

Never Give up Hope

by *Kristin Selby Gonzalez*

The day I almost lost my son...

My son's dimples and smile filled the room and his eyes seemed to glow. From afar, at a ripe age of 2½, he seemed like the happiest little boy on the face of the earth, which brought tears to my eyes after three miscarriages and being told he would never be born. As I sat in the doctor's office that day my ears grew numb as I was told the things my son would *never* do...my beautiful son, who had just been diagnosed with autism:

“He will *never* be capable of talking.”

“He will *never* be able to look at you.”

“He will *never* be able to tell the difference between you and the chair you're sitting on.”

“He will *never* have friends.”

“He will, however, be in a group home by age 8. Once a duck, always a duck.”

And...the doctor's famous last words as we were leaving, “Go home and grieve for the child you thought you had, as he will *never* improve beyond where he is today.” That word *never* still rings in my mind...

The day I decided to take my son back...

So, I went home and followed the doctor's orders. I crawled in bed and grieved and grieved, and grieved some more. And then, one day my son jumped in my grieving spot with me and I hugged him. As I snuggled with my little blessing I stopped grieving long enough to think, “Is the future that doctor described good enough for my son? No...absolutely not! Come on, Jaxson, we are going to roll up our sleeves and we aren't going down without a fight!” Onto the computer I went and found many other parents on there talking about options for treating autism including special diets, biomedical treatments, special therapies, and the list went on and on.

Fast forward to now....

I love to reflect on the things my son can do...

Jaxson says “Good morning, Mommy! I love you!” as he hugs and kisses me with the new day.

Jaxson talks in sentences.

Jaxson is fully potty-trained and dresses himself.

Jaxson rides a two-wheel bike.

Jaxson plays games, sings songs and reads books.

Jaxson loves his family and knows his family loves him.

Jaxson is 9, and is NOT in a group home.

Our Journey...

It was a multi-pronged approach that has helped Jaxson on his road to recovery from autism. He saw substantial improvements from the following:

- The Son-Rise Program®
- Special Diets
- Enzyme Therapy
- Biomedical Treatments
- Nutritional Supplementation
- Far Infrared Sauna
- Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy
- Sensory Integration Techniques
- Speech Therapy
- Cleaning up toxins in his environment

Finding the Right Educational Program

I believe that none of this would have been possible had I not found The Son-Rise Program®, an educational method that involved joining Jaxson in his own world before inviting him to join us in ours. Raun Kaufman, the CEO of the Autism Treatment Center of America™, had, himself, been diagnosed with severe autism as a boy, but had fully recovered through The Son-Rise Program®, which his parents developed specifically to help him. I began the course with some trepidation, not knowing whether this program would be what I was looking for. When I saw, on the first day, how the staff at the Center believed in Jaxson and didn't in any way write him off, I knew I was on the right track. I got home and immediately began implementing this child-centered, parent directed program with Jaxson. And look how far he's come! From nonverbal to speaking in sentences from disconnected to engaged, playful and interactive. After all that I was told what he would *never* do, I was so excited as I continued to run his program and see all that he *could* do.

Finding the Right Biomedical Interventions

One aspect of my son's autism that became apparent very quickly was that it had many biomedical components. My son had heavy metals such as mercury in his body. He had chronic constipation along with severe stomach pain; and he had extreme sensitivity to a wide range of foods, such as dairy, wheat, and other grains. It was hard to watch my cute little guy crying and pushing huge yoga type balls into his stomach in an effort to get some relief. Biomedical interventions were instrumental for helping Jaxson's body start to heal and recover by way of mineral supplementation, DMSA chelation (to eliminate the mercury and other toxins), detoxification of Jaxson's gut, and other crucial treatments. Some of Jaxson's biomedical therapies included: aerosol glutathione, secretin, methyl B-12 injections, far infrared sauna, Epsom salt baths and nutritional supplementation. With the use of glutathione, there was a small jump in his language and ability to follow directions. The sauna sessions created something new yet so simple: Jaxson, for the first time, was able to perspire, and he began sleeping much better throughout the night. It was also very interesting to see that when we began methyl B-12 injections, we saw no change; however, once we started enzyme therapy (see below), the injections suddenly yielded results. The day

after each injection, we would get comments from those working with Jaxson that he was more connected, had more eye contact and was more flexible in games. (As I'm sure you know, it can be so challenging to discern exactly which biomedical intervention leads to which improvement, since many of us use interventions concurrently.) More recently we have added hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT) to Jaxson's protocol and are already noticing wonderful social and cognitive improvements.

Finding the Right Dietary Interventions

Dietary intervention is so crucial for so many of our children. Food can either be medicine or poison. In the early days, though I didn't realize it at the time, most of Jaxson's food was poison. Drastically altering Jaxson's diet became one of the cornerstones of his treatment. One of our big goals has been to do everything we can to heal and seal Jaxson's gut. My own research led me to the dietary intervention that is best for Jaxson: a gluten-free and casein-free version of the Specific Carbohydrate Diet (SCD) in combination with the Body Ecology Diet.

Adding Enzyme Therapy

One of the most exciting interventions I found was enzyme therapy. Because Jaxson has such severe digestive issues, this therapy has been of utmost importance to him. I also had digestive issues (although not as debilitating as Jaxson's), and this helped me within the space of one meal. With the addition of enzyme therapy Jaxson's language exploded! I could now ask him a question like, "Jaxson, how are you?" and he would suddenly reply, "I am doing good." He would spontaneously say, "Good-bye. I love you!" The combination of dietary intervention plus enzyme therapy benefitted Jaxson enormously.

Becoming "Sensory Savvy"

It is so important to do our best to see through our children's eyes. Children with autism frequently have a sensory processing disorder. This means that our children see, hear and feel things very differently than most of us do. I can tell you with certainty that Jaxson hears things at different volumes than I do, sees light differently and has a different sense of touch than I do. He often is very sensitive to things he hears and feels. And, rather than tell him to behave differently, I always try to look for how he is attempting to cope and self-regulate and then help him with this. It was quite clear that Jaxson had sensory issues. What wasn't clear was what we could do to help him. He is a child with tactile issues (wouldn't wear his shirt), auditory issues and difficulty with any sudden change in his environment. I discovered a protocol called the Wilbarger Protocol® that helped him with his tactile issues. It is a brushing technique where you use a specially designed brush and follow up with joint compression. This is done every two hours. We did this protocol for nine months, and he now has no issues wearing his shirt. In fact, he actually loves picking out what he is going to wear. He later began doing The Listening Program® to address his auditory issues. With this protocol we noticed clarity of speech and improvement in his fine motor skills. This program uses headphones and specially developed classical music. They have something called ABC Modular Design™ that enables listeners to effectively exercise their auditory processing system, providing "warm-up," "workout" and "cool-down" phases. This really helps children to not become overwhelmed and hyperactive after their session. In our home, we created a distraction free environment for Jaxson in which to do therapy and play that we learned from The Son-Rise Program®. Since doing that, he is less rigid about his environment changing and is becoming more flexible. Lastly, we added the following programs/tools to his existing therapy and play: The

HANDLE® Program, Brain Gym®, and the Alert Program®. These programs offer techniques to help children to utilize both hemispheres of their brain in a balanced and coordinated way. They use exercises to stimulate the brain and set children up for success rather than failure. A tool that I developed over the course of my program with Jaxson is something I call “the three S’s”: Slow, Silly, Shhh. When Jaxson was being very cranky and rigid, as if nothing was the way he wanted (no matter what I did), I would say to myself, “Maybe I’m the sensory overload here!” So, then I would move away from him slowly and quietly (being silly doesn’t have to mean being loud), and, at the same time, keep my facial expressions very animated (to show him that, even if he was struggling, everything was okay). Above all, I am always very aware of respecting Jaxson’s sensory situation.

Heading down the path of hope...

The experiences Jaxson and I have had have been through have changed our lives. I have now dedicated my life to helping other families facing the diagnosis of autism and to passing on the message of hope. Many different types of interventions and therapies combined with lots of reading and learning brought us to where we are now. Unfortunately, there wasn’t a handy “What do you do when your child is diagnosed with autism” book the day we left that doctor’s office many years ago. Even after many years of training in autism treatments, I still have a hard time keeping up with some of the language used in mainstream press and books on this topic. I didn’t go to medical school, so I had to learn to understand enough terminology to be able to help my own child. Because of this, when I talk to new parents starting down this path, I try to use a Mommy Terms™ way of sharing what I’ve learned to make things easy for them to understand as well. My mission is to help new families be aware that there are options out there and that there is hope for our children with autism.

What to take from our story...

My life and the life of my son changed the day I found hope. Six and a half years ago, I had a son who some “experts” said would *never* talk, *never* know me and *never* experience life the way you and I do. Because of hope, I have a son who is talking, reading, loving, playing and enjoying life the way you and I do. He is continuing to grow and progress everyday and I believe the sky is the limit for him. Bottom line: *No one* can take away your hopes and your dreams for your child. Don’t let anyone convince you to give up and remember, “Progress for one provides hope for many!”

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