

Intro: [\(00:00\)](#)

Having an ADHD brain is a mixed bag. Sometimes it's good news. And sometimes, well, it's not. Even ADHD professionals have trouble with their ADHD. They try harder and harder and harder to overcome the chaos that's ADHD. And finally, they overcome the barriers of ADHD and they become what we call at ADDA, ADHD heroes. And that's what TADD Talks are all about this year. Your favorite ADHD professionals sharing their ADHD stories. So, join us here at ADDA, the Attention Deficit Disorder Association every single day of October, because it's ADHD Awareness Month. Here's the next inspiring story.

Liz Lewis: [\(00:50\)](#)

Hello and welcome to TADD Talks with ADDA. My name is Liz Lewis and I'm coming to you from central PA. Most of you can find me on the internet, just Google Healthy ADHD. And I had a really tough time with this theme, the hero's journey theme, this year for the TADD Talk. I don't feel that I have a hero's journey, but I definitely have a personal journey and it's not so much, it's not directly related to ADHD, but it involves my beliefs around ADHD. And I'm going to sort of frame it as a story about my relationship with my mother, because the thing is ADHD is like one of those invasive maple trees or something that invade my yard and the root system just touches everything and chokes off everything else. And I've always had trouble with my relationship with my mother. Um, it's been going on since I was a kid, you know, it started when I was really young and she was told that I, uh, that I was gifted.

Liz Lewis: [\(02:01\)](#)

And so they had me in this gifted program. Um, but I wasn't, I was performing well, but I wasn't performing up to the expectations. Well, I guess her expectations. And so, at the same time, my little brother was just, you know, typical wild ADHD, little guy. And she took us both at the same time to be diagnosed. And I was diagnosed. He was diagnosed. I was probably 12, I believe at the time. And from the day she got my ADHD diagnosis, she sort of wielded that, um, over me, I don't know how else to describe it. She had something she could criticize about me. She had something, she could say that that was why I had so much anxiety, why I was so hypervigilant. It had nothing to do with, you know, her mental health and her physical health issues. Um, obviously it was all this ADHD thing.

Liz Lewis: [\(03:04\)](#)

And strangely over many years, I think I actually started to believe her. Um, I started to believe that I was a very selfish person. I was not very family oriented and because of my ADHD issues, I was incapable of properly taking care of her and her health issues. And, um, by the fall of 2019, I felt very stuck in my life. Even though my life had moved forward, I had gotten through school. I had been a teacher for a while. I had gotten married. I bought a home. I started a family. I still felt like the ADHD was holding me back. And of course, I had my mother telling me, um, you know, what a failure at life and at being a daughter I really was. So, I sought out a new therapist and I was lucky, I had to look around, but I found someone who was a CBT therapist because I kept saying I wanted to reframe this whole ADHD thing.

Liz Lewis: [\(04:13\)](#)

And my business was stuck and I was stuck and I needed to work through these issues around being responsible for my mother's care. And I found a lovely therapist and I got very lucky, and we spent some time talking and one day, um, I was very upfront about what I was looking for in terms of my therapeutic experience. And one day, um, she asked me if she could be frank with me and I said, sure, yeah, that's what I need. And she said, I do believe that you have ADHD just based on your, you know, your day-to-day executive function. Struggle. I totally believe that she said, but I would like to challenge you in your belief that, um, this is just about the ADHD. She said, I am starting to think that you have been engaged in a 30-year abusive relationship with your mother and that your diagnosis has been used to convince you that you are just, I don't know, flawed.

Liz Lewis: [\(05:19\)](#)

And I don't remember exactly how she said it, but something along those lines and that I had sort of taken this on as a thing, like I had really, truly internalized the idea that I had ADHD. And so, I was limited in my ability to be a good daughter. And I was very one of the things I kept saying, and I remember this was, I was so cold hearted. I really wasn't very warm. I didn't really care much about my mother's problems as much as I should. And you know, all these, whatever, so long story, but it took me two years of therapy, almost two years of therapy, to understand that ADHD is a huge deal in my life. It does impact my life, but it isn't the whole thing. It's one piece of a much larger puzzle. And that I had spent basically 30 years believing that I needed to change.

Liz Lewis: [\(06:08\)](#)

I needed to treat my ADHD. I needed to manage my emotional issues; as my mother would say, my emotional issues. I needed to be stronger. I needed to be less sensitive. I had to change. And suddenly, I realized that actually, maybe I don't need to change. Maybe I just need to stop trying so hard. And maybe it's not just about ADHD. Maybe I have a form of post-traumatic stress from being abused. And the fact that I even used the word abuse as growth for me because I wouldn't use the word for a very long time. All of this to say, and the reason I tell this story, is because I want people to understand that ADHD is like one star in a constellation of what makes up a person. And so, some of us, especially if we were diagnosed later in life, some of us look around at our life, maybe it's our career, our relationships.

Liz Lewis: [\(07:12\)](#)

It could be anything. You look around and you're thinking, this is the reason why, this is why I haven't been able to, you know, set goals and become the person I wanted to be. And maybe, you know, maybe that's true. Maybe ADHD does play a role in it, but you have to look at the ADHD in the context of your whole life and your other experiences. And I'm always telling people, go to therapy, go to therapy before you start down the road of like coaching and all that stuff. Obviously talk to doctors. If you want to try new medications and other things, that's great, but start with your therapy, because if you can get a handle on the, on the whole picture, on what makes you, you; you can be so much more objective about what is ADHD and what is not.

Liz Lewis: ([08:02](#))

And the shame part of it starts to disappear. It doesn't disappear completely, but it recedes. So, I don't have a hero's journey. I guess if anything, you know, I wasn't looking to save the world. I was looking to save myself and I did still work on it. I mean, it's not a complete project, but I just want people to understand that ADHD- and I have written more than one article about the negative impacts of unacknowledged and untreated ADHD. But I think it is equally important that we don't over identify and over-focus just on the ADHD. I want people to take a whole person, look at themselves because I know what it's done for me. And as I work with more and more women, and I tell them my story and they hear parts of themselves in it, I think, I think it means something. I don't know what it is.

Liz Lewis: ([09:02](#))

I think it's called humanism, right? When you look at the whole person. I am very involved in this community, and I want to stay involved in this community. But I also want everyone to know that there is life beyond the diagnosis. So, you're more than just a list of symptoms and don't let anyone use the ADHD diagnosis against you. I know the world is changing. It hasn't always been super friendly to people with brain-based differences, but it's changing. So, let's do this thing. Let's look at the whole person instead of just the list of symptoms. And I don't want this to be any longer, but that's the best thing I have for a hero's journey. Thanks for joining me for ADDA's TADD Talk today. Again, my name is Liz Lewis. If you want more information about me or my work with ADHD adults, you can find me at [healthyadhd.com](http://healthyadhd.com) or email me at [liz@healthyadhd.com](mailto:liz@healthyadhd.com). Thanks. Bye.

Outro: ([10:02](#))

Thanks so much for joining us for TADD talks this year. I'm sure you enjoyed these inspiring stories and there's so much more. In fact, why don't you join us for the 2021 virtual ADHD International Conference November 4th through the 6th. And you might want to consider joining ADDA as well. It's a great investment for a small amount of money as little as \$5 a month. And remember, so when you feel like hope is gone, look inside you and be strong and you'll finally see the truth, that a hero lies in you. hero flies in you.