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When Naomi Joyce discovered her son Aston had autism and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), she decided the best way forward would be to document everything about his personal journey in a daily diary, which grew and grew until she realised she had a book on her hands.

Encouraged by friends she sat down to write a manuscript, and three years on the Gold Coast mother-of-two is about to become a published first-time author.

The book will be launched soon and aims to provide a message of hope for all parents raising young neurodiverse children.

Naomi says she and husband Mark were “heartbroken” after receiving the official diagnosis in 2017, when Aston was four.

“We were in grief because we found the process quite confronting,” she says. “All these thoughts were rushing through my mind, things like what future hardships will my son endure, and will he be able to function in society?”

Switch to the present and Aston is an adventurous, curious and outgoing seven year old who loves going to parties and playdates.

“He’s about to start Year Two at a mainstream school where his learning is progressing well with help from one-on-one tuition,” Naomi says.

“We thought he’d struggle to cope at school but it turns out he’s quite resilient and he’s adjusted well to the routine and structure, in fact he really likes routine.”

Naomi credits the supports Aston receives through the NDIS for where he is today.

“As soon as we got his diagnosis we applied to join the NDIS and he was accepted pretty much straight away into the early childhood intervention stream,” she says.

“The benefits have been enormous as we were able to fund the early intervention Aston needed, for instance occupational therapy, speech therapy and applied behavioural therapy targeted at those areas where he really needed support.

“Aston’s NDIS funding also paid for our participation in the Autism 360^{o} program which provides one-on-one sessions for parents to help them boost their child’s individual capacity in the areas of communication, social and learning skills, and daily living.”

In her book Naomi relates plenty of anecdotes from her own experience of raising Aston (called Noah in the book) to highlight the joys of raising children with ASD and ADHD, and how she came to embrace new parenting concepts and ways of doing things.

She also writes about how Aston adjusted to the birth of his little sister Imogen (Abbey in the book), who is now five.

However, Naomi says the book doesn’t aim to promote a set ‘how to’ guide.

“Each child is uniquely beautiful and what may work for one child, may not work for every child; therefore, you have to keep trying new ways to bring significant positive change,” she says.

“If I was to describe the key message for parents of neurodiverse children, it would be the importance of seeking early intervention and accessing NDIS funding for therapies.

“There are some great evidence-based programs out there that really do make a difference.”

Titled ‘Set Free Autism and ADHD: Parenting Special Needs Children’, Naomi’s book will be available in bookshops and online from early April.

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