



SURVIVING TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL

Understanding and Teamwork Go A Long Way To Help

When I graduated middle school I was both excited and terrified. I knew I was going on to high school and even though I was overwhelmed with joy to be out of middle school, I was also intimidated by high school. On top of all that, I had just been diagnosed with Tourettes, Depression, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and Attention Deficit Disorder (and if that isn't enough I was also going through puberty).

While I was in middle school many of my problems went undetected and therefore untreated. This led to an endless saga of dismal progress reports and useless confrontations with my mother.

In the summer I became more and more anxious about high school as it drew closer. This was when I knew I needed help. Fortunately for me I found a perfect psychiatrist for my needs. In very little time I recognized that he was equally as challenged by a lack of organizational skill as I was! To overcome his own ADD he clung to his palm pilot like it was a security blanket. I discovered how important a quality, caring psychiatrist could be to someone with my types of challenges. For me, nothing compares to the kind of insight and understanding that my compassionate and reassuring psychiatrist provided.

Now my biggest challenge was high school. The first day was horrible. With knots in my stomach I quickly realized that there would be mountains of homework and social pressures that no one can really prepare you for. I realize everyone has to go through it, but that knowledge doesn't make the experience any easier (note to myself, remember this when I'm an adult!).



In no time the entire pattern emerged. I managed to have more outstanding assignments than completed in every one of my classes. I was convinced my gym teacher hated me (this may be a universal phenomenon). The best diagnostic indicator of my well-being was the state of my backpack. I hope that if you are reading this and your backpack is a disaster know you are not alone.

So back to my new friend and doctor I went. Once I told him about everything I was struggling with and had a good cry—which everyone can use from time to time—we agreed I would begin medication. I wish I could say that everything is just perfect now. It's not but there is good news.

My English teacher was immeasurably patient and understanding. One day I skipped school because I was afraid of taking a test I didn't feel prepared for and my mother couldn't find me. She flipped out. Not knowing what else to do she went and told my teacher. After that day, there were a number of meetings with the school counselor, my other teachers and the vice principal. Out of those meetings I got a revised schedule and an agreement about accommodations for my disabilities, which isn't perfect but it is a basis upon which I'm figuring out what I really need.

The bottom line is this: there is no sufficient substitute for an understanding set of people in your corner. In my case I was fortunate. One of my other teachers told me that he had a son with similar issues. As the assistant wrestling coach he also encouraged me to participate on the team. I discovered I love wrestling.

I have a tutor outside of school who specializes in teaching children who are identified as gifted and

ADD. He is great. We talk about everything under (and above) the sun. I also enrolled in a class at the local university, which I just finished. I find that it is easier for me to be in a learning environment that is either one-on-one or with other adults. I realize that I'm very fortunate to be able to do these things. There are probably many youth who don't get the kind of individualized attention I get. Knowing how hard it is for me with the help I do have, I don't know how people manage with less.

So here is how I made my transition: with the help of a good tutor, Zoloft and Concerta, a revised class

schedule, a lot of accommodations written into a 504 plan and a wonderful English teacher who loves science fiction like me. I think I'm going to make it through. The key to all of this was finding a good doctor who was able to help me understand that although maybe I can't take away my challenges there are things that I can do for myself to make life a little better every day.

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