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## Easing the stigma of ADHD

**DENISE DAVY**

The Hamilton Spectator

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Lucky Horseshoes is a children's book that tells the story of a little girl named Skippy who befriends a dragon named Iris.

Skippy is frustrated because she keeps getting chastised for not sitting still, something she's unable to control. Skippy doesn't know why she acts this way until her mother takes her for tests.

She is diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, also known as ADHD.

Once her mother finds her the help she needs and begins a treatment plan, Skippy's life begins to change for the better.

"I used to really hate school. It made me feel so anxious," says Skippy.

"But now that I understand what they are teaching me, I get my work done and I really like it."

It's a cute story, but there's a more serious meaning behind the storyline. This is author Gayle Grass's second book in a series called A Tale From The Iris The Dragon Series, which addresses children's mental health issues.

Grass, who lives near Ottawa, came up with the concept for the books as a result of dealing with her son's diagnosis of ADHD at the age of 10.

That was 20 years ago when the stigma around children's mental health issues was even worse than it is today, said Grass.

"It's the No. 1 reason why families don't go for help," she said.

This, despite the fact one in every five children in Ontario has some form of mental health need.

"Parents still don't want to talk about it. They feel ashamed as if it was their fault," said Grass.

"They'd never blame themselves if their child got cancer, but they do if it's a mental health issue."

Grass was turned down by several publishers who told her there wasn't a market for the book -- a comment she says reflects the "don't talk about it" attitude people have toward children's mental health issues.

Not to be deterred, she set up Iris The Dragon Inc., an educational publishing company that, in addition to the book series, offers educational resources related to children's mental health.

Grass said the book is unique because it tells the story through the feelings and thoughts of a child with ADHD. She hopes it will "give children a language" to better understand their illness -- and show their parents they are not alone.

Most of all, she hopes it will encourage parents who suspect their child may have a problem to reach out for help.

Grass's son was among 30 to 40 per cent of children with ADHD who develop a bipolar illness when they get older. He was also among the 10 per cent who did not respond to medication to correct it.

"If this book helps one parent get help, I'll be happy," said Grass.

You can purchase Iris The Dragon by going to website [iristhedragon.com](http://iristhedragon.com) or by asking a bookstore to order it.

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More about ADHD

\* On Wednesday, May 16, at 10 p.m. TVO presents My Different Life, a documentary about a single mother trying to get proper care for her three children. Two have a learning disability and the third has ADHD. \* For more information on ADHD, go to Denise Davy's parenting blog at theSpec.com under Favourite Links, and click on blogs.



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