

Introduction

When I was seventeen, my psychiatrist suggested that I write a book on my personal experiences of suffering from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). I did not give the idea a second thought. The answer was a plain and simple “No!” I did not want to talk about it. I didn’t even want to think about my personal experiences with ADHD.

I was sick and tired of always being looked upon as that “crazy little child” who seemed to be a burden to everyone. My school life was hell, not just for me but for my parents as well. Not to mention the teachers whom I challenged every day in the classroom. I hated that I was different and at times even hated myself for who I was and what I was doing.

When gathering my research material from the many schools where I was a student, I was embarrassed by a lot of the terrible things I had done. But at the time I did not know what I was doing. I was often confused, not understanding my own actions. I was depressed a lot of the time in my early school days. As I got older it became easier to deal with my problems. I overcame them in a number of ways, including using medication and self-taught techniques that I will discuss in Part Two in greater detail.

Now that I’m nineteen, I look back on my short life, and my childhood seems like a faraway story. I still have no idea why I did things that normal society sees as abnormal. If you or your child has ADD/ADHD, you will understand what I mean when

I say abnormal behavior—those fits of anger and impulsive behavior unleashed on family members that seem to have no reason or specific purpose. It is very hard for parents to deal with and understand why their child is behaving in this abnormal manner. This book, I hope, will help you understand why your child acts in this uncontrolled way.

It was not until I turned nineteen that I seriously considered the challenge of writing this book. After watching a story on children with ADD/ADHD on an Australian current affairs program, I felt that I had to write this book to help other people suffering with what I have endured throughout my life. However, again I put it off. One day it will happen, I thought to myself. I didn't have the time—I had to study at college, and I was going out a lot. But it was really an excuse. I just didn't care enough, I guess. Or maybe it was that I was still embarrassed by my disorder? Most probably a combination of the two.

A young boy down the road from me has ADHD. For the past couple of years my mother has been saying, "Why don't you go talk to the boy's mother?" I usually brushed it aside with "Yeah, maybe later." Then one day I decided to talk to the mother. She was pretty upset with her son's progress at school because he was behind in reading and math. I told her I could not read a short sentence until I was eleven.

It always seems to surprise people when I tell them things about my life at school and home. They often look at me with amazement and even confusion. I believe this is because now I do not act like a *freak*, as my sister called me when I was younger. However, I can understand where this confusion comes from. If

you'd said to my parents when I was ten, "Your son will graduate from high school and do well," they would probably have bet their house that this would not happen; if you'd told them their son would go on to college and write a bestselling book, they would have probably bet their lives on that not happening. Well, it did, and this book will tell you about the remarkable turnaround in my life. I hope it will help your child achieve the best results possible.

I have no accredited medical knowledge of ADD/ADHD. However, I do not see how so-called medical experts can really understand ADD/ADHD without actually living with it themselves. I am not knocking the medical experts, because my doctor is excellent and does understand ADD/ADHD in great depth. But the strategies that I developed myself were invaluable. Instead of ending up in a juvenile detention center, I made it to college.

However, I have skimmed through many books on ADD/ADHD, and they make me very angry because they are often filled with medical mumbo jumbo that really does not help the treatment of your child with ADD/ADHD. They do help partly in understanding what ADD/ADHD is, in a medical sense, which is always a good start for parents. But those books rarely contain techniques and strategies for dealing with ADD/ADHD in daily life. I searched many libraries and on the Internet to find a book by a young person who has ADD/ADHD, and I could not find one. This was a surprise to me. I could not believe that someone had not written a book on their experiences and how they overcame their problems in everyday situations. Well, now someone has, and I guess it's about time!

This book will not give you the answers to all the problems you will come across in managing your child's condition, but it will

help. Many parents feel isolated. They feel depressed, confused, and guilty—and of course angry and frustrated. My parents have lost a number of friends throughout my life as a result of my behavior. People would not invite my family to parties and gatherings because I caused too many problems. Along with this, my parents would cut themselves off from people because they were embarrassed by my behavior. My dad told me that they were invited to a lot of parties—but only once! Narrow-minded people who did not understand made comments such as, “Leave him with me and I will give him a good belting and pull him in line.” My parents were often accused of being bad parents who could not control their son. This was not true, because my sister, Adelaide, who is two years older than me, is the most polite and nicest person you could ever meet. In my younger years my parents took me to see a number of psychiatrists who said it was my parents’ fault and that there was nothing wrong with me. How wrong they were!

Now, getting back to the little boy who lives down the street. After offering to help him with his schoolwork, I was quite worried the first time I went to his house. I did not know what to expect. I thought I might have bitten off more than I could chew. Well, the first day I went there his mother showed me his schoolwork: he had to play simple word games that promoted word recognition.

It often took his mother over an hour to get him to do his homework. This hour was mostly taken up with his erratic behavior that included swearing, yelling—basically everything except doing his homework. The first time I went over to their house it took me only fifteen minutes to get him to do his work. I promised to play a Nintendo game with him after he was done.

He had done his work and he knew it, and now he was playing with his Nintendo. His mother told him to get up and do his homework. I told her that he had done it and done it twice. This was accomplished without medication, through techniques I have developed while suffering from this condition. I get great pleasure out of helping people with problems related to ADHD. I enjoy it more because I know how isolated these children feel at school and at home.

I will discuss a number of issues in this book, including picking the right school for your child and selecting the right teacher, if possible. I went to six schools and I know what works and what doesn't. I will talk about other issues, including parenting techniques; anger management; homework, which can be basically impossible for some parents; discipline, what works and what will never work. I know my parents tried everything, including medication, which is always a hot topic in the ADD/ADHD network. I will also discuss relationships among parents and siblings and the child with ADD/ADHD. I hope you will find this book useful in the management of your child. I would just like to add that this book will be most useful only if you are prepared to put in lots of tiring and frustrating hours of work with your child!

I wish you and your child the greatest success in overcoming this challenge, and always remember that the rewards are priceless.

Best wishes,
Benjamin H. Polis