

Living, Laughing and Parenting Your ADHD Teen

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I never realized that I was incontinent until I was grocery shopping with my then, 13 years old, ADHD son, Brian (names have been changed to protect the guilty). I was bagging my groceries and Brian was unloading the shopping cart. One by one, the items came down the conveyor belt: milk, eggs, cereal; two boxes of Depends. “Brian, what in the world?” But Brian was cheerfully talking with an elderly neighbor who was behind him in the checkout line. “Brian!” I hissed, frantically. “Is there a problem, ma’am?” the cashier asked politely. Trying to ignore the Depends, I shook my head, no, and continued to bag. The voice of my elderly neighbor interrupted my task. “I know some good exercises for bladder control, dear”, she offered sympathetically. “Your son says that you have quite a problem”. Mortified and not wanting to call any further attention to myself, I smiled tightly in the neighbor’s direction, paid the cashier and began to slink out of the store (with Brian smartly following a safe distance behind me). “Wait a minute, ma’am”, the cashier yelled, “You’ve earned a store coupon for your next purchase of Depends”.

Parenting a teen who has ADHD can be a challenge that’s not for the faint of heart ... the unrelenting impulsivity, poor decision-making and difficulty with reading social cues, lack of focus to things that don’t appeal to them (think homework, here); excessive risk-taking, and hyperactivity... the list just goes on and on. Any one of these ADHD traits can tax your parenting skills, but when your teen has several of these symptoms, even the most experienced parent can be overwhelmed. Things can and will get better if you can make a commitment to using humor and changing your perspective on ADHD.

In order for you to change your perspective on ADHD, take a moment to put aside all of the negative facts that you have learned, and consider this instead: having ADHD can be a great asset (stop smirking here, please). Many successful people who have been diagnosed with ADHD, from company CEOs, to Olympic gold medalists to celebrated authors, have attributed their success to having ADHD, because it challenged them to think creatively and outside the box. What would happen if you looked at ADHD through a new lens and viewed your teen as having an excess of creativity and an ability to think of alternative solutions to problems? Think back to my son and the grocery store episode. In retrospect, I could view it as being humiliating (truth be told, I was embarrassed at the time) or I could view it as being creative, humorous and educational since it taught me that I must always be one step ahead of my son and to always be prepared for the unexpected.

A primary task of parenting any adolescent is to help them develop their talents and build upon their strengths while not succumbing to negative peer pressure or social influences. That’s a daunting task to accomplish, even when looking at ADHD with a positive perspective! Well, what if your adolescent’s talent is writing and his strength is his intelligence? Blake E.S. Taylor was such a teen: when he was seventeen years old, with encouragement from his mom and stepdad, Blake wrote his memoirs: *ADHD & Me: What I Learned from Lighting Fires at the Dinner Table* (Taylor, Blake, E.S. 2008. CA. New Harbinger Press). Blake is straightforward in detailing his challenges with ADHD and the impact that it had on his family, but he also attributes his success to having parents who had a different perspective on ADHD. Not many parents encourage their teen to write his memoirs during their senior year of high school, amid college application deadlines. And while not many parents could have found humor in

“lighting fires at the dinner table”, cultivating your sense of humor will help you to create a new perspective on ADHD.

Viewing ADHD with a new perspective can happen when you are able to reframe your teen’s negative scenarios in positive terms. For example, despite your best efforts, maybe your adolescent spends hours hyper focusing on video games. Let’s face it; you’re tired of arguing with him/her about the amount of time spent using the computer. At least, you reason, he’s at home and relatively safe. By shifting into your new perspective on ADHD, you’ll be able to view this scenario in strength-based terms. The once negative picture (hyper focusing on video games) will become: *paying attention to detail and strategizing*. This new perspective sounds as if your adolescent may be on his/her way to a career in computer engineering or environmental design!

ADHD can only limit your teen if you view it in negative terms. Rethink limitations as challenges: ones that can inspire your teen to approach obstacles creatively and to think “outside the box”.