

## How Embarrassing!

### Things we never thought we would say or hear

by Marie S. Paxson

**ALTHOUGH IT HAPPENS TO EVERYONE AT SOME POINT IN THEIR LIVES**, parents of children with AD/HD are more likely to experience the Parenthood Walk of Shame. This is when your child says or does something so absolutely horrifying you want to instantly teleport yourself to another universe. Like the time my young son dumped his cup of punch back into the punchbowl, after deciding he didn't like the taste. Others view your child's actions as a reflection of your parenting skills. Those of us in the AD/HD trenches know that impulsiveness and "act first, think later" is a hallmark of this disorder—but that doesn't make the experience any less embarrassing.

*Devoted to real-life testimonies of coping with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, Attention's newest department made its debut in December 2007. This article is based on a talk given during the volunteer luncheon at CHADD's annual conference in November 2007.*

This article is a recap of some of my experiences, along with those of some anonymous friends (no need to wear a name badge!) as we navigated the complex journey that is known as parenting a child or teen with AD/HD. Keep in mind the Parenthood Walk of Shame may not be a must-see destination, but you will have plenty of company should you be forced to drop by.

When my son was about five years old he had a play date with a friend who had just gotten two gerbils. In the course of the afternoon, Danny's mom let the kids play with them out of the cage, but only when she was present. She eventually told them to put the gerbils away for the rest of the visit and encouraged them to play outdoors. As you may expect, as soon as her back was turned the kids took the gerbils back out of their cages and let them run around the bedroom. This became boring very quickly and the creatures were hard to capture. One of the gerbils jumped into Danny's open bottom dresser drawer and the boys quickly

shut it, mangling the gerbil's tail in the process. Their solution was to put it in the cage and go out and play basketball.

When I returned to get my son from the play date, Danny's mom was pretty upset with the children. As I stood near the cage

with my son, I went into full lecture mode. I covered disobeying house rules, taking advantage of privileges and the pain and suffering of a trusting pet. My future spin-doctor son look at me and said, "Yeah, but now Danny can tell them apart." He had completely missed the point and appeared to be a rather callous individual.

One of my daughter's co-occurring conditions is the tendency toward oppositionality. This is a really tough way to live. There is no parental request that can't be refused, disputed, modified, or completely ignored. This went on for many years. I remember an incident when she was twenty-one years old. At the time, I was working for our family business, coordinating a CHADD chapter, living in a house full of AD/HD, and caring for an elderly relative. We had also had a power outage that lasted three days, and my housework had backed up to an overwhelming amount. I asked my young adult daughter to please empty the dishwasher so that I could get the next two loads of dirty dishes cleaned up. She said, "Yes, but only the top rack." I stopped dead in my tracks. Now some people would have stopped dead in their tracks because this is a ridiculous answer. I stopped dead in my tracks because I had waited twenty-one years to hear the word YES!

These anecdotes have a slightly humorous slant. I really believe that the aspects of AD/HD that either can't be changed, or are going to take a lot of time and energy to change—well, we might as well find them amusing.

Despite the amusing anecdotes this disorder has



brought to my life, there are other aspects that aren't funny at all.

I really thought that if I ever met any judges, police officers, or car impound lot owners it would have been at a barbeque, or a sporting event, or a social occasion. And that has not been the case at all.

CHADD has been very good at helping us realize that AD/HD is a lifespan disorder. They have the lifespan chart that highlights the struggles and challenges that can affect each age group. Initially I looked at the chart and thought, "That stuff will never happen". My children must have looked at the chart and thought, "What a cool to-do list!" because we seem destined to hit every bump on this road.

Another aspect of parenting children with AD/HD is that we often say or hear things we would never have thought possible. I've asked some of my friends to let me share their tales.

## **We never thought we would say:**

***"I will pay for the attorney this time. Any future legal entanglements will be YOUR responsibility."***

I can't believe I actually had to spell this out, but after the second or third contact with the police, it became obvious that there wasn't a lot of advance planning going on.

***"You may only sign YOUR name in the funeral home guest book. If you forget this rule and sign a name that is not rated G, there will be a consequence."***

Can you guess what happened the last time I was busy talking to relatives at a funeral?



**MORE INFO:** The lifespan chart mentioned in this article may be viewed by clicking on the link on CHADD's Web site, [www.chadd.org/attention](http://www.chadd.org/attention); click on the link that reads **AD/HD Across the Lifespan Chart**.



**“Who vacuumed the toilet?”**

I had asked my nine-year-old son to vacuum up the cracker crumbs he left in the bathroom (by the way, who eats in the bathroom?). He put the crumbs in the toilet, but then realized I had asked him to *vacuum the crumbs*—so he did!



She was complaining and threatening to walk out when the nurse came back with this perfect response.

**“That’s OK, Mom. The teacher will give me another math worksheet tomorrow.”**

Apparently my son didn’t see the cumulative effect of not handing in his class work. He viewed it like a conveyor belt and if you didn’t do today’s work... well, there was plenty more where that came from.

So if your life as the parent of a child or teen with AD/HD is turning out differently than you expected, well... you might not enjoy every moment of it, but you will have plenty of company! **A**

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**We never thought we would hear:**

**“The Brussels sprouts I had in rehab were better than this.”**

In a rare moment of culinary creativity I found an amazing recipe for my least favorite vegetable. I was not prepared to hear that a food service company did a better job!

**“Sorry, honey; this is not a drive-through.”**

This was the ER nurse’s response when my oppositional teen grew impatient at the wait to be released from the emergency room.