

Introduction

Friday 3rd November 2006: Daniel's a funny little soul. Having ADHD, he can come across as bolshy, in your face, aggressive, over-confident, energetic and brash, but those who know him well know he is also kind, loving, funny, tender, empathetic, caring and very charming. There's also another side to him too, his autistic side, and that makes him inflexible, insecure and shy – and very much a man of routine.

Looking back, I think I knew there was always something different about Daniel. Even as a baby, he was irritable, moody and inflexible. Where his sister had been content, he was angry; where she slipped easily into a routine, he was unpredictable. At the time I put it down to him being a boy, or a second child, or because I didn't have so much time to spend with him.

So when he was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder at the age of six, it wasn't

really a surprise, but I had no idea what the following 12 years would bring – including battles with schools, two permanent exclusions, an educational tribunal, brushes with the law and the emotional journey that ended with a Statement of Educational Needs and a place in special school.

ADHD has been around forever – the first written record of it dates back to 1755¹ – but it's been diagnosed more frequently in the last 30 years and it often gets a bad press. In fact, many people would have you believe it's a made-up condition, an excuse for a lack of parenting skills. But any parent of a child with ADHD knows it's a real, genuine disability that affects every single aspect of a child's life – and the lives of their friends and family too.

So why am I writing this book? As the parent of a young man with ADHD, I read pretty much everything I could find in a bid to find some answers, some strategies that would make our lives better and give Daniel the chance of a productive, safe and happy future. Many of the books out there are authored by medical professionals and most of them are American, so even when I did find something written from the parent's perspective, it wasn't relevant, as the condition is treated very differently in America. For example, ADHD is more readily diagnosed over there, with medication often the first option, whereas in the UK diagnosis can be hard to get and medication a last resort.

What I needed was a book that outlined a UK mother's experience of ADHD along with tips and advice on how to cope with the demands it places on a family.

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And when I couldn't find anything that fitted the bill, I decided to write it myself.

I kept a diary for many years and those diary entries were indispensable when I was writing this book. One phrase that kept cropping up throughout the diary was 'the boy from hell' – because at his very worst, Daniel was truly hellish. The strange thing is, although I never actually referred to Daniel as the boy from hell anywhere other than in my private diary, his online nickname now is Hell Boy!

What you'll find in this book is our personal experience of ADHD through schooling, medical intervention, the exclusion process and family life. Our case is unique, as is every family with a child with special needs, but I've included some advice on what I've found helpful along the way, and I hope it will be helpful for other families too. If you have, or suspect you have, a child with ADHD, I hope that reading about our experience will show you that you're not alone and that there is help available – although I can guarantee you'll have to fight for it tooth and nail. Above all else, I wanted to show that ADHD is real, it does exist and it can have serious consequences for everyone involved – but there is also a lot of positivity, love and hope for those affected too.