

I don't need to tell you how it feels. Most of you who read this newsletter have heard the same basic words as my wife and I have. "Your son has autism." It took a few minutes to sink in. Fortunately for us, there were also hopeful words that accompanied this heart-wrenching diagnosis. About a year ago a pediatric behavioral specialist determined that our two year-old son Zachary has PPD (Pervasive Developmental Delay), a mild form of autism. She explained to us that in Zack's case he was significantly delayed in speech development and he also had sensory integration problems. These integration issues led to aggressive behavior such as biting, pinching and severe tantruming. Sound familiar to any of you?

However, the "good news" was that although he was classified as autistic he did display some characteristics of children "not on the spectrum". At times he seemed to socialize, play and hold eye contact better than other toddlers who had more severe challenges. When Alta Regional assessed Zack's case, we were told that with early and intense intervention he would probably be able to function fairly normally. Supervised and chauffeured by my dedicated wife Becky, Zack began a demanding twenty-hour a week regiment of in-home tutors and speech and occupational therapy.

Shortly after Zack had begun his routine, our "miracle" entered our lives. We had invited a couple we knew from church over for dinner; before this time we had known them only casually. Over dinner, the conversation turned to Zack, and we shared the information about his condition with Brian and Gina Jenkins. Brian, a chiropractor, was fascinated by the diagnosis of autism considering Zack had some characteristics that didn't seem to fit the profile. Brian asked us to bring Zack in to his office in order to take some x-rays. It literally took two full-grown men (Brian and myself) to hold down the two-year old to get some pictures of his neck.

When Brian analyzed the developed images, he muttered almost to himself that he would probably be biting and hitting people too if his neck looked like Zack's. When he finished all his calculations, Brian explained to us that a small bone called the atlas which is located at the top of the spinal cord. Out of the thousands of x-rays that he had look at, Brian had only seen one atlas bone more out of alignment. Zack's atlas was tilted twenty-one millimeters (almost an inch) from where it should have been. In reviewing the medical history we had provided, Brian noted that Zack had ear tubes for chronic infections. He told us that ear infections were a common result of the atlas being out of alignment. In fact, he explained to us that a group of pediatric ear, nose and throat medical doctors in Germany published a prescribed course of treatment for chronic childhood ear infections that recommended chiropractic-type atlas adjustments before trying antibiotics.

Brian's theory was that Zack's atlas had been pushed out of its proper location during the birthing process, and the muscles in his neck had developed around it in such a way that they held the bone in the incorrect position. As the nervous system for the body must pass through the neck to reach the brain, Brian reasoned that the misalignment in Zack's spine could be causing the sensory issues. Basically, the impulses to Zack's brain may have been affected which could have led to his heightened sensitivity to sensory stimulus. Brian made sure to tell us this was just a theory. He made no promises of miraculous results, but he believed getting the atlas in its proper place might help Zack's processing abilities.

That day, Brian gave Zack an adjustment that took all of about one second and consisted of tiny ping on his neck. At first, we took Zack in twice a week to determine when he needed his next adjustment. Almost immediately we began seeing results; within a couple of weeks Zack's vocabulary went from two words to about ten. Over that past few months, his vocabulary has reached the point where we no longer number the words that he knows. He has started to string words together to make short phrases. While he still is behind where he should be in speech, the progress he has made is remarkable.

His demeanor has also changed significantly. He tantrums less and is much easier to re-direct. Many people at church have come up to us and expressed their amazement in the change they have seen in him over the past of couple months (that tells you something about what he was like before). He has completely stopped biting and has greatly reduced how often he pinches. He can be reasoned with now, and although he still has a difficult time communicating verbally, his receptive language skills are much further developed.

Of course, during this time Zack has still received his other interventions, and I don't want to downplay their importance in any way. He has worked with many wonderful tutors and therapists who have helped him immensely. Dr. Jenkins advised us to continue with all of Zack's speech, occupational and in-home therapies. He felt that Zack would benefit the most from the combined efforts of the several different experts. This definitely had been the case, but I have seen the most dramatic results after he began his visits to Brian's office. I believe that the chiropractic adjustments have made Zack's progress possible, and the efforts of the other dedicated professionals have ensured that these improvements take hold.

Zack turned three years old the day that I wrote this letter. Recently, he was re-evaluated by Alta Regional. He has improved so much that they recommended that his diagnosis for autism be taken away. This has come as a mixed blessing to us because it will mean less support for him, and we are currently in the process of having this new evaluation confirmed. Now that he's three, his support will be provided through San Juan School District, and it looks like he will be given services relating to his delays in communication, but he is not recommended for an autistic class.

Dr. Jenkins still sees Zack on a regular basis, but he now only needs an adjustment once every few weeks. The plan is that his atlas will eventually stay in place on its own as the muscles in his neck get used to holding it in the right place. Of course, Zack will also continue speech and occupational therapy. He will also start a communicatively handicapped preschool in the fall. None of us know what the future holds, but my wife and I feel much better about Zack's potential than we did a year ago thanks in large part to Brian Jenkins and the other people who have worked with Zack. Kaary Ogaard has been his speech therapist; his tutoring has been provided through Advance Kids, and he goes to Vista for occupational therapy. Dr. Jenkins' office is located in Fair Oaks; the office phone number is (916) 962-0144 and his website is www.jenkinschiropractic.com.
