

Back to School by Penny

“I think I’ll just stay here,” answered my son when I suggested to my two kids that we head to the store to buy our back to school supplies. “I’m kinda tired.”

I could feel my pulse rate quicken and my blood pressure start to rise. My daughter looked crest fallen-she LOVES back to school shopping. Come to think of it-she also loves school....

“What do you mean you don’t want to come?? The whole point is to start to get excited about school. We’re only two weeks away!” My rationale continued to spill out of me. “ Don’t you remember how your math teacher last year said that you should take more responsibility for your agenda? You could pick one out that you think would really work....” His blank look only served to make it worse.

Then I got angry. Again. In my head I think the questions I will never say out loud. Why can’t you like school? Why can’t this be easy? Why is everyday a new struggle? Oh, yeah, I reminded myself. My kid has ADHD.

Many kids with ADHD do not experience school as a welcoming environment. Many have personally felt unsuccessful, both academically and socially. Many are bullied or made to feel different as they are relegated to the ‘special classes’, whether for remedial support or for behaviour. I know that this was our case, so why does it not surprise me that he is less than excited to go back to school?

Things that other parents take for granted become huge issues for parents with kids with ADHD. Newsletters and permission forms go missing between school and home. Reminders about upcoming tests never make it into the agenda. The agendas themselves disappear. Gym class gets missed because gym clothes get left in the backpack in the upstairs locker. Try out times for teams get forgotten. Notebooks come home empty as other distractions were deemed more important than writing down homework..

Elementary and middle school provide some consistency in terms of teachers. High school becomes a different story with multiple teachers dealing with your kid everyday (and every semester!). What used to be on meeting (parent initiated, of course) at the beginning of the school year now becomes multiple meetings repeating the same “Here are the strategies that work best with my kid” over and over again. And then hoping that the teachers have the time and energy to implement them.

We wait impatiently for the phone calls from the school to begin. We have discussions about self-advocacy with the teachers and administration. Sounds great on paper, and many other students have that skill. My kid doesn’t-and I don’t recall there ever being a course available that would help kids understand what it even

means and how to put it into action. “You need to tell the teacher when you need to go to the resource room to work, “ is one of the suggestions. I tried to imagine any kid raising their hand in front of 20 strangers and admitting they needed help. I can tell you that my son would rather fail than admit that he is different.

Are we doing our children a disservice because we are proactive in trying to communicate on their behalf? What do we do when a teacher doesn’t believe in ADHD and dismisses our suggestions? How can I encourage my kid to avoid distractions in the hallway and get himself to class on time, everyday, four times a day?

Come to think of it, maybe I don’t want to go back to school shopping either.....

Follow up note:

We did finally manage to do our school supply shopping. I am happy to report that brother and sister even sat together at the dining room table and divided the erasers, pencils and loose leaf paper and labeled their binders. When the first phone call arrives from a frustrated teacher, I will try to remember the image of that wonderful blissful hour, when he really did look excited about going back to school.