

Rearview Mirrors



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"You did then, what you knew how to do, and when you knew better, you did better."

— Maya Angelou



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AS I SAT IN AN AUDITORIUM at the CHADD conference listening to an expert on AD/HD share parenting information, the woman beside me started to cry. Although we had never spoken, I knew *exactly* why she was crying.

Most of us who have been around the block a few times have been in her shoes. She had just discovered a piece of information that would have changed the way she managed her child(ren)'s AD/HD. But she had just learned about it a few minutes ago. Depending on her child's age, she had some options on how to proceed. But at that moment, all she felt was guilt.

In some instances, this wouldn't be a problem. Guilt and remorse inspire us to change our ways. The problem in this instance was that the AD/HD expert was sharing important information that could result in positive changes for her child. But she was missing every word because she was reliving past mistakes.

This is like driving while *only* looking in the rearview mirror. Taking a look at the past for insight and to spot preventable future patterns is valuable. Taking a look back to catalog and relive every misstep only blocks us from doing what is needed right now.

When my son was diagnosed with AD/HD at the age of seven, I quizzed the neuropsychologist on how it happened. He told me that any energy I devoted toward figuring that out would be energy taken away from finding solutions to my son's challenges. He let me know about AD/HD and its genetic component as well as the further study of environmental factors. But then he said that delving into further reasons on behalf of my son should be done AFTER supports were put into place to help him. I think this was pretty sound advice. There are many researchers looking into the causes of AD/HD and I've participated in some studies. That is my way of doing my part to discover the cause of AD/HD.

I've heard the following question raised at parent meetings: When you realize that you have been managing your child's AD/HD incorrectly, should you acknowledge this to your child and apologize? Every situation is different. We want

our children to feel confident that we are on their side and have their best interest at heart. We also want them to learn that when mature adults make a wrong call, they step up to the plate to fix it. I think how this is handled depends on the age of the child and how they might interpret an admission like this. (Some teens may wonder what else their parents have "screwed up" and second-guess all decisions their parents make in the future.)

One of my colleagues is in a twelve-step program, which includes making amends. Mainstream culture interprets this as making a formal apology. This idea was perpetuated in a *Seinfeld* episode where one character was resentfully waiting for his apology from a recovering alcoholic for a ten-year-old incident involving a ruined sweater. In actuality, while making amends can indeed mean making an apology, it can also be a conscious decision to treat someone you have harmed in a better manner from that point forward.

Another factor to consider, if you are struggling to reconcile errors you made in the past, is that your recollection of events may not match what your child remembers when he or she grows up.

I spoke to a parent who remembers her son's childhood as pretty chaotic and challenging. When she asked him (he is now a young adult) if he had a happy childhood, he answered "yes" without skipping a beat.



My friend Lorraine recalls her son Jason's high school experience. Everything came to a head during his senior year. His learning style was not being accommodated, and he had difficulty navigating his school's social culture. He

had a bad stress reaction to his increasing academic workload. The family had some very scary moments, and they scrambled to find supports and services. Lorraine still recalls the helpless feeling surrounding this event.

Jason received help and went on to be quite a successful young adult. I asked Lorraine if her son would consider doing a presentation for some young people in our CHADD chapter who were experiencing difficulty in high school. She said that Jason doesn't recall the incident with the same intensity as she does. To him, it was just something that happened along the way and not of particular significance.

So while the events that inspire us to change may be difficult or painful,

maybe we don't have to think of them as defining moments.

A dad I know frequently participated in a parent support meeting I attended. We had formed a friendship, as we both felt like we were in the same lifeboat together. After hearing me go on and on about clues I had missed and treatments I didn't pursue on behalf of my troubled daughter, he said, "Maybe as parents we have an inflated view of our control over a brain-based disorder." I pretended to be insulted and asked him, "Are you saying I need to get over myself?" "Pretty much," he replied.

Sometimes we learn things later than would have been useful. It helps to share our perspectives with others in a similar situation! 🍓

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