

# WELCOME TO ADULT ADHD

Making sense of your diagnosis



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# WELCOME

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If you're anything like me, the diagnosis seems strange, but makes so much sense. Personally, I found knowing my "issues" were a result of neurological disorder, and nothing I had or hadn't done, enormously relieving. I could finally stop blaming myself for all the challenges I had faced over my life.

My diagnosis only came about because my psychologist of 5 years decided it was time to think outside the square of what was causing my ongoing mental health issues. I thought I was struggling because I had anxiety and depression, but it turns out I had anxiety and depression because I was struggling with undiagnosed ADHD.

One of the biggest challenges about receiving this diagnosis is trying to explain it to others. It's difficult to make sense of it as the person experiencing it, let alone people outside of your brain. So I thought explaining my story, might give you some help to try and explain yours.



# THE IMPACT OF ADHD

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ADHD was around when I was a kid, but it just wasn't understood. Girls present differently to boys and I wasn't as "naughty" as a boy might be. So I was simply labelled a disruptive, sometimes naughty kid, who just didn't pay attention or apply themselves.

I wasn't naughty enough to constantly be in trouble, but disruptive enough to be a problem and annoyance to all of my teachers and peers. They judged me with comments like "why can't you be more like your brother".

It explains why school was nothing more than 12 years of hell for me. Why I tried so hard to fit in, and make friends, but constantly felt alone and isolated. Why I struggled to work, focus and stay quiet. Why people constantly told me not to yell, sit still and stop being "too much." Why I have always been bullied, rejected and teased. Why I lack impulse control and find it impossible to sit still.

Somewhere along the line, I learnt to hide these parts of myself – because it was made very clear to me they made people upset, uncomfortable and frustrated. They made me unlikeable, unlovable and unacceptable. I learnt to mask those aspects of myself and tried hard to lock them away - by being perfect, organised and hyper critical of myself.

I figured out that if I was perfect, and behaved like others wanted me to – ie not be me at all, I would be liked. It was never that simple or true.

To look at me now, you wouldn't suspect it, but I still struggle with these things. I've just perfected the art of masking them, but it's exhausting. I subconsciously taught myself coping strategies, which were really just overcompensating for my perceived failings and flaws.

On one hand they helped, but on the other they hindered because so much of my self-worth became tied up in hiding the bits of myself that were deemed so bad. I was relentless in trying to keep my true self hidden - if cracks showed, and those "imperfections" were revealed, I simply fell apart.

The problem is, you just can't hide all of who you are. As good as my masking is, bits of me would and do pop out from time to time. I've always hated social occasions, where I don't know people, but just never understood why - it turns out it's because it was so hard to try and not be me. So I resorted to alcohol to try and feel comfortable and food to numb myself to the constant, daily struggle.

It explains why I only have a very small close friendship group. Most of my friendships have only been superficial and I've been regularly dumped and ghosted when whatever novelty I provided wore off or I stopped being the one making the effort.

That's the real me, and not the outgoing fake me I presented for so long. At least I think that's the real me - after masking for so long, I can't separate the fake from the real me. I now have to start the process of finding out what my true personality actually is.

# DEALING WITH THE DIAGNOSIS

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Hannah Gadsby described her late Autism diagnosis as an “exfoliation of shame” and I can relate to that sentiment. I felt so much shame because I was constantly being judged and told I wasn't good enough as I was. Now, I no longer have to feel shame about the parts of me I tried so desperately to conceal.

While I'm grateful to have this knowledge, it makes me sad for little, teenage and adult me who had to struggle so much just to try and be “normal.” What a monumental waste of time, energy and emotions that was, because there is simply no way I could be “normal”.

Understanding this gives me freedom to release those bits of myself that I had locked away in my dungeon for so long ago. It's a hard concept, to embrace those bits of myself, to just love myself whole and present the real me to the world.

But, I now recognise how much I apologise for the things I say and do – because whatever it was, it wasn't perfect to me or others. I realised I constantly say sorry for being me and am determined to stop that. I'm now on the path to learning how to stand in my truth and say to the world “This is me - your reactions are your problems, not mine.”

I need to start putting myself first, by managing my energy levels better and avoiding situations that drain me. I need to start saying no to things or asking for changes to be made to help me. I've always sacrificed my own needs to avoid confrontation, appear easy going, not to create a fuss or simply do things for others, but I need to stop that now.

While the journey to get this diagnosis has been particularly confronting and exhausting, the timing is so important as I try to teach my kids that we don't worry about what others think. We don't do things because they make others happy, we do things because it make us happy.

I teach them they are perfect just as they are, and every inch of them is worthy, likeable and loveable. I guess on some level I've always known something wasn't quite right with me, so I've always made sure I engrain those self-beliefs into them. Now, I need to live by example.

For me, I am not my diagnosis. It is part of me, but I refuse to be labelled by it. I am simply someone who's had to demolish themselves because the foundations were weak and now get to rebuild myself to be stronger.

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ADHD coaching to build on your strengths, develop new coping strategies and address mental health impacts, visit my website [www.faceyourflawscoaching.com](http://www.faceyourflawscoaching.com)