

Pxxx, our family and María's connection therapy

Pxxx is my second child. I realized early on that he was a kid ahead for his age developmentally speaking. He was an early crawler and also he started to walk and, run early as well. Soon he was sleeping all night and started to talk and eat solids before the established age. We even placed him in a nursery a few hours a week at a young age.

Suddenly, at 18 months of age, he started to run randomly from one side to another, making strange body movements with his body, especially arms and hands. He would hide inside the pantry to be alone, and pull things out of the fridge to hide inside. He started to reject food as well. Soon his menu was reduced to sausage, rice and processed juices. Suddenly he stopped talking, did not look at us in the eyes or when we talked to him and we suspected he was deaf. From that moment on, we visited countless doctors and underwent several medical studies. The list is long, as Pxxx sight and hearing potential were evaluated. He underwent several CT scans and electrocardiograms. We visited different pediatricians, gastroenterologist, nutritionists, ophthalmologists, psychologists and neurologists and after six months of an agonizing journey they told us that he may well be a child with autism.

Looking back, from my personal experience during these interventions and after he was subject to several traditional behavioural interventions and methodologies, that initially generated behavioral changes in my son, through the years these did not have a major impact on his life or well being. Now I understand many did not go to the core of his being in any way.

He was already 9 and it was my intention to create or to find a support center for children like Pxxx when Dr. Serrano (María) came into our lives to transform not only Pxxx but all of us. María found a Pxxx in his own world, full of stereotyped movements and self-stimulation behaviors obsessed with the corners of my living room throwing small objects into the air. Yet despite his typical autistic behaviors, María was able to connect with him and surprisingly we were able to see how he started to play with her assistant on the first visit.

María suggested an intensive home program without specific outcomes but to connect with Pxxx and we built for him a special room with mirrors. María's work was intense, and so was ours. She selected a small group of people whose main objective was to connect with Pxxx and she trained them and me as well. To everyone's surprise, Pxxx used the room only for 3 weeks, and after that we were already thinking in a larger space for him within the house. Changes during this short period were already evident as Pxxx started to look at us and seek our attention and many of the compulsive obsessive behaviors disappeared one after another.

Pxxx also stated to feel both physical and emotional pain, where before he could fall and show no signs of distress. It was the first time I saw my son seeking my comfort and my embrace. He would even tolerate another child in the room and started to seek after his sister. I would never forget the day when Pxxx looked into another child's eyes, showed him his toys and hugged him. The most wonderful thing for our family was that in this initial stage Pxxx connected with his older sister and since then they have become best partners. Although these experiences were short-lived at first, they meant the world to me and opened a promising future for all of us.

The second stage of María's intervention took place within the house in the living room. He did not go back to throwing small things into the air any more and he began to play with us, a thing never thought possible before. The stressed and ill-tempered Pxxx gave way to a happy, playful and energetic purposeful child. Although still far from developmentally appropriate expectations for his age, we thought we were in heaven.

María observed that Pxxx was bored!!! Before connection therapy, he could be in a self-stimulating activity for hours, like being in the shower for 6 hours in a row, but Pxxx needed more as he started to enjoy physical games with others, and even showed incipient signs of object manipulation abandoning interest in objects for sensory self-stimulation only. At this stage his eye contact was

consolidated and today, after 5 months of therapy, not only does he look at us in the eyes, but when we talk to him he responds, and sometimes he takes our faces into his hands so we look directly at him.

Pxxx is more conscious and aware of his surroundings. He prefers people to play with than the objects that at a given time would "take" him to his own world. His smile is different and he even makes sweet sounds showing us how much he enjoys being with us. It is clear that Pxxx understands and tolerates, learns and accepts the world and the people around him. The list of changes is very long but it is noteworthy that after two months of therapy, after eight years of silence I finally heard my son's voice when he spontaneously began to throw words to us with intent and meaning. Pxxx also began to be mischievous. He no longer rejects his clothes and even puts them on. Going to the hair dresser is not a problem any more. Before, he would not allow anybody cut his hair without crying or stress. We no longer needed 4 people to restrain him! He sits there and with our presence waits for the hairdresser to do his job!

It is unbelievable to me that today he tells me he loves me with his own words: "ma mo oe". ("Mama I love you" in Spanish (Mama te amo) and not with the echolalic repetition from the past. Changes were such that the spaces at home were no longer enough for his needs, so we built a sensory room for him designed by María where Pxxx regulates himself, plays and feels empathy for the pain of other children coming to play with him. I can not express what it means to me when I see his language emerging as a fresh stream of unexpected words.

Pondering on these five months of intense work, I remember how María came to us surrounded by her wonderful aura of knowledge and love marking a division in Pxxx life and in ours where we could actually talk about a "before and after" in his development.

For some people my experience may seem "magic" but it is not. Behind each of María's interventions one could see her total commitment to the child. What initially could start as an intuition turns into a full explanation of facts and methods by which she decided to proceed in a particular manner with my child. María supports everything she does with scientific evidence in what she calls "her continuous learning". She is so specific that she leaves no family member out.

María embraced Pxxx globally. She is the first one surprised with Pxxx changes. For us, she became that adorable multifaceted woman who fills the space with the roles of bonding therapist, psychologist, confidant, favorite person, and a friend of everyone around her.

We have seen many changes in Pxxx amid the pain and anguish of an uncertain future. But today his changes have filled us with emotional satisfaction and certainty that Pxxx's quality of life is better now than ever. Without expectations, we let ourselves be surprised, because as María says: "Provided that Pxxx continues to change we will always know we are moving ahead" Today I am sure that the best is yet to come !!! ...

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