

Sticking With Myself:

A Neurodivergent Story of Hurt, Healing, and Perseverance

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I was eight years old when I first learned what it felt like to stick with something hard. It wasn't because I chose to, but because I didn't know there was another option. In fourth grade, I was teased for being the new kid and trying too hard to connect with people. I was called Urkel. I was mocked for going to the bathroom too often and for calling out in class. Over time, I earned a lifelong label: too much, too emotional, too loud, too eager, too impulsive.

I didn't know I had ADHD and anxiety. I didn't understand boundaries or how to tell who was a real friend. I just knew that being myself drew the wrong kind of attention.

So I adapted. I shrank. I stuck with communities that misunderstood me because I believed the problem was me. That pattern followed me throughout my schooling.

I was eager to become an adult and start over. However, when I got older, the bullying didn't disappear. It just became quieter and more socially acceptable. It looked like being talked over in meetings, then labeled "too intense" when I spoke up. It looked like jokes about my energy or mistakes, followed by "just kidding." I learned to monitor myself constantly because the cost of not doing so felt heavy.

Years later, as an ADHD coach, I wanted to know whether this was personal or systemic. I surveyed 158 ADHD adults worldwide. The results were striking:

- 89% were bullied as children
- 82% were bullied as adults
- 70% experienced bullying during both ages
- 93% said their ADHD traits contributed

As one participant put it, "It didn't stop. It just got more professional."

After my ADHD diagnosis and coaching, I noticed a shift. Before that, sticking with something meant forcing myself to endure. Afterward, it became about self-trust.

I began taking "1% steps" — small actions that led to big changes. I wrote down what I wanted to say after a hard interaction instead of pushing myself to respond in real time. I left a meeting or party early when my body was overloaded, or I let a message sit overnight instead of replying immediately to prove I was "easy."

Boundaries followed. In a group chat, a family member wrote something about me as a joke. Instead of laughing it off, I said, "You might think I'm overly sensitive, but I didn't like what you wrote about me." I didn't argue or explain. The group moved on, and so did I.

Another boundary came at work. When a boss yelled at me within earshot of colleagues, I asked for a one-on-one meeting and told her it wasn't okay to speak to me that way, especially publicly. She heard me, and she treated me with more respect afterward.

This is how neurodivergent people stick with hard things. Not through grit, but through believing our needs and limits matter.

Here's where the theme of sticking with something becomes more than a slogan.

Neurodivergent people are often experts at persevering through challenging tasks. We stay in painful dynamics, unfair classrooms, harsh workplaces, and friendships

that drain us because we believe we have to fix ourselves to earn belonging. But sticking with something challenging becomes powerful when it shifts from survival to self-understanding.

Here are a few gentle anchors for that shift:

Ask yourself:

- What are my values?
- What energizes me and lights me up?
- What and who drains me?
- Who gets me and supports the real version of me?

Stick with 1% steps, because healing rarely arrives in massive shifts.

Write down what you want to say before a hard conversation instead of forcing an immediate response.

Let a text or email sit unanswered until your nervous system settles.

Leave 10 minutes early

Before an emotionally charged moment, eat, breathe, or move your body

Create a self-awareness checklist.

Am I giving myself time to think before responding?

Am I noticing when my body is signaling overwhelm and responding with care instead of criticism?

Am I choosing pause over pressure, even when it feels unfamiliar?

Where today did I honor my needs, even in a small way?

Stick with boundaries, even when they feel assertive.

Say, "I need time to think about that," instead of defaulting to yes.

Choose not to explain or justify your boundary.

Do not laugh along when something hurts.

Decide who gets access to your time, energy, and personal story.

Choose clarity over shame.

Replace "What's wrong with me?" with "What do I need?"

Let adult insight and data points interrupt old stories about being "too much."

Break hard things into smaller steps you can return to.

If something is exhausting your emotions, energy, and executive functions, then take a break.

If any of this feels familiar, you're not alone. You were never too much. You weren't failing at persistence. You were persisting in a way that wasn't recognized. As you learned to stick with yourself, everything began.

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Are you an adult with ADHD? Share your perspective in this short survey on adult bullying:

