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ADOPTION OF RESOLUTION  
WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Hello.

I am the mother of a three-year-old boy who was diagnosed last year with a form of Autism called PDD or Pervasive Developmental Disorder. My son is a handsome boy, particularly funny and affectionate, who was born, as one would say, a healthy child.

However, from early on, I noted that his personality was somehow different from the other babies. He was rather mellow, and to me, the other kids seemed even hyperactive compared to his laid-back, pleasant ways.

I noticed that he would hit the so-called "Milestones" always months later than the rest, for example while other kids were walking, he was just starting to crawl.

He loved being in my arms, but did not want being held by others. I really didn't make much of that. By the time he was one year old, he showed little awareness of the world outside, but being my only son, I thought it was just a matter of personality.

By the time he was a year and a half I started sharing my concerns. A friend told me I should bring him for an evaluation; but I was promptly discouraged by both my family and Doctors who told me that my son was just fine, and that boys were simply slower.

I tried not to compare him with the rest, but while other kids his age were talking, jumping, showing cognitive development, my son seemed even to regress. He stopped saying the couple of words he had -"Mom" one of them-, he wouldn't respond to his name, his eye contact was very poor, he, wouldn't play appropriately with his toys -other than putting them in his mouth or banging them against the floor. If I needed to change his diaper, what is called "transitioning", he would, in frustration, hit his head against the wall or floor.

The day after his second birthday, I called the Early Intervention Office of the NY Department of Health. Throughout the evaluations, they kept asking me whether he had the habit of flapping his arms, tiptoeing, spinning, staring at lights. I answered yes to all. He did not engage in 'pretend play' and could not imitate my funny faces, and would not point at things or body parts. Two months later, I was hit with what now seem so obvious: an Autism diagnosis.

I asked my husband to keep the diagnosis confidential to prevent my son from being labeled with such a strong word. Now I see this ‘denial’ as part of my own accepting process.

A few months later, I did confide with some friends and family members. Some supported me, while others just thought that I was exaggerating, and that my son’s behavior was merely because I was an over-protective mother. Others said they sort of saw something along the lines of Autism, but did not think it was their place to say it. I wish they had had the courage to tell me back then. My son would have just gotten therapy earlier, and by now, he would have progressed even more.

If you are thinking:

- “My son didn’t speak until he was four either, and look at him now”
- “I can’t catch a ball either, I am bad at sports and that’s not Autism”.

Well, my son had those difficulties, and many more, but all of them at the same time.

And I gather that at this point there is no need to get too much into the tantrums in public spaces; the harsh looks we get, and how unfairly we are judged, my son as a brat, and me, as a bad mother. Which reminds me of a T-shirt that says: *I’m not rude or nasty, I have Autism. What’s your excuse?*

The diagnosis at first hurt me immensely, but on the other hand, it helped us make sense of the things that we saw that were not right, and now, we could tackle them more efficiently. The services that he started receiving, called “Early Intervention” made a huge difference. I made the decision not to go back to work, and stay home to facilitate services and to be able to learn from the therapists how to carry over their techniques the rest of the day. He received intensive home-based therapy for a year, five days a week from 9 to 6 by a team of two Special Educators, an Occupational and a Physical Therapist, two Speech Pathologists, and a Social Worker. Today, at three and a half, my son is able to make short sentences both in English and Spanish, and more importantly, for the past few months, he’s been able to tell me whether he is hungry, sleepy, cold or hot, sad or happy.

My son today is attending a Preschool for kids with Special Needs from 8:30 am to 2 pm. He receives home therapy in the afternoons, an average of two hours daily; and he is expected –keeping fingers crossed- to be mainstreamed to a regular school by age five. Where would he have been had he not received early intensive treatment? We will never know. Where will he be ten years from now? We don’t know either. As Doctors and Therapists tell me, nobody has the crystal ball when it comes to these types of brain disorders.

But we do count our blessings, because not all kids affected by Autism can speak and express their feelings, or act ‘socially appropriately’ as our son now does –most of the time... I will never forget what I read from a father saying that if his son could speak, he

would ask him three questions: Is your mattress comfortable? Do you like the clothes we buy you? Do you love me?

For some parents, their concerns are whether their children will be doctors or lawyers, and when, and to whom, they will get married. For us, they are: Will my child be able to live an independent life? Who will take care of him, or her, the day I will no longer be around? But one of the things that we, parents of children with Autism have learned is to be in the moment, and to celebrate every little, yet giant progress our children make everyday.

Your Excellency Ambassador Al-Nasser, may I, on behalf of all families affected by Autism, express our gratitude for your invaluable support towards the creation of a United Nations World Autism Day.

The adoption of this Resolution during our lifetime, is giving this generation of parents and grandparents not only comfort, but also a sense of accomplishment. Our main goal is to increase awareness, yes; but our hope is that one day, Early Intervention services could become accessible to all children affected by this disorder. We don't know of a cure yet, but early treatment is the essential and imperative first step for the long road to recovery.

We are encouraged by the fact that an international Autism Awareness Day will educate the world by showing that these kids are not the way they are because we spoil them, neglect them, or overprotect them. Neither them, nor we have chosen for them to behave in what is seen as peculiar ways. They don't choose to avoid eye contact, or to be silent. That is why we are here today, to speak for them.

In closing, I would like to pay public tribute to Bob and Suzanne Wright, for their devotion to our kids, both as Grandparents, and as international Advocates.

Thank you for making a difference.

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