



Case Study



Supporting the mental health of a neurodivergent person with co-occurring Autism and ADHD

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Oscar had never been happier in his twenty-two years.

Nobody knew more about his corner of the big hardware store, and he delighted in arranging the shelves, learning about the products and solving problems for customers. Sure, there'd been that uncomfortable meeting with his supervisor after he'd been overheard telling a customer that the barbeque they'd chosen was poor quality and the colourful poinsettia in their trolley would possibly poison their cat, but no-one could say his shelves weren't always fully stocked and the goods arranged with an exquisite attention to detail.

It hadn't always been like this. Primary school had been a nightmare of "time-out" and letters home about his lack of focus and impulsivity. Eventually, when he was eight, the family GP had sent him to a developmental paediatrician who worked with a developmental and educational psychologist to arrive at a diagnosis of Level 1 Autism with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder - presentation.

For Oscar's parents, it was something of a relief to finally have an explanation for Oscar's need for routine, his sensory issues and intense interests, and his behaviour that could be impulsive and disruptive. It also opened the door to a range of support services.

From Oscar's point of view, however, they were just words and he couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. He was sure others found social situations as confusing as he did. Why couldn't people just say what they meant, rather than giving out all sorts of unclear hints?

Oscar had found the support provided by his integration aid (or educational assistant) through those final years of primary school to be very positive, if a little frustrating to have to spend time on things that were boring and useless. She'd helped him understand what other students really meant when they'd talked to him, which wasn't often, and she'd brought him back to the task when his attention wandered to what was far more interesting outside the classroom.

But moving to high school meant he'd lost this support and he'd had to navigate this new environment alone. School was all about learning new things every day, most of which were still boring, and socialising became even more difficult. He also found it hard to remember to take his ADHD medication, which added to the challenges and increased expectations of high school.

Then there was that one day in Year 11 when it had all boiled over due to a lack of support, and sensory overload. He'd melted down outside the tuckshop, headbanging and biting his hand until teeth met bone.

He'd surprised everybody but himself when he'd achieved his HSC – he wasn't stupid, after all - but further study was daunting after the negative experiences in high school that had damaged his confidence. Although meteorology had looked interesting.

Landing a job at Bighammer Hardware had been a dream come true for Oscar due to his special interest in hand tools, and he donned his uniform each morning with pride and enthusiasm.

Moving out of his parent's place and into his own was a major goal for Oscar but rentals were very tight. He still required support to keep his room and uniform tidy and his mother often made his breakfast and packed his lunch. Oscar kept forgetting his employee badge, much to the frustration of the store manager, and so he started keeping it in his backpack.

He'd heard some workmates muttering in the staffroom that morning about "upcoming retrenchments" and "redundancies", whatever they were. He'd have to ask his supervisor that afternoon. She'd asked him to come and see her ten minutes before knockoff, and to bring someone with him if he wanted.



Three weeks later, Oscar's parents were beside themselves with concern. Having indeed been made redundant in a staffing restructure, Oscar was feeling worthless and anxious about his future. Although his supervisor had made it very clear to Oscar and his mother there was no problem with his work, Oscar couldn't help but feel that he'd somehow failed in a job he'd loved.

He missed his routine and the pride of doing his job well. Both his parents were worried that he rarely left his room and was frequently skipping meals and not showering. He told them he hated his life and couldn't see the point of taking his medication, which sat untouched in his bathroom. He'd dragged his TV and PS5 into his bedroom and spent most of the day and night in bed playing Fortnite with strangers.

Eventually Oscar's only sibling, 24-year-old Matt, who was home on uni holidays convinced him to come for a drive and see the family GP.