

'My son was expelled from nursery'

While everyone blamed Mandy Caulkwell, 48, from Milton Keynes, for her son's appalling behaviour, she knew he wasn't just a terror toddler...



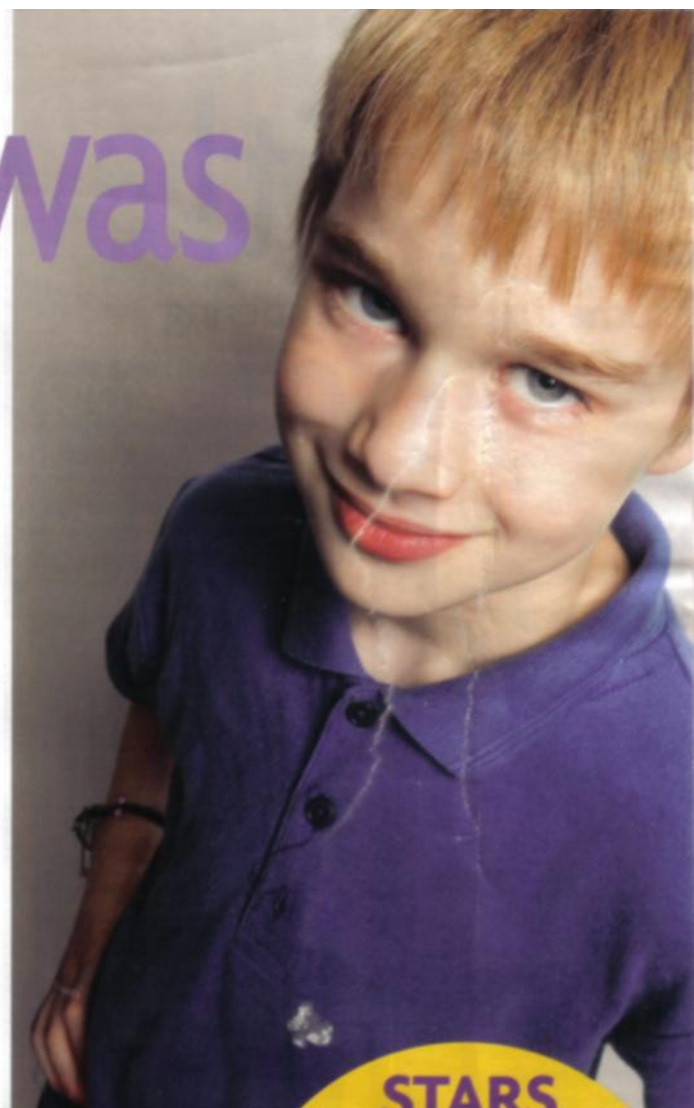
Mum Mandy was so relieved to discover the real reason for her son's strong will and tantrums

One thing that can be said about my eight-year-old son, Jonny, is that he doesn't do things by half. In his world, it's got to be all or nothing. He doesn't just walk along the local supermarket aisle, he somersaults. And he only ever watches TV upside down looking at a book and waving his legs in the air.

Now I understand the reason why and can manage him, but for the first six years of Jonny's life, me and my husband, Bill, 46, struggled with his constant tantrums and strong will.

Even when he was in the womb, Jonny was so physical that I found it impossible to sleep. And when he was finally born, his shoulder was broken, and the ligaments in his right leg were torn from being so active.

As his wounds healed, he still seemed to spend a lot of time



Jonny's was so boisterous that he'd destroyed 20 pushchairs by the time he was two

crying and went stiff every time I cuddled him. I'd had four children – Emma, now 24, Jamie, 22, Gavin, 18, and Sarah, 15 – from a previous marriage, who had all been contented babies and thrived on affection, so I found Jonny's behaviour upsetting.

Then at the age of one, Jonny started having terrible tantrums and would bang his head and kick, bite and punch anyone within reaching distance.

When I took him to see the doctor, he recommended we try parenting classes. I had to walk out because he made me so

angry. So we had to struggle on ourselves and if it wasn't for the constant support of my husband, I think I'd have gone mad.

It was impossible to get things done, and I had to brace myself every time I went out because Jonny would rock, scream and buck to get out of his pushchair. There was so much strain on the

STARS WITH ADHD



DANIEL BEDINGFIELD, 27, has suffered with ADHD all his life and describes himself as 'the most hyperactive person I know'.

LIV TYLER, 29, has admitted that she'd love to return to school as she missed out on so much due to having ADHD.



REAL LIFE HEALTH

ABOUT ADHD

WHAT IS IT? A behavioural disorder characterised by problems with attention, impulsivity and hyperactivity.

HOW COMMON IS IT? It affects up to one in 20 children and four per cent of adults in the UK.

CAUSES It's believed to be hereditary, although factors such as exposure to alcohol and tobacco during pregnancy, premature delivery and significantly low birth weight are believed to play a part.

straps, the seats would rip, and we went through 20 pushchairs by the time he was two.

I felt I was doing something wrong, and it didn't help that strangers would look at my son as though he should be locked up.

And when Jonty was two and a half and I returned to work as an IT teacher, he lasted a month in nursery before they kicked him out for disruptive behaviour.

It meant he wasn't able to play with other children, but I was determined not to give up. So, that night, I started looking on the internet and became convinced he had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). He had all the signs, from his lack of attention span to watch TV to his tendency to destroy everything and be difficult around people.

Through my research I contacted a local centre that helps preschool children and arranged to see them. It was such a relief as the adviser agreed that Jonty seemed to display the signs of ADHD and said we qualified for a private nursery place. But it was heartbreaking as even with the great staff at his new nursery, Jonty found it very hard to fit in. He had few friends and was frustrated because his speech development was so slow.

His relationship with his siblings also suffered as they resented him breaking their things and lashing out at them whenever he had one of his tantrums.

But finally, at the age of six, Jonty was prescribed Ritalin, and within weeks we saw there was a dramatic improvement. He still runs everywhere and finds it hard to do one task at a time, but now waits his turn and asks for things politely. He also attends a special school, which has really brought him out of his shell.

Some experts believe people with ADHD are highly creative and have different brainwave patterns. I don't know the truth of that, but Jonty is a brilliant gymnast, and he seems to see the world in a unique way.

It's been hard dealing with it all, but I love him and wouldn't change a thing about him.

Your child could have it if he/she...

- Makes careless mistakes and doesn't pay attention to details.
- Has difficulty paying attention.
- Doesn't seem to listen to someone speaking to them.
- Avoids or dislikes projects or games that require concentration.
- Runs or climbs, or feels restless in inappropriate situations.
- Can't stop talking.
- Blurts out answers before questions have been completed.

● For help and more information, visit www.mkadhd.org.uk.