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A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE OF LIVING WITH A CHILD WITH ADHD

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) brings challenges for the whole family, not just the child or children diagnosed with the disorder. The core symptoms of ADHD are inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, characterised by fidgeting; difficulty paying attention, being easily distracted; always in motion, as if being driven by a motor; and difficulty controlling impulses which can lead to interrupting conversations and excessive talking.

Before our son was diagnosed with ADHD, we spent years at breaking point, emotionally and physically, tired from the constant demands and physicality of living with a child who ignored our requests, was always in motion, and impulsively reacting to internal desires and his external environment. We experienced feelings of insecurity as parents, questioning our parenting techniques. Were we being too hard in giving out consequences, or were we giving in to demands being made because of the screaming and shouting from our son when he didn't get his own way or pay attention to the instructions given. Both our sons experienced negative parenting more than positive and supportive parenting from us because

of the intense and disruptive emotions swirling around.

Our eldest son experienced bullying when playing with his younger brother; simple games could lead to him being hit repeatedly because of a perceived offence, an apology not timeously given, or pain caused through an accident. He also received numerous consequences from us for irritating or distracting his younger brother when we needed focus and attention, especially in moments of pressure to get to school, appointments, or even to sit down at the dinner table just so that dinner could finish within an hour.

As parents our ability to communicate with each other regressed as we became accusatory and judgemental towards one another. We saw in each other the parent we didn't want to be. We found ourselves arguing over our parenting more than partnering together to get the best results for the family, especially in the stressful moments of trying to communicate with our son when he wasn't listening to instructions or was behaving in an inappropriate manner.

As a family we found ourselves isolated, not wanting to attend events or meet up with friends just in case there was an incident, and our son

threw a 'tantrum', which was how we viewed his behaviour at the time. We noticed that there were issues within his class at school where he was being isolated, and negative and disruptive behaviour was being highlighted by his classmates. We were called into meetings with the principal and teacher to discuss his oppositional behaviour, inability to sit still, and walking out of the classroom when he desired.

In April 2022 we were given a pamphlet on the indicators of ADHD and our son ticked almost all the boxes. We felt the enormity of the potential diagnosis and yet have never experienced such relief. Finally, we understood what our son was experiencing and had something we could work with, in managing his behaviour; and towards, in getting him the help he needed. The process took some time and due to his age, the doctors were not comfortable to initiate medication until he was six years old. Diagnosing a child younger than six years old is more complicated due to the developmental changes that are happening as well as limited attention span.

We decided to approach the diagnosis through more comprehensive

