

just want others to see in your child what you see. You find yourself defensive and trying to prevent your child, at least initially, from seeing himself as different. And then the work began with the school—the place he was to spend the majority of his life until age 18.

I have to say that my involvement with our school system has been, for the most part, excellent but, at times, very frustrating. As a parent, I was a bit intimidated by my son's teachers and by the administrative staff. While I trusted the school system, I wasn't about to sit back and let it totally direct his education. We had him evaluated outside the school system by a private therapist and had him seen by a pediatric neuropsychologist, who subsequently came to the school to meet with the faculty. I attended all meetings and read everything I could get my hands on. I volunteered for everything so I could be nearby, and I even acted as his aide in math class. His teachers were more than happy to have me, and I always felt welcomed by them in the classroom.

By educating myself I was able to be a key member of his educational team and not just a bystander, letting others call the shots. Because the educational team members knew I was involved, they made every effort to include me and to keep me completely informed. We did not always agree, however, on the direction his education should take, but it was not just academics that were at issue here.

I learned early on that sometimes academics had to come second to activities that allowed him a social outlet. Our son had difficulty understanding social cues. He had trouble with peer relationships. He wanted so much to have friends, but for the most part his peers had little to do with him. He was made fun of, laughed at, and rarely included in social events such as spend-the-night gatherings, parties, or even groups on the playground. You see, he had a hard time understanding and learning the rules of games, such as football. The light hurt his eyes, and the noises hurt his ears. He has trouble even now remembering information. He does not feel the passage of time and cannot tell you how many days there are in a year or a month, nor can he easily figure out how to divide something in half. Yet, he presents to the world as being very "normal." Everyone expects him to be able to do those things, and when he can't, they laugh and call him names. He has been bullied in the halls, at lunch, out in public, and on the Internet to the point where we had to threaten to bring charges against some of his peers.

The school has been an ally for us. Teachers and administrators have been available to answer my

questions and to advocate for him. They have made sure that tests and study guides are appropriate and, when they are not, have allowed him extra time to study or to retake tests. They have provided guidance to me so that I can help from home, and I think, most important, they recognize that he is trying and that he does the best he can. They have, on many occasions, tried to educate other students about how to treat others and have allowed me time to talk to his peers about Tourette syndrome in an attempt to educate them.

It hasn't always been easy. There have been times that I have had to go to war over him. Middle school was particularly hard. Part of the difficulty may have been because we had such a good experience in elementary school. Going from the protected environment of elementary school to middle school where he knew so few of the children in his class, where he was made fun of in the halls, and where he had so many different teachers was extremely difficult to deal with. But he survived, and things are better now that we are in high school.

For now at least, my son is doing well. He has made the transition to high school and has found his niche. He is in the marching band and loves it. He no longer has to participate in classes that are so over his head as to be embarrassing for him. He has a case coordinator who works well with him and who helps us with his class schedule. Because he will graduate with a diploma that is vocational in nature, he takes classes that are geared to his individual needs and not college prep courses. Vocational rehabilitation will start working with him, and he will soon begin to decide what kind of job he wants and begin training toward that goal. His teachers are very helpful and have shown tremendous flexibility with him.

As his parents, we are still protective and still very much involved in his life. But even I am having to back off a bit. He is a teenager now and will soon be driving (he just got his permit), which is a bit scary, but I realize he is growing up and must learn to stand on his own. He will do well. After all, school is the only time in your life where you are expected to be good at everything. He will soon start choosing his path in life. I find that my anger has finally begun to subside and that I am growing more comfortable all the time with the outlook for his future. He has friends, particularly those at church, who love him. He has siblings who watch out for him. He is growing up quite nicely and is truly a young man with a mind and faith of his own. I could not be more proud.

—Anonymous