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Introduction

We know that behind every successful boy with ADHD is a tired parent. (Actually, we hope you are not alone. We hope you are surrounded by a strong supportive team, which could include a spouse, stepparents, grandparents, and even special friends and neighbors.) Raising a boy with ADHD can be exhausting, but we know you can do it. We know this because you wouldn't be reading this book if you didn't care deeply about your son. You will help guide him toward success in life. There is no *one* path to happiness and success, and it will be a journey influenced by parents, siblings, relatives, caregivers, teachers, and others. We've been down similar paths in our personal lives, and we also coach parents of boys with ADHD in our professional work. In this book, we've combined our success secrets to help guide you in raising your young man.

Your son with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD) is unique, special, and talented, and has his own set of strengths and skills. He has characteristics and abilities that

you understand. You can nurture your son's qualities to help him grow into a successful man who will make you proud.

What Does Success for Boys With ADHD Look Like?

When we think about success, we don't view it in terms of "things." Being successful doesn't mean owning a fancy car or a huge house or having tons of money or an extraordinary career. Although these things can be nice and often project the image of success, they don't reflect internal success—the type of success you need to feel satisfied and fulfilled.

We've worked with too many families to know that what you see portrayed on the outside does not always mirror what's happening on the inside. One client told us, "My husband works so hard to support our lifestyle that he's filled with anxiety, takes medication, doesn't sleep well at night, and barely has time to spend with me or the kids." They drive expensive cars, send their kids to an exclusive private school, own a big house, and take luxurious vacations. Everything sure *seemed* OK to the casual observer, but happiness had eluded them.

In our opinion, success is about being happy with yourself and with what you have and believing that you make a difference in this world. This might come from making a difference in the life of your child or spouse, in your job, at your church, at a community center, or by helping others. Success for boys with ADHD is more about being capable of living independently, earning a living, and helping make our world a better place. As the country music song "Red Dirt Road" by Brooks and Dunn goes, "Happiness on Earth ain't just for high achievers." Sure, your son with ADHD *may* become a high achiever, but that alone isn't going to make him successful. It's your job as a parent to help your son identify his purpose, develop his talents, and learn how to get along with peo-

ple. It's not a high-paying or cushy job, but it is *extremely* rewarding and, in our opinion, one of the most important jobs you'll ever do.

There is no doubt that raising a son is difficult, but raising a son with ADHD is even tougher. When you have a son with ADHD, you face issues that generally aren't on other parents' radar screens such as:

- ◇ years of telephone calls from his teachers,
- ◇ other parents' perceptions that you don't know how to discipline your son,
- ◇ being embarrassed by the impulsive things he says or does,
- ◇ the intensity of your son's emotional displays,
- ◇ his fragile self-esteem,
- ◇ his automatic negativity,
- ◇ discouragement (yours and his),
- ◇ relationship issues, and
- ◇ severe homework struggles.

That last one struck a chord, didn't it? Homework is usually an intense endeavor for boys with ADHD. The average boy may have some difficulty getting started on his homework, but with some gentle prompting, he starts and finishes within a reasonable time-frame. The boy with ADHD? He often has to conquer a personal battle just to get started, and it goes that way every night. His parents prompt, threaten, offer rewards (sometimes they look a little like bribes), and even sit next to their son for the entire time. Sound familiar? One mom told us that because of the continual battles she has with her son with ADHD over homework, she feels he doesn't even like her anymore. Another mother said, "I've battled him so long that I finally put him in aftercare at school so they could get him to do his homework."

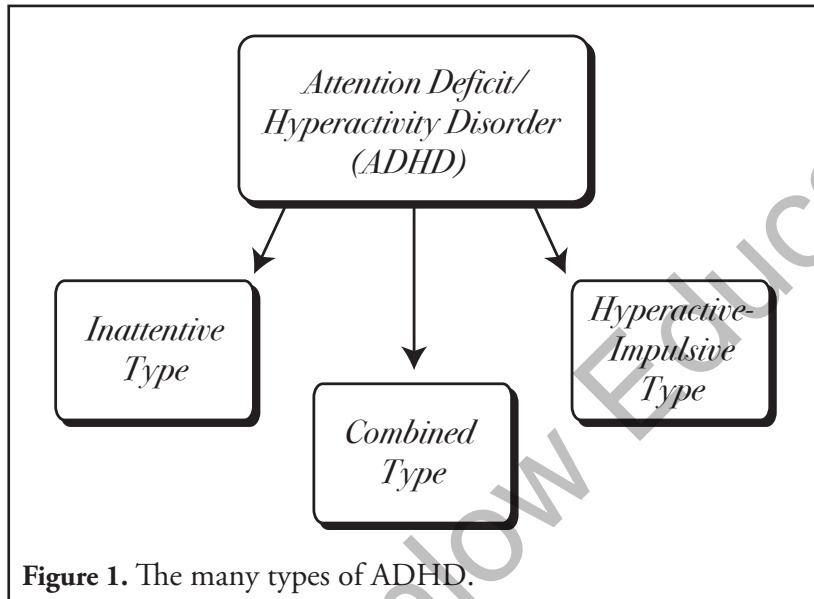
Fortunately, there are professionals and resources to help you work through many of the parenting challenges of raising boys with ADHD. *You don't have to conquer everything on your own.* With some effort, you can find support groups with other parents

of boys with ADHD, valuable books, and professionals such as counselors, psychologists, or medical doctors. Locating the right people to help you can take some energy, time on the phone, and research, but it *is* worth the effort. Not only will you feel less alone, but you'll also be making an investment in your son. As one wise mother of adult children told us, "You pay now or pay later." To us, it is much better to be proactive and provide assistance to ward off problems than to be reactive and face even larger problems. He may be too young or too immature to realize and verbalize it, but he'll thank you later.

If you do not have a professional to help guide you, don't worry. We are sharing some of our most valuable tips and strategies with you. At the end of each chapter, you will find points to consider and action steps you can take right away to help your child. Share these with your spouse or a family member so you'll have an ally in choosing the best strategies for supporting your son in school and at home. And once you've finished reading the book, we'll walk you step-by-step through creating a personalized Dynamic Action Plan. The beauty of your Dynamic Action Plan is that it will allow you and your son to build upon today's successes while following a blueprint for his promising future.

ADD Versus ADHD: What's the Difference?

Before you read too far in this book, we want to explain the ADHD and ADD terminology, because it can be confusing. Some professionals and parents use the acronyms ADD and ADHD interchangeably. Others use ADD to describe behaviors of forgetfulness, not paying attention, and distractibility; they apply the term ADHD to describe behaviors of hyperactivity and impulsivity. Within current professional literature, ADHD is considered



the umbrella term that is used to describe both students with inattention as well as students with hyperactivity and impulsivity.

There is ADHD Predominantly Inattentive Type, which used to be called ADD. There is also ADHD Hyperactive-Impulsive, and that was called ADHD. There is also ADHD Combined Type, which is when a certain number of symptoms from both ADD and ADHD are met. In this book, we use ADHD as the general term that includes ADHD and ADD. The diagram in Figure 1 provides you with a visual of the many variations of ADHD.

Chapter 1

Coming to Terms: “My Son Has ADHD. Now What?”

You may not always recognize boys with ADHD, but believe us, they are *everywhere*. The American Psychiatric Association (2000) stated in its text revision of the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* that “The prevalence of Attention-Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder has been estimated at 3%–7% in school age children” (p. 90). That’s a lot of kids!

Furthermore, some organizations say up to 9.5% of the population has ADHD. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website (2011), 5.4 million children ages 5–17 have been diagnosed with ADHD by a healthcare professional. The CDC data showed that as of 2007, 2.7 million children in that age group were receiving medication for ADHD.

Assuming these numbers are accurate, a teacher can expect that at least 2 children in a class of 20 students will have ADHD. On a sports team of 12 players, there will be at least one with ADHD. In a church with a youth population of 100 children, at least 12 will

have ADHD. How many kids live in your neighborhood? In addition to your own son, there are probably some boys with ADHD living around you. Boys (and girls) with ADHD are everywhere.

Did I Cause It?

Not intentionally. Nothing a parent *did* causes ADHD, but in many cases, a parent's genetics probably contribute.

Because he doesn't look physically different, it might be difficult to accept that your son has a problem. This can be especially true for fathers. Often in a dad's eyes, his boy is just being a boy. He is *supposed* to be active and run around, climb things, ask a million questions, and argue. We often hear from dads, "It's the same thing I did as a kid." Pause on that thought. This is a key point because most professionals consider ADHD to be a neurobiological condition that is heavily rooted in genetics. When Jim's son was diagnosed, the psychologist asked Jim if he thought he had ADHD or if it was suspected in his wife's family tree. In fact, for their family, ADHD had been suspected but had never been officially diagnosed.

When a child is diagnosed with ADHD, parents often comment to us that their son is a lot like they were as a child. It doesn't help one bit to cast blame on yourself or your spouse and wonder who your son "got it" from. If you do suspect a genetic link, try instead to find some sympathy and compassion for what your son is facing.

Many parents feel guilt-ridden because they believe their actions may be responsible for their son's ADHD. Parents may even start to second-guess themselves by making negative assumptions. Parents have told us:

- ◇ "I should have breast-fed him instead of using the bottle."
- ◇ "I should have played with him more."

- ◇ “I shouldn’t have let him watch so much television or play so many video games.”
- ◇ “Letting the nanny watch him while I worked was a mistake.”
- ◇ “If I had not put him in that preschool with that mean teacher, then this would not have happened.”
- ◇ “If only his dad had taken more interest in him as a youngster.”
- ◇ “I shouldn’t have fought with him all the time.”

It is important for you to remember that your parenting style and the decisions you’ve made usually are not your son’s main issues. Being a more skilled parent will not make ADHD go away. Poor parenting does not *cause* ADHD (but as we’ll see later in the book, it certainly can aggravate the situation). Can we, as parents, improve the way we deal with our sons with ADHD? Absolutely, and we’ll spend a good bit of this book sharing ways to help you do just that.

When parents come to us for professional advice and help, we reassure them that their parenting skills did not cause their son’s ADHD. Even though most parents may realize this, they are still relieved to hear it from a professional. Mary L., a parent of a 9-year-old son with ADHD, expressed this: “After all these years, I was relieved. I’m sure parents in my neighborhood thought John’s behavior was my fault, but it’s not. It’s his ADHD that causes him to become so emotional.” Another parent, Amy S., explained it this way: “It’s like a chip was missing in his brain. When Mark was young and he wanted people to go home, he would just yell, ‘Make them go home!’ I used to get so embarrassed.”

Taking Charge of ADHD

We often advise parents not to worry so much about the label but to focus on proactive steps they can take to help their son. To raise a successful son with ADHD, you must start doing things differently from the day you find out your son has ADHD.

Recognize That ADHD Is a Disability

Even though your son may look fine on the outside, his mind is wired very differently. Taking a “disability perspective” provides understanding. You are taking a great step by reading this book and teaching yourself more about ADHD. Increasing your knowledge about ADHD is key to raising a successful son.

Try to Become More Understanding and Patient

That doesn’t mean you will let your son “get away with things,” but you will need to learn to respond differently. When Jim gets upset or frustrated with his son, he tends to point his index finger at Teddy and shake it up and down as he scolds him. Jim became so frustrated at himself that he was determined to stop this automatic response. One day he decided to write the letters “u” and “p” on the edge of his finger. When he got upset and pointed his finger at Teddy, Jim got an automatic visual reminder to have understanding and patience. This simple strategy worked!

Locate Support Personnel

Begin to locate different support personnel such as educators, counselors, and doctors who can serve as resources throughout the years. Part of raising a successful son with ADHD is recognizing that it’s very tough to try to do alone. If your son is going to be successful, at the very minimum you must have his teachers’ support.