

I'm Sarah Kesty. I'm an ADHD and Executive Function coach and host of The Executive Function Podcast.

ADDA invited me to share a story about ADHD heroes, and this one will be both super relatable and pretty untraditional.

Because our hero, it turns out, lives inside our brains!

My ADHD hero story doesn't have a defined beginning but lots of defining moments, the first of which happened when I was just 22, entrusted with a classroom of kids with special needs. A classroom which was also in the way way back of the school, in a portable that shook a little when you walked and was filled with the same 1980s curriculum that taught me to read.

In that classroom, I taught the 14 best kids at school. Kids who, for no fault of their own, were deemed too much for a regular teacher to handle, and were collected into my "special day class." Crystal and Cheyenne were two of the students who first introduced me to my ADHD hero.

Crystal was a tiny thing, who moved and talked faster than she could plan, which often meant doing and saying things that she instantly regretted. It also meant that the "sit and get" method of most classrooms wasn't a match for her quick motor and need to move. She was working with second grader thoughts and toddler school skills. But, with the option to move and learn specifically what she needed to fill in her Swiss cheese learning, she learned to read at her typical lightning speed.

Then there was Cheyenne, bright and endlessly happy. He nick-named me, his teacher, "Mi Amor," and would affirm everything I asked of him with, "Yes, Mi amor." This was delightfully strange for a first grader—one of many quirks that seemed to cause friction with adults around him. When I found him at recess, in time out for hitting another kid, he replied that, "Yes, mi amor, I'm in trouble" but refused to be sad about it. Instead, he'd laid upside-down on a bench and sang his observations of kids playing, without him. With a few self-regulation strategies and some rehearsals of how to "play the school game," Cheyenne was thriving as a learner and a very happy human.

These kids became heroes to me in that they overcame what would cause us adults to break in half: rejection, isolation, inequities, and inborn challenges. Their brains were wired differently, and they needed different supports. And that is ultimately how I came to meet the true hero of the story:

The detective perspective.

As a teacher, a parent, a partner, a human with ADHD, the detective perspective is our most reliable hero for this journey we share. The detective perspective can help us realize both what we need and how to get it. It can help us see patterns and approach

would-be “problems” with curiosity. It can turn our puzzling brains into playgrounds of innovation.

The detective perspective is all about hope.

When we embrace the detective perspective, it’s usually kicked off by adversity: our kids’ teachers are calling, we earn a bad grade, our bosses are upset by something we just can’t seem to solve. With the usual perspective, we’d take up camp in Adverse-City, gossiping with our Adverse-City neighbors about why we suck and how things can’t change.

But, with detective perspective, we only spend the time needed to investigate in Adverse-City. We look for clues, like patterns or inciting events or reinforcers and we take a curious look at our own mental patterns. When we’re detectives, we’re looking to solve the case, which leaves a lot less space for judgement. We’re on the case, seeking to understand the circumstances that got and sometimes kept us in a space we now want to change.

In my classroom and now in my coaching, the detective perspective is heroic in 2 ways. First, it leads me to deeply understand before I react. This helps me see that behavior is not personal and is usually a manifestation of need. *This kid is acting like an official turd because his need for stimulation is going unmet after sitting and listening for an hour. He’s not being disruptive or asking to use the bathroom for the fifth time because he hates me. He just needs a way to get regulated again.*

Second, it’s the single best thing I can teach a kid. Listen, I’ve taught every subject and almost every grade level over 17 years. Math is cool, reading’s pretty helpful, and science can be so fun. But, if you look forward, to when these cherubs are 25 or so, it’s not their mastery of any one subject that’s heavily influencing their life satisfaction. It’s mastery of their own brand of success, mastery of their brains and their needs. It’s their use of the detective perspective to mine their experiences for insights and strategies.

If you’re ready to embrace your own inner detective hero and take on the curious and courageous detective perspective, there are a few guiding questions you can stick in your pocket right now (or make your phone background! I included a freebie for you on ADDA’s site):

What skills could I be missing?
What strategies could I need?
What in the environment needs to change?

The best part about asking these questions is that you don’t need to know a solution right away. In fact, once you set your brain to search for these ideas, it will be too busy with detective-ing to let you wallow in a stuck place. Challenging your mind to lift up a little bit and view the situation as a curious observer will allow some of the needs and potential solutions to get thought time in your mind.

Plus, the best detectives are often part of a team, and you can be, too. You can work with your partner, best friend, coach, or teacher to look at some of the “clues” on your journey. Maybe your ADHD shows up as a flurry of great ideas and unfinished projects? Maybe it’s a time-blindness that has sneaky impacts on your day. Or, maybe it’s a need for movement that you’ve ignored, telling yourself you *should* want something that contrasts with your needs?

Whatever your place on your ADHD journey, a detective perspective can be of great help to unlock your thinking and unstick your progress. You’ve got this! And, you’ve got a whole big team at ADDA here for you, too, Detective.

If you want more information about me or my work with ADHD adults, find me online at The Executive Function Podcast and Sarahkesty.com. I support people of all ages to create strategies for thriving with ADHD. This is my passion, my life’s work, and most certainly my dream job.

Let me know how I can help you! email me at Sarah@SarahKesty dot com.

You’re on the case, Detective!

An executive function expert and advocate for neurodiversity, Sarah Kesty loves to coach people with ADHD! She hosts The Executive Function Podcast and writes for several publications. She is an award-winning educator and advocate who lives in San Diego