

Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Human Services, 2013 Legislative Session

Attention: Senator Alan Bates, Co-Chair, and Representative Nancy Nathanson, Co-Chair

My name is Jenni Malm (Benton County)

I am the parent of two teenagers who were diagnosed at the ages of 9 & 6 with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. My youngest, my son, also recieved a diagnosis of Oppositional Defiant Disorder.

The pain and isolation of living day to day with these types of conditions is immense at times. When the world sees a Down's Syndrome child, it is easy to conclude that there is a mental challenge present that the child has no control over.

ADHD and Oppositional Defiance show up in behaviors that appear volitional, and these behaviors are irritating to the people around these kids. Without understanding, it is difficult to develop compassion. With a pervasive disorder, it is oftentimes easy to lose hope.

Collaborative Problem Solving has helped me as a parent cope on a day-to-day basis in a number of ways, two of which are primary. There are many things I learned in CPS classes to help me become a better parent and to cope day-to-day, moment-to-moment, but these are the biggest two...

First of all, "Children do well if they can" has become a mantra for my life in reminding me to have patience and understanding. When I feel so overwhelmed and upset, I remember that we are doing the best that we can given the circumstances. This takes the edge off the frustration and angst I feel inside.

Secondly, in CPS classes, parents share their struggles at home with their kids. Parents of "normal" kids out in the day-to-day world cannot understand what is is like to have a child go into a complete meltdown in the car at age 8 and open the car door to escape while driving at 35 mph. Nor can they understand an elementary age child running out of the classroom and hiding to escape the frustrations the child faces in the classroom.

Most of all, when a child becomes verbally abusive, to his parents and/or his teachers, this is intolerable in the normal world. Who could rasie a child to act like that? What kind of parents would teach him to talk like that? Being able to share these experiences with other parents who are facing similar challenges at home eases some of the pain. There is something healing about knowing I am not the only person in the world that has to deal with the frustration, sadness, and worry that comes along with raising children emotional/behavioral challenges.

I saw an article on Yahoo this morning. There is going to be a documentary about Adam Lanza, his life, his mother... I am choosing not to see it because, for me, it is too close to home. I will keep doing the best that I can, and I will keep using the skills that I learned in the CPS classes, but I can't watch that documentary. I keep a prayer in my heart... "Please, Lord, let that not be my son."

Collaborative Problem Solving is necessary because isolation exacerbates illness of the spirit.

Jenni K. Malm