

It's been a long day!

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Education can and should be emancipatory. Yet, for many of our neurodivergent children, it can feel like torture. Common challenges faced by neurodivergent children in our schools include sleep deprivation, sensory overload, social isolation, and repeated questioning - all compounded by a sense of powerlessness and the inability to leave or change their environment. As much as we strive to do our best for our young, it sometimes feels as though, in our efforts to educate, we do more harm than good.

There is no doubt that we've made significant progress in supporting neurodivergent children. It wasn't so long ago that some children were forced to write with their non-dominant hand or subjected to physical punishment for failing to make the grade. However, despite this progress, inequality of outcomes for neurodivergent individuals persists. In extreme cases, some are even institutionalized in hospitals, or imprisoned due to a lack of appropriate and available support. Clearly, we still have a long way to go. Given the chronic underfunding of our education system, it feels increasingly important for individuals to come together, support one another, and collectivize their efforts for change.

This poem is not about any one person. It is an amalgamation of my own experiences—as a child, parent, husband, educator, and a friend and confidant to other parents of neurodivergent children. I've been fortunate to be part of a self-organized parent support group for adults with neurodivergent children. There is something deeply powerful about learning from others with shared or similar experience - helping and being helped at the same time. Sometimes, it feels like you don't have the energy to take on another responsibility, another evening spent meeting with other parents. But, in my experience, it is almost always worth it. The connection with others, the empathy for each other's

situations - it all helps to re-energize you for the fight ahead. As one of my fellow strugglers once said, 'I arrive with a problem, but always leave with a few new ideas to try and address it'. Moreover, participation in interest groups provides opportunities for collective action in support of our cause. This poem was used as a means of sharing the experiences of neurodivergent children with their teachers.

This poem is dedicated to the parents and carers of neurodivergent children, their allies within the education system (of which there are many), and to all the neurodivergent children making their way through the school day - after day, after day.

7:45, it's been a long day!

We struggle to wake, we struggle to rise.
We fight over teeth we fight over ties.
The toothpaste's too minty, it burns in my mouth.
My clothes feel all scratchy, as I'm leaving the house.
My brother was waiting as I ran out the door,
He might be much younger, but he is starting to soar.
He meets all his milestones; he loves joining in.
I know I should too, but that's just the thing.
Sports day is noisy, the classrooms too light,
I give it my best, but my answers aren't right.
I've tried and I've tried, but try as I might,
I just never get it, I'm just not that bright

8:45, it's been a long day!

I get to the playground, it's busy and loud.
I scan left and right, for a friend in the crowd.

My stomachs in knots, what is to come?
I've left my safe space and said bye to mum.
I step into the classroom, lessons begin.
Spelling is tricky, but at least it's not gym.
My arms are so awkward, they never play ball.
My feet out of step, I'm likely to fall.
Games in the playground, I'm always last pick.
I know how this goes; I feel anxious and sick.
I'll stay at the side and keep out of the way,
If I go unnoticed, they will allow me to play.
At least I'm outside and I get to move,
My desks like a prison, I fidget to soothe.

12:45, it's been a long day!

Lunch time arrives, what will it be?
I know I am fussy; we will just have to see
Maybe I'll eat it, I hope it is nice
Bland is my favourite; I'd be happy with rice
Flavours are fierce, too much to bear
Textures important, does anyone care?
I've had a nibble, the rests in the bin
No wonder I'm tired, pale and so thin
I've made it through lunch, back out to play
I'm getting frustrated, it's been a long day

Finally, projects, I love this the best.
I get so excited; do they think I'm a pest.
My teacher is lovely, she asks "you, ok? "
I wish I could tell her, its slipping away

I smile for a second, trying to remember the task
I tell her I'm fine, does she see through my mask
I hold it together, there's not long to go
The melt down is coming, it's beginning to show

3:45, it's been a long day!

It's over, I've done it, a chance to be free!
For just a short time, I get to be me
In the car home, and I've got nothing to say
I can tell dad's bursting, "what happened today?"
I can't even remember what I had to eat
Or that I slipped and fell over my feet
He finally asks, "how was your day?"
I lose it again, what does he want me to say?
I'm tired and I'm hungry, my brain is away
I'm processing everything that happened today

The car falls silent.....

We are finally home and it's up to my room
Under the covers, my bed's like a tomb
Off with my clothes, the itching has gone
Time for some darkness then, get YouTube on
I'm on my way back, my hunger arrives
I start to feel normal, it's a lovely surprise
Time with my people, time to be me
I can be crazy, wild and so free

That time soon passes, I'm pulled into line

Homework is calling, breathe, it's going to be fine
I just can't do it; I've giving you my all.
Push any harder and I'm likely to fall.

A parent's dilemma, to push or to hug.
The look in his eyes, my hearts strings they tug.
Let's do it tomorrow, brings joy to his face.
It's pointless tonight, he's all over the place.

9:45, it's been a long day!

Everyone's in bed, but no-one's asleep.
The silence is deafening, as he lies in a heap.
11 then 12, I know he's awake.
Thinking about school and how he's a fake.
I remember not sleeping when he was a babe,
It drives you demented and makes you a slave.
I eventually give in and go to say hi,
You still awake bud; you gave it a try.
Let's cuddle together, I'll tickle your back.
And when you're sleeping, I'll hit the sack.

He's finally ready to share all his fears,
I listen, I smile and fight back the tears.
Let's put on a Star Wars, that does the trick.
Let's lie here together, sleep will come quick.
Your breath becomes heavy, you're finally asleep.
I slip out your room, without as much as a peep.
I look at my wife, she doesn't need to say.
Let's just be grateful, it's been a long day.