ADHD and Fitting In: How Do We Cope?

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Fitting In When You Have ADHD

In a world where “fitting in” is so important, those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can definitely feel left out.

Once we begin school we are expected to follow certain social norms. There are molds into which we must fit in order to belong in society and succeed in class. We quickly find ourselves falling into distinct groupings among our peers.

We all know the drill; We want to belong, we want to be liked, we want to feel like we fit in with those around us.

Some kids find their group with no trouble and settle into their stations making themselves at home. Others fall into one group while wishing they belonged to another. Others never find a place at all.

ADHD and Fitting In

For those with ADHD fitting in can be a nightmare.

We say and do all the wrong things. We are too loud, too hyper, too forgetful and too distracted. Some ADHD types seek attention while others want to fade into the background. We are self conscious because of our many mistakes.

It can feel like there is no “home” in the world for us. Often we are misunderstood. If we also happen to have a condition commonly found with ADHD, such as anxiety or depression, the social aspects of life can be overwhelming.

Middle School

It didn’t take me until middle school to figure out I did not fit in. That truth hit me square in the face the first day of school. Middle school was where it got worse.

I was not like the other kids — I was also incredibly shy and introverted. I wanted to be liked, but I tried too hard. I was clumsy and awkward, and my gigantic granny glasses did not help the situation.

I didn’t defend myself when I was teased, making me a prime target for torture. And torture I had by the bucket load. Middle school was undoubtedly the worst time in my pre-adult life.

High School and Finding My Way

High school was some better for me than middle school, although I know plenty of people with ADHD who say

high school was just a continuation of the torture.

Maybe I got through it because I learned to keep my head down and be as invisible as possible. I managed to make a few friends, wonderful extroverts who simply kept coming back even when their first attempts at talking to me had failed.

My friends were great. They never tried to make me be something I wasn't, although I have to admit I envied them. I wished I was more like them. I still wanted to fit in, even in my own group.

I didn't do a lot with them on the weekends; I stayed in the background for the most part except for an occasional sleep over.

The Big Secret

I remember looking at everyone back then and thinking they all knew some secret I didn't. They all knew the magic formula for making high school easy. They went on dates, went to parties, and looked like their lives were perfect.

I know now there was no secret. Most people, whether ADHD or not, think everyone else has it all together. Having it all figured out is only a myth.

Moving Into Adulthood

In all those years I hadn't been diagnosed with ADHD, so I had no idea what was wrong with me. I just knew I was different — I knew I did not fit in anywhere.

As adults, we may be free of most of the cliques of high school, but there is still a certain degree to which we must fit in. It's never easy to try to fit into the mold society expects from us.

We are still too loud, too impulsive, too awkward and too self conscious. We still worry about what our coworkers or the other parents think of us.

The Two Sides of ADHD

ADHD can be a contradiction. You want things in your head, like being able to enjoy yourself at a party, or meet new people, but the truth is that those things can also paralyze you. I always let the paralyzing thoughts win.

I'm often too chaotic to remember things. I have an abnormal fear of telephone conversations. I will forget what I told you I was going to do.

It's not because I want to be a bad friend, and not because I don't make sincere offers of assistance; I am just terrible at seeing things through. Something else snags my attention and I forget my own name.

When Do We Say Enough?

Recently, I was looking at my life and where I am compared with people I used to know. They all look so successful. They have careers, hobbies, families and friends.

I let myself feel inadequate. I wasn't looking at what I had accomplished, but what I hadn't. I was looking for outward signs of success.

I have a wonderful daughter. I am a freelance writer and a novelist. I also work in a restaurant.

When people I used to know come in, I feel like they are looking at me wondering if is this is all I've managed to

do with my life. I'm sure they aren't even paying attention, but for just a teensy, fleeting moment, I was allowing it to make me feel inferior.

Why? I guess part of me always felt inferior to everyone else. They were smarter than me, had more friends than I did, had more fun than me, and I let my own anxiety get in the way of everything I'd ever wanted.

Then I realized that I have everything I want. I no longer need to fit in to validate who I am. I can live my life on my own terms, doing things my own way and be confident that I'm doing what's right for me. It's freeing.