



## A Study in Contrasts

by Marie S. Paxson

### I RECENTLY HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF REPRESENTING CHADD

on a radio tour consisting of interviews about AD/HD with talk radio hosts around the country. Held during AD/HD Awareness Week, it was really a lot of fun.



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The tour was also a study in contrasts. The hosts had a variety of interview styles and what they knew about AD/HD varied also. In some cases, I was sharing additional knowledge with their audience; in other cases I was starting from scratch. I was surprised at how few people knew about the multimodal treatment approach: medication if appropriate, counseling or behavioral interventions, and academic accommodations for students and workplace strategies for adults. Many interviewers thought medication was the only option for treating AD/HD, and knew nothing about other effective treatments.

When I think about it, my experience with AD/HD is a study in contrasts. When my daughter was growing up, she struggled with oppositionality—which meant we all struggled with oppositionality. She would literally try to negotiate toothbrushing and other daily tasks. It was exhausting. I remember a father, who happened to be a minister, once called our local CHADD chapter about an upcoming meeting. We spoke about the difficulties he was having with his young son who had oppositional behavior. After a while he paused and asked, “Does this ever make you cry?” I answered that of course it did (although I was both unnerved as well as reassured that even people with strong faith find this difficult). It was hard seeing my child unable to comply with the simplest of rules—and realizing she wasn’t doing it on purpose. That somehow her brain led her to believe this was an appropriate response to a request. And even worse, knowing sometimes my parenting methods contributed to the problem, as in: “Fine! Don’t brush your teeth—be the only fifth grader with dentures!” Not very effective parenting.

That was fifteen years ago, before Parent to Parent classes and all of the good science-based information about the importance of parent education, training, and the value of support from our peers.

This summer I had the pleasure of socializing with some CHADD friends. I watched the interaction be-

tween one of the moms and her elementary-school-age son. I saw my friend Janet use AD/HD-specific parenting strategies with her son and witnessed how effective they are. She set some limits and he tested some limits. Even at a party, where she could have let the rules slide, she remained consistent in her parenting methods. She stated expectations before a change in activities, praised and rewarded appropriate behavior, and after giving a warning at one point, took her son to the car for a time-out when he failed to follow her instructions. All occurred without negativity, eye-rolling, or explanations to those in the vicinity. This was what her son with

AD/HD needed to navigate this social setting and this was what he could count on her to provide.

My friend Darlene told of the checklist she kept near her entryway for her son’s entire academic career. It contained tasks to be completed and supplies to take with him before he started his school day. Because she wasn’t barraging her son with morning requirements, requests, and reminders (the checklist served that purpose), he felt comfortable in the predictability of the routine and confident of his ability to follow through. Partly due to Darlene’s ability to structure the home environment, her son just graduated with honors from a top-notch university. He still uses a variation of the checklist to keep himself on task at school and in his job, and is experiencing a great deal of success.

If you have concerns that your child may balk or express anger if you implement this type of system, try to involve him or her in the initial list-making process, and include some sort of reward for compliance.

Over the years, CHADD’s commitment to provide research-based information and practices has really helped my family, and I hope you, too, find this useful. I would love to go back and change my approach to some moments in my children’s lives. I shudder when I think of where we might have ended up without the information, support, and advocacy that CHADD provides. ●

*Marie S. Paxson*