

More True Stories from Adults with Failed Childhoods

Compiled and edited by Cynthia Hammer, MSW,



After I was diagnosed at age 49 and got to know other adults with ADHD, I often said, “I have a mild case of ADHD, but it is bad enough.” It is sad for me to read stories of adults whose struggles, because of their undiagnosed inattentive ADHD, are much more painful than my struggles. Reading their stories motivates my work so that the childhoods of today's children with inattentive ADHD will be more fulfilling.

Each * indicates another person's story.

*I am in my early 20s and was diagnosed with inattentive ADHD a few months ago. It distresses me when I tell people about my diagnosis, they minimize its significance. I was shy and quiet in school and I always got excellent grades. Because I don't present as a hyperactive person, my friends and family don't believe I have struggles, and this hurts a lot. They don't know what it's like to have a mind that won't quiet down. They don't know what it's like to participate in conversation only to forget what I wanted to say or to tell a story and lose my train of thought part way through.

*I'm 20 and was recently diagnosed with inattentive ADHD. I haven't told many people but the ones I have told don't believe me. I hate having my ADHD invalidated because I'm not bouncing off the walls and was a good student.

*I'm a 25-year-old male who was diagnosed this year with inattentive ADHD. I wasn't naughty or disruptive in school and I got good grades so no one suspected I had problems. Actually, my education and personal life was a daily struggle to motivate myself to do things others do

easily. I want people to realize how inattentive ADHD *really* affects in numerous areas of their lives.

*I have a friend who wants to become an elementary school teacher. I asked her to *please* learn what looks like. I suggested she watch this 5-minute video. (<https://www.iadhd.org/child>) If a teacher recognized it earlier and suggested an evaluation, it would have changed my life. My untreated ADHD made focusing painful for me and impacted my school work, social skills and self-esteem.



*After years of being treated for depression/anxiety with little improvement, I saw a psychologist who correctly diagnosed me with the inattentive type of ADHD when I was 23.

*When I explained my diagnosis to my surprised parents, my father quietly said he dealt with the same problems his whole life. Learning this broke my heart, but I think I brought him some relief to realize he didn't have a character flaw which he had told himself for so long.

*When my daughter entered high school she began to suffer with anxiety. The school counselor said it was probably her hormones, but her anxiety worsened and she developed panic disorder. She began to harm herself and became anorexic. She missed out on the joys of high school, and stayed anxious and anorexic until her early 20s. It was a dreadful time.

Then I heard a radio program about a young woman with problems just like my daughter. In listening, I learned about ADHD and how it presents differently in girls. I got my daughter tested and an ADHD diagnosis was confirmed. ADHD was never mentioned to me by counselors or teachers. If we had only know earlier, she wouldn't have missed 10 critical years of her life.

*I did very well in high school, but it was because I could do the homework the night before it was due. I was quiet and respectful in class and learned easily, even with zoning out or doing

other things during my classes. College, with its reliance on self-teaching and self-regulation, was a different story. I saw how my peers were able to study. When I couldn't, I convinced myself that I was lazy, inept, and imposter. I became depressed and anxious. I took five years to graduate, while my friends had already moved onto graduate school or started their careers. I was totally demoralized.

*After years of being treated for depression and anxiety with little success, my family doctor suggested I see a psychiatrist. Luckily, she knew about inattentive ADHD in women and diagnosed me right away. I was so relieved. I walked out of that appointment feeling like I did in second grade when I wore my first pair of glasses. Suddenly, everything made sense. I could finally understand why other people experienced the world differently than me.

*Now I understand how my depression/anxiety resulted from my untreated ADHD. It's why the medications for depression and anxiety helped just a little. For too long, I was told to keep taking those medications. With my ADHD diagnosis, I understood why I struggled with initiating tasks, motivation, and organization. Schools need to educate teachers and other school personnel about inattentive ADHD so it is recognized and diagnosed early in a child's life. We can't wait until we are adults and, hopefully, get lucky by seeing a knowledgeable medical provider who correctly diagnoses our inattentive ADHD.



*It's particularly infuriating when primary care doctors, psychiatrists and psychologists who should be specialists, know little about inattentive ADHD which impacts so many areas of our life. Often, they diminish you and your problems and make our ADHD seem insignificant.

*My husband has inattentive ADHD as well as our daughter. She is lucky that her dad "gets" her, but she is unlucky because her school doesn't understand why she's not bouncing off the walls. They only know ADHD with hyperactivity, not the inattentive type. Every school year, we have to educate a new set of teachers that ADHD can look different for different children. It's exhausting, but worth it when someone finally understands, even a little bit. It makes you feel less alone when you have people in your life that understand. My advice is to not waste time on the rest.

*I have both grieved and celebrated my brain; yet I continue to wonder how my life would have been if we learned I had inattentive ADHD at 5 instead of 30?

Would I have been humiliated by being pulled out of kindergarten and forced to repeat the words, “I am immature and talk too much.” Why didn’t they just ask me to be quiet?

Would I have thought I was stupid when I couldn’t do math? Would I had been forced to do math and continue to flail?

Would I have nearly failed at school?

Would I have put myself in dangerous situations? Would I have had more friends?

Would my family and friends not have told me, “You are too sensitive.” “You are too dramatic”?

Would I have struggled with over-eating, depression and anxiety beginning when I was 8 years old?

After my diagnosis I was able to give context and understanding to my earlier life as a girl and young woman with undiagnosed inattentive ADHD. Now I know I’m not stupid. I’m not lazy. I’m not too chatty, too sensitive or too dramatic. I am just me, a valued individual with talents and skills. I am happy with who I am.

