

MOM STRESS & ANXIETY

WHEN CONSTANT, UNPREDICTABLE STRESS REWIRES YOUR BRAIN

MY FIGHT-OR-FLIGHT DIDN'T JUST GET ACTIVATED; IT BROKE



ALWAYS ON CALL

I'm convinced people either thought I was a workaholic or had an unhealthy attachment to my iPhone. It went everywhere with me—medical appointments, Pilates classes, the bathroom. If I set it down, it was only because I needed both hands for something medically necessary.

By the time Chris was in elementary school, I was on a first-name basis with every principal, administrator, and teacher in the district, K–12. Not because I wanted to be, but because I was essentially running a part-time satellite office out of their campuses. Being called to the school wasn't an occasional disruption; it was a thrice-weekly event. The only mystery was which day, what time, and what fresh chaos awaited.

THE STRESS THAT STAYED

I'm convinced the permanent stress of those years actually rewired my brain. A therapist once compared it to PTSD. I laughed, the kind of nervous laugh you give when you're hoping someone will say, "No, no, I'm exaggerating." She didn't. Instead, she gave me an analogy.

THE PING-PONG BALL ANALOGY

She told me to imagine someone throwing a ping-pong ball at my head. Not hard, just enough to make me flinch. Then imagine them doing it for an hour straight. Then stopping. Then three hours later, doing it once. Then nothing for two days. Then three hours on Tuesday. Then nothing again. Over and over, unpredictably.

STUCK IN THE "ON" POSITION

She said that's what my nervous system had been living through, constant, inconsistent, unavoidable impact. And she wasn't wrong. My fight-or-flight didn't just get activated; it broke. Permanently stuck in the "on" position. I became someone who was always on watch, always bracing, always scanning the horizon for the next ping-pong ball.

**HYPER FOCUSED.
HYPERVIGILANT. WAITING
FOR WHATEVER WAS GOING
TO COME AT ME NEXT**

SURVIVAL

And honestly, when you're parenting a neurodivergent child in a world that throws ping-pong balls instead of support, it's not surprising your brain adapts. It's survival. It's what we do.