

How to Embrace Your ADHD: A Teen's Perspective

by Grace Friedman

ACCORDING TO THE CDC, I became one of about six million children nationwide with ADHD when I was diagnosed at twelve years old. As I was soon to learn, like most, I was left to my own devices to understand, manage and adapt to my “disorder.” Unfortunately, I learned more about how my body works at my first dental visit when I was five than I did when



at twelve I was given medication for a neurobiological disorder. As a teen with ADHD, I can say firsthand that it can be terribly difficult being different, and living with ADHD can be very challenging on many levels. Any teen reading this article will readily agree. That said, having ADHD does not mean we are not capable of great success. My ADHD is fairly severe, but I have learned to adapt and thrive despite my “disorder.”

If you have ADHD and you are reading this article, you should know that ultimately you have two choices: Ignore or accept your ADHD. Ignoring your ADHD sounds like the easy way to proceed, but in fact it is a hundred times harder than learning to accept who you are and move forward in life bravely. In reality, if you do not accept and manage your ADHD, it *will* manage you.

There was no way I could manage my ADHD if I did not accept myself first. Accepting your ADHD is the first and most important step to taking control and becoming who you want to be in the future. Although it is hard and frustrating having ADHD, and challenging to not compare yourself to your friends and other kids without ADHD, you need to run your own race and focus on yourself and your destination in life. ADHD is part of how you are created as an individual and should not be categorized as a flaw. Coming to terms with your

unique mind and how you act is the first and most important step. We kids, teens, and young adults with ADHD (or “ADDYTeens” as I like to call us) are part of a very large community. We learn and function a bit differently. We often find it challenging to discuss openly how we feel about having ADHD. To accept yourself as you are, you must learn to open up and share your thoughts and feelings and experiences. Once you “let it out” having ADHD is not scary anymore.

Beyond “acceptance” of your ADHD, learning to thrive with it requires some self “discovery.” What makes you tick? What excites and inspires you? Discover your natural gifts and talents by analyzing your hobbies and interests. Every ADDYTeen should work on pursuing projects and activities that utilize and improve your natural gifts. Many people with ADHD have succeeded and achieved great things. Every person has a unique set of talents, we are all challenged by various things in life and we all have a unique brain. It is just a matter of identifying those gifts, refining them into talents and visualizing your future. That is “the nature of the race.” If you are in direct competition with others who do not have ADHD, it may feel as if you will never “win.” It may feel as if racing makes no sense. This is a trap, and it is not productive. You can not win if you do not suit up. Read on.

Running “my race” took a lot of perseverance, courage and support. I had to reach out and get what I needed to succeed (and it is okay to reach out for help in this process of self-discovery). In high school, I filed for an IEP and received accommodations which helped me tremendously. I had teachers, friends, and family on my team, helping me refine my goals and chart my path and cheer me on as I race forward in life. As you run your own personal race at your desired speed remember you are not in it alone. Most importantly, there is no shame in asking for help along the way.

Focusing on your own path is tricky and sometimes very challenging, but that is nothing to be frightened of. Look at me, I did it. I constantly focused on and



struggled with my weaknesses, and I never focused on my strengths and identified my passions. I was stuck. With some support, I channeled my strengths and identified what made me “tick.” Once I publicly accepted my ADHD, it became easier to cope with challenges and share my successes. Just as I learned that coping with my ADHD is “winning,” I discovered my passion to help people “win” by solving their problems and coping with their personal struggles. Because I do not hide my ADHD, I do not feel shame in it. Others sadly do. This upset me greatly and inspired me to become an advocate for other teens with ADHD. Helping people comes easy to me and it soon became a goal of mine to make a difference. Now I knew where I was racing toward and had a vision of what I could achieve.

When I was just fifteen, I decided to write a guide for kids, teens and young adults with ADHD so they could better understand, adapt to and thrive with ADHD. It took me two years of very hard work, but writing *Embracing your ADHD* motivated me to continue on my own path and genuinely focus on an area where I could achieve great success. Talking about ADHD with others was easy for me, so I interviewed dozens of other kids, teens and young adults with ADHD to learn and record their experiences and observations. This helped me learn how to write proficiently, and led to many more opportunities. My website—addyteen.com—has been visited by thousands of kids, teens, and young adults with ADHD all over the world. My work and my guide *Embracing Your*

ADHD have been featured in the press, on TV, and I have been invited to blog for the Huffington Post. The great folks at CHADD asked me to write this article just to share my experiences and ideas with others with ADHD. There is no magic, this was hard work and nothing of real value comes free, but these pursuits are interesting to me, they inspire me, and that allows me to be successful. It was only the change in my attitude about who I am and what I could achieve that powered me forward in my race. Remember ADDYTEens, it is easier to do work you love doing.

After accepting your ADHD and discovering your natural talents and abilities, the last step is to pursue your goals with great energy and bravery. Writing *Embracing Your ADHD* enabled me to focus on what I wanted to do in the future. ADDYTEens need more support and motivation to get started and complete what’s on their plate but what better motivation than success itself? Once you discover your passion you gain speed when doing the things you like. Newton stated in the law of motion, that an object in motion tends to stay in motion, and an object at rest tends to stay at rest. This resonated with me because once I gained momentum with my guide and publicly advocating ADHD, I did not want to stop. Pursuing what you love is fun and once you are rolling it gets easier for you to enjoy it and become more proficient.

I am still running my race and focusing on my personal path which inspired me to guide kids who get lost and left out. My guide, *Embracing Your ADHD*, provides ADDYTEens with a “roadmap” to help them un-

derstand, manage, accept, and eventually thrive with their ADHD. I wrote ADDYTeens with a “teen-to-teen tone” because it is crucial for ADDYTeens to understand their condition and not ignore it or feel shame in it. *Embracing Your ADHD* is an easy read and I wished someone had given it to me in middle school or high school.

There has been a great deal of controversy and misunderstanding about ADHD in the press, which only makes teens with ADHD feel more stigmatized. It is crucial that ADDYTeens, just like me, are not hesitant or afraid to talk about their condition. ADDYTeens have to learn a different way or spend more time on certain activities or repeat tasks to get it right. Children and ADDYTeens have special qualities that they can use to become successful in their lives and my mission is to reinforce this point—loudly. Those of us in the ADDYTeen community must ignite a conversation and share our experiences to erase any stigma and remove any sense of shame from living with ADHD.

As any ADDYTeen will explain, understanding, managing, and coping with ADHD requires great determination and persever-

ance. Speaking personally, facing my own limitations has only made me stronger and helped me to discover my natural gifts. My ADHD has given me purpose and clarity as I pursue my own goals. I have learned to embrace my own ADHD, and it has become the engine powering my journey to become a source of strength, inspiration and comfort to those feeling stuck or challenged by difficult obstacles. Learn to embrace your ADHD, and run your own race. **A**

Grace Friedman is an eighteen-year-old incoming freshman at the University of Puget Sound in Washington. She was born and raised in Alameda, California, just across the bay from San Francisco. When Grace was in elementary school she started to experience what she now knows are the early signs of ADHD, and when she was diagnosed she was frustrated and surprised at how little “teen-friendly” information was available about her condition. Grace decided to “do something about this” by publishing her teen-friendly digital guidebook, *Embracing Your ADHD*, and setting up her website, addyteen.com. Grace has been interviewed by Attention magazine, blogs for the Huffington Post, and has been interviewed on television about her advocacy work on behalf of teens and young adults with ADHD.

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