of his situation. He still doesn't like being different and still struggles socially, but he has begun to see the upside of ADHD—and so have his parents. **A**