

Peer Perspective April 2021

Everyone you encounter is fighting a battle you know nothing about. Be kind. ~unknown

I am the lone parent of a 10-year-old.

Over the years, I cannot count the times I have been looked down upon or dismissed for insisting something was amiss with my beautiful child, but a mother knows. At the same time, I have been invalidated, criticized, insulted, given unwelcome advice, isolated, excluded, and to a large extent shunned by many because sometimes, my sweet and brilliant child does not conform to society's behavioral expectations.

Strangers in public have glared at us and called us disrespectful and spoiled when he was over stimulated, and I was overwhelmed. More than once I have been told to "beat that behavior out of him." Another favorite is, "That's what happens when you let the prisoners run the penitentiary." Shame became a companion.

In third grade, my child was taken out of school and put in partial hospitalization for his mental health because he simply could not cope with the expectations placed upon him at school.

These types of experiences had left me to believe that I was a horrible parent. I was raising an out of control, aggressive, disrespectful child. A child who I have at times become fearful of. I had become hopeless with continued depression and anxiety. I desperately wanted better for myself and my child but had resigned myself to a life less enjoyed.

Not only did I have a very negative view of myself as a parent, I also frequently wondered if my child was just a bad kid. Born bad and destined to make both of our lives and the lives of countless others miserable. These two distortions combined left me devastated. The snowball had become an avalanche.

My thoughts were stuck in this place and were continually reinforced both publicly and privately. I was on the verge of giving up. It took a toll on me in every possible way.

Last summer my son was medically diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and I felt validation. It explained so much about my beloved son, his moods, his reactions, his sensory processing, his sense of humor, his brilliance. His behavioral outbursts could be given a name other than "bad". Finally, there was an explanation that allowed us both to have grace.

He's NOT a bad kid! I am NOT a bad parent! We are worthy of a better future. My son no longer thinks he is "the worst kid in his class" despite really trying "to be good." I no longer carry the heavy burden of guilt that had been consuming me. His behavior has a name, and it is neither his nor mine.

~Tracy, Certified Peer Specialist