

TADD Talk 2021.  
Redefine Success Through the ADHD Lens  
by Linda Walker

Hi, this is Linda Walker. I am an ADHD Coach and the member of an ADHD family. Today, ADDA has invited me to share my thoughts about one of my ADHD heroes.

My daughter, Kyrie, has always looked up to her sister, Jennifer. Jennifer is three years older than Kyrie, and Kyrie has always wanted to be just like her. When Jennifer learned to read, Kyrie looked in awe and declared: "When I'm older, I'm going to read like Jennifer." But it would take her six more years and numerous interventions with speech therapists, tutors and special education to achieve this.

When Jennifer graduated High School, Kyrie set her mind to follow in her footsteps. But Kyrie had to repeat several classes and take adult education classes to earn her diploma.

When Jennifer moved out on her own, Kyrie set her sights on doing the same. Jennifer moved out with very few problems. Little did we know how big a challenge doing the same would be for Kyrie.

You see, Kyrie has ADHD and severe learning disabilities. Nothing ever came easy for her. Learning, making friends, or getting a job. But there's one thing she has that I rarely see in people who haven't had to deal with nearly as many setbacks. She is one of the most courageous, persistent people I know. She is one of my heroes.

Adulting requires an incredible number of skills most of us take for granted: grooming, getting and keeping a job, planning, saving money and paying bills, organizing meals, doing laundry, managing social interactions and the list goes on.

A major hurdle for Kyrie was getting and keeping a job. Kyrie had found a job and she kept it for two years because she was a reliable employee who worked hard. Management could always count on her to fill in at the last minute. Her supervisor liked her because of this and her go-to attitude.

But when the store changed managers, Kyrie's new supervisor insisted she do jobs she was not able to do as well, and this manager could not see past the mistakes she made due to inattention and to learning disabilities. She was let go.

She began to look for work again. Of course, she struggled to get organized and to prepare for interviews. She also struggled to keep up with the speed of work in customer service jobs. Kyrie's mental processing is slow, a major handicap for the types of jobs she was qualified for. She had trained as a cook's helper but didn't move fast enough for most busy commercial kitchens. After almost two years of unsuccessfully looking for work, she didn't know where to go next. Her ADHD and learning disabilities were making it impossible to find a job where she could contribute meaningfully.

Her struggles at work soon carried over to home. Without the structure of a job, Kyrie slept in until noon, stayed in her pajamas all day and moped around most of the time. Understandably, she was discouraged and was ready to give up on her dream of launching.

I remember a conversation we had with her after a particularly bad month of neglecting her commitments at home. I told her "I totally get that you're getting discouraged, who wouldn't be. But there is more to adulting than just getting and keeping a job. While you look for work, we can also work on developing other skills you'll need to live successfully on your own." I told her, "While I love being your parent, I also look forward to the day when you and I have an adult relationship." She knew what I meant because she sees the relationship I have with Jennifer. The thought that she could have an adult relationship with me seemed to inspire my then 25-year-old daughter. She agreed to work on other aspects of adulting and asked me to help her.

Lesson 1. I wanted her to take the lead on this project. She's going to need to be able to figure out what help she needs and to ask for it. To spark ideas for the different aspects of adulting we could explore, I bought her a book on life skills for adulting. It wasn't the most ADHD-friendly book I've ever seen, but it provided her a list of skills she'd need to develop in order for her to take the lead on this "adulting project". After all, how do you know what is required of an adult if you're never done it. We just had to make sure to look at the book through an ADHD lens to make it relevant for Kyrie's situation. We also decided it was time to explore other options for a career that would suit her abilities. Then we got to work.

Together, we decided to "Fake it until you make it." This meant I needed to treat her like the adult she strived to become. This was tough for me, since I had to stop acting like her mother. I had to let her make decisions and live with the consequences. I couldn't protect her from what I thought were the wrong choices.

I asked open-ended questions to help her set priorities rather than to tell her what to do. Sometimes I didn't agree with her approach, but if she was to take control of her life, I needed to step out of the way.

She decided to create a structure, starting with setting a bedtime and wake up routine. It took a few months to implement, but we celebrated every bit of the progress and made sure to acknowledge the effort.

Lesson 2. When she faced setbacks, instead of getting discouraged, she learned to redefine these setbacks as learning experiences and, together, we explored needed adjustments to her plan.

After chasing down different employment programs at the federal and provincial levels (we're Canadian), we finally found one that supports people with Kyrie's learning difficulties and challenges finding and keeping jobs. This organization finds jobs for people like Kyrie. A counselor accompanied Kyrie when she started a job, and helped analyze the job and train Kyrie using approaches adapted to the way Kyrie learns. The counselor was also there to support both Kyrie and the employer when challenging situations arose. I am so grateful such programs exist. Seven years later, Kyrie is still successfully employed through this program.

Kyrie learned to organize her time. She learned to prepare her lunch and her clothes for work ahead of time. She learned to navigate the transit system to get to work on time. She created routines to make sure she did her laundry, made her bed, cleaned her room - although this is still a huge issue - and to keep her commitments.

It took two years of hard work. But Kyrie moved out at the age of 28. To ensure she and her boyfriend (who also has ADHD) honored their financial commitments – both are impulsive spenders – I helped them open a joint bank account that requires both their signatures to make withdrawals. Together we determined how much each would deposit each payday to ensure there were always sufficient funds to cover their expenses. We automated everything we could, and even set up savings accounts where they could save for retirements and for bigger goals. They were able to save up and take a long weekend bus tour to New York City, and they have bigger goals set for the future.

In 2018, Kyrie married Viktor, the love of her life. And now, five years later, they remain self-sufficient with very little of my input. And because we don't make decisions for them, when they feel they need advice, they don't hesitate to come to us and ask for it.

Kyrie is a successful adult, and she got there by creating structures to support herself in everyday life. She succeeded by being open to using approaches that, while they seem unconventional, let her thrive. She knows when she needs help, and is not afraid to get support around things that will always be a challenge for her.

Kyrie will always be a kid at heart, but she does it while adulting. She and I have developed the adult relationship we aspired to 8 years ago. It's been a long journey and some might wonder how successful has it been. Her apartment is still a mess. She's not rich, and probably never will be. She doesn't have a high-powered career.

A few years ago, concerned she might feel she didn't quite measure up to her sister, Jennifer or the other members of our family, I asked Kyrie how she felt about her life. She replied enthusiastically, "I love my life! I've got people in my life who love me and accept me. I have a good job. I love the people I work with. And I'm able to live on my own!" Kyrie taught me the most important of these lessons, that success is measured in different ways for different people and each one of us gets to define our own success.

This is Linda Walker, ADHD Coach. For more information about me or my productivity training and group coaching for adults with ADHD, visit my website at [www.Coachlindawalker.com](http://www.Coachlindawalker.com).

Take care! Bye for now!