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BAMBI NEWS

THINKING
ABOUT
CORD
BLOOD
BANKING?

Examining
the EYFS
Curriculum

ENCOURAGING
INDEPENDENT

PLAY

BUDDING
BUSINESS

MEET 3 BAMBI MOM-PRENEURS

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Killian's Therapy Is In Full Swing

By Becky Horace

In an ongoing series taken from her blog, this BAMBI mom shares the ups and the downs of working through ESDM Therapy of her son, who is on the autism spectrum.

Week 3: Objects vs. People

Part of my son's issues has to do with being social. I can understand why he wouldn't want to be social in Thailand; everyone here makes such a big deal about a white baby. They have to squeeze his legs, pinch his cheeks, pat his head, try to kiss him, and are always shouting "hey boy!!" to get his attention. I totally understand why he doesn't want anything to do with people. Imagine how much easier his life is when he ignores everyone (except for mom and dad) and acts like people are completely invisible! It's funny how we all adapt to different situations and this is how my son is dealing with the harassment he receives the moment he leaves the house.

I am sure this constant touching and being "hollered" at like he is a beautiful woman walking by a construction site or I guess really a farang man walking down soi 33 by the "working girls" would have him retreat into his shell and not want to come out is greatly impacting his condition in a negative way.

When we arrived at the Reed Institute for the evaluation Killi had absolutely no interest in the therapist or in the staff but only a few toys but one in particular was an addition and subtraction toy that is made entirely of buttons that "click". He could sit and play with this the entire time if we had let him. This is part of the reason why he was diagnosed with social delays, because he prefers objects (toys or really anything) to people.

To help our son with this, the therapist gave us some tips on how to engage him more. We were told to "go to his spot light." This means find whatever he is focusing on, go and sit with him face to face and narrate what was going on. This isn't narrating in the way of constant chatter. It should only be a few words. For example, when rolling his truck, I would sit in front on him on the floor, and say, "truck go" or "zoom" in a very exaggerated way in the hopes that being over the top would get a smile, a giggle and (the key component) eye contact! Our doc says that eye contact is what is firing the neurons in his brain and these neurons going off are rewiring that cute little brain of his!

Weeks have gone by now and we have been at the Reed Institute every day for a couple of hours a day working hard on his therapy and it has finally paid off! Don't get me wrong, we are nowhere near finished but my son is now interested in people. When the other kids are having craft time he will put down the object he is playing with and go see what they have going on and participate. This is huge progress. He is so curious and wants to see what is going on with everyone. Today we had a birthday at the institute and my son, who only a few weeks ago wanted nothing to do with anyone, went straight to the cake, was in the procession the kids singing happy birthday and asked to be picked up to help blow out the candles. He put himself in the middle of all of that commotion and wasn't looking for mommy, he did it all on his own.

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Another huge leap forward in his therapy is that he is initiating play. Instead of us trying to go to him and figure out what it is he wants my son will come grab my hand or the doctor's hand and ask (in his nonverbal way) to be chased or to be wrestled. Again, with him initiating the play, it shows us that he wants to be around people and is enjoying the fun playtime that comes with giving people attention.

I am so proud of the progress that he has made in such a short amount of time. Our doctor says that he is way ahead of schedule. I love that my son is an overachiever!

Next week in therapy, the plan is to start making this play therapy more structured, which will eventually help prepare him for preschool. Instead of being the wild child in class, Killi will know how to behave properly in that setting. ■