

Too much, too loud, too big, too different!

My life and parenting journey with ADHD

Nicki Walsh



Queensland
Government



How I'm planning to group my thoughts tonight



- The 'too much' kid
- My masking era
- Pregnancy and Early Parenting
- Getting older, not wiser
- The things I want people to know about me

As far as anyone knows we are a nice normal family.....

- Severe mental ill health, addiction, suicide going back generations
- Generations of mental illness (maternal) and neurodevelopmental challenges and diagnoses (paternal)– intergenerational trauma
- “No escaping a family history like that” - speaks true for trauma, mental health AND neurodivergence



The 'Too Much' Kid

As a child I was frequently described as 'too EVERYTHING!':

- Too loud
- Too attention seeking
- Too rough
- Too dramatic

I also:

- Had a Mum who experienced trauma and mental illness
- Had a Dad with ADHD and ASD (diagnosed when I was a child)
- Had asthma & sleep apnoea & grommets
- Had experienced abuse and trauma
- Was naturally academic & didn't 'need' to pay attention
- Was always in trouble for being 'TOO' something
- Had lots of friends and loved socialising
- Was very sensory-sensitive (smell, taste)
- Poor sleeper - 5 hours a night



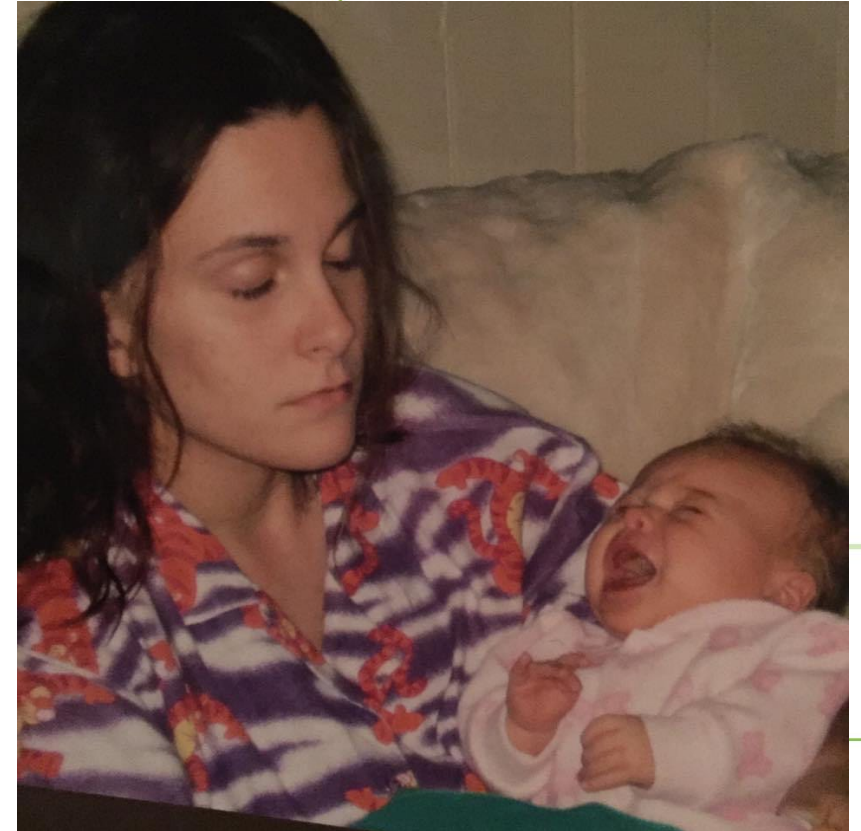
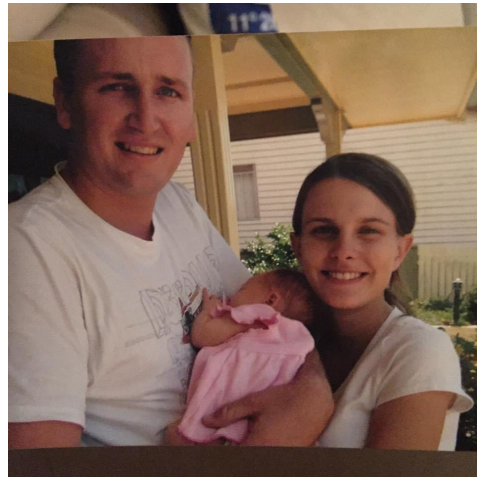
Challenges of being 'too much', and my masking era:

- Trouble in primary school – 'the desk on the verandah' & the class clown
- Trouble with friendships
- Being asked to 'act more like other girls'
- Little brother's diagnosis of ASD and ADHD
- My 'failed' diagnosis - 'just learn to stop talking so much'
- Entered high school knowing that I was different and most likely.... 'too much'
- Tried to 'be normal' (what's that')
- Trouble in high school – had to change schools
- Endometriosis & PMDD (surgery)
- Beginnings of accepting myself as I am.
- But who am I?



Pregnancy and Early Parenting:

- 20 years of age, still living at home, studying at university
- Perinatal onset in first trimester:
 - GAD
 - Social Anxiety
 - OCD – contamination
 - Agoraphobia
 - Phobia Disorder
 - Panic Disorder
- What about the other struggles?
 - Paled in comparison
 - Anxiety overtook everything
 - Sensory issues escalated
 - Sleep decreased
 - Almost 'blended into each other'



The impacts



Learning to ride the wave



- I remained undiagnosed and untreated for all of my challenges until my daughter was 3
- Emily was diagnosed with anxiety at 3, and gross motor delays
- I fell pregnant again and hit crisis point – eventually getting the help I needed

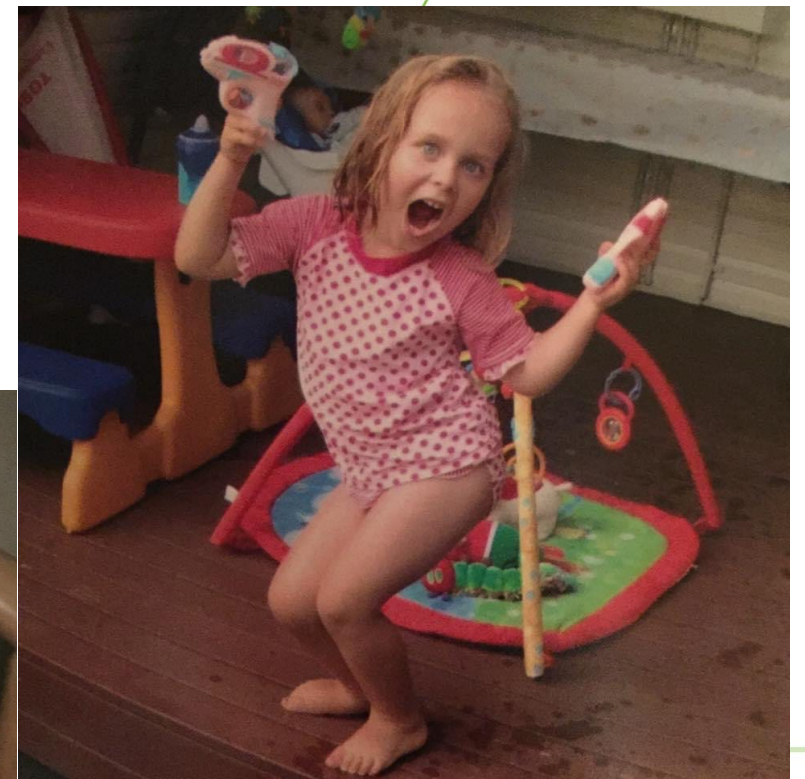
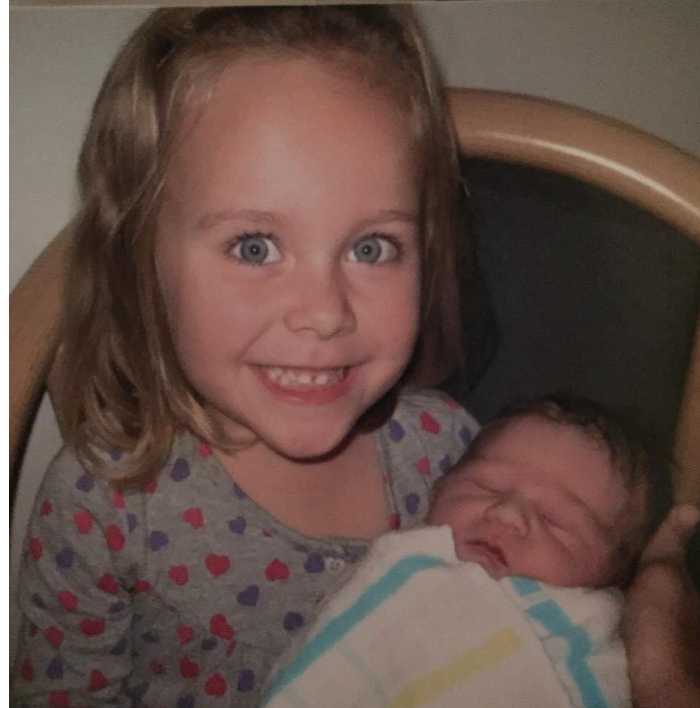
Learning to ride the wave

- Spent time in a MBU
- Continued perinatal mental health treatment for 24 months (general treatment ongoing)

Diagnosed with:

- Perinatal OCD (contamination)
- Panic Disorder
- Agoraphobia
- PMDD
- Bipolar Affective Disorder (unexpected diagnosis!)
- ADHD – combined type

Everything began to make sense....



Life goes on..... just differently

- Found a lot of clarity & peace in my ADHD and Bipolar diagnoses
- Subsequently both of my children were diagnosed (one with inattentive and one with combined)
- Medication has been difficult to manage:
 - SSRI's triggering mania
 - Mood stabilisers not managing the depression
 - Stimulants – amazing! But also unpredictable with my Bipolar episodes
 - Weight and side effects
- Tried to 'self-medicate' with alcohol (sober for 5 years)



Fast forward to now



- Mental health journey continues to have its ups and downs
- I see a psychiatrist and a psychologist regularly to keep on top of my conditions
- I continue to be challenged by ADHD daily and Bipolar several times a year
- Healing/recovery – a lifelong journey
- Medication isn't the sole 'fix' for any of my conditions
- Medication, sobriety, sleep and stress management are key to my ongoing stability and recovery
- It is difficult living as a family when 3 of you have ADHD – conflicts and chaos galore!
- My son has Type 1 Diabetes (diagnosed 3 years ago) and this is extremely challenging for all of us to manage
- I love who I am, and would never want to be anyone else – my quirks make me, 'me'!

My thoughts and wonderings



- My ADHD symptoms were very apparent from childhood. Would my trajectory have been different if I had been diagnosed earlier?
- The first time taking stimulants was scary (because Bipolar) but it was LIFE CHANGING - 'can you put your thoughts in order?'
- My parenting abilities are compromised due to my ADHD, which is why I stopped at 2!
- My Bipolar meds keep me stable 24/7 (mostly) but my stimulants only work for 6-8 hours and then I find it hard to function
- I experience extreme executive dysfunction, especially at night
- I experience sensory sensitivities to foods, smells and touch
- I am still described as too loud, too attention-seeking, too full of energy, a 'tomboy', too dramatic and many other things....

But.....

- My ADHD brings so much **fun and goodness** into my life – my ability to talk to anyone, my creative thinking, the way I can connect and empathise with others, my crazy specific knowledge about very niche topics and my ability to bring joy and energy (as well as my sarcastic sense of humour) to any setting I am in
- My challenges, while crap, have helped me learn about my brain, about how I communicate and about **how I fit into the world as my own brand of 'me'**
- **Resilience and strength** do come from adversity, and they are great skills and traits to have as a parent who needs to advocate for their own kids
- **Talking about my story helps** to remove some of the stigma and perceived judgement for others, and helps health professionals understand the impacts of untreated conditions
- I **learn quickly, I make friends quickly** and I'm **socially very adaptable**
- **If you have a crisis**, I'm your girl! I thrive on chaos and uncertainty – a great asset on any team full of 'planners', academics and clinicians



If I had a magic wand....

Would I take away my ADHD? My Bipolar? My Mental health struggles?

