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BAMBI NEWS

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DIAGNOSING A CHILD WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN THAILAND:
ONE MOM'S STORY

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Does My Son Have Special Needs?

By Becky Horace

This BAMBI mom shares her journey to get a diagnosis and treatment for her son.

We all have needs, some more than others. I didn't really want to write about this but then again I think that it is important to share how we are adjusting with anyone else that might be an expat or a parent going through the same thing, it's always nice to know you aren't alone.

As a parent it is extremely hard not to compare your child to the kids you see around. When at different playgroups I think, "well Timmy can do this but Killi can't or Jenny can do that but why can't Killian...?"

Everyone says that children develop at their own speed and on their own time and I know that this is true but as a parent it is hard not to worry and think about if your kid is falling behind. You wonder if your child is actually falling behind or are you blowing it out of proportion. Everyone is eager to give their two cents on when their kid started talking or in an attempt to help you not worry about it downplay the situation but in all reality that doesn't help put a parent's mind at ease, nothing will at this point.

Before we arrived in Bangkok, my son was doing great on his vocabulary and his development. He was right on track. No worries here. We arrive in Bangkok and he starts to slow down on his speech. We hire our first nanny/maid and he all but stops talking. He could sit and play with a toy and not make a sound. I would try to engage him, talk with him and maybe even get a giggle out of him but some days I swear he didn't make a peep. I figured it was just Killi adjusting to his new life here. We went back to the United States in April and I took him to his normal pediatrician to do our wellness visit and our 18 month shots. They have us fill out a form that asks about his development and would give the

doctor an indication of behavior to watch out for. As I start to answer the sheet, I feel a little uneasy. Why am I marking yes to some of these boxes? There is no way my kid is delayed! He is just adjusting!

We talk with the doctor and he is a little concerned with his development and some of the boxes that I have

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indicated are not on par with normal development. The doctor says we need to watch these behaviors and see what happens but in the meantime he encourages us to get Killian into speech therapy to get him back on track with his speech. Whatever the doctor says, I will do it! I leave crying and worrying what do I do if my kid ends up having serious delays but then I think so what if he is? It's not like I would love him any differently.

After our trip to the States, I immediately make an appointment with the speech therapist. After waiting

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a few weeks we go to our appointment at Bumrungrad and we wait for two hours for our appointment to begin. You can imagine my toddler isn't in the mood to wait that long. We get into the appointment and Killian wants nothing to do with anything that is going on. He is clearly frustrated and wants to go home. The speech therapist watches him a little and tries to get his attention but again he isn't interested. I was hoping and praying that the speech therapist would say, "don't worry he has had a big life change, he is just adjusting" but instead she said

"let's get him evaluated." My heart stopped, after she said that I didn't hear anything and I had to fight back the tears that were rolling down my face. She tries to reassure me that it is just to rule out anything serious but I know that if we go for an appointment to get him evaluated it will not end well. I know my son; I know he is acting in ways that are not "normal." We make the appointment for July 13. We have a couple of months to work on his speech, maybe he will be better by then, and it won't be an issue.

As the months go by, we have the drama with the nanny and she leaves. As soon as she leaves, Killian seems to be the happiest he has ever been, he is babbling and using some words and is just so happy. I think, "praise God it was just the bad attitude from the nanny that was causing all of this," but in the back of my mind I know the dreaded appointment is rapidly approaching.

July 13th arrives and I want to vomit. I do not want to go to the specialist that is going to tell me what I already know, that Killian has a delay, and then blow that up into something huge. We make it to the appointment and again we wait for 90 minutes before we are seen

(what is the point of the appointment anyway?). Killian didn't nap well so he is already in a mood. We get to the office and she starts to observe him but Killian just wants to run around, he doesn't want to sit and do her activities. She pulls out the Denver II test to show us how he is doing developmentally.

The test shows he is delayed. At this age he should have 50 words he can use and should now be combining them into two word sentences, he should be able to point to 6 body parts, he should be able to do several things but he can't (sometimes I think he just chooses not to). The doctor says

"he is too young to diagnose him with anything at this point and he has had a huge trauma moving here." (I am so glad to hear a doctor acknowledge that part) Killian's biggest delays are in his speech and his social skills. He does not maintain eye contact. It's almost impossible to keep him focused on our faces or on what we are trying to show him. He does some repetitive behaviors like spinning around in circles and flapping his hands. When it comes to his speech, he has created his own

language (the babbling that I thought was progress).

She did give us some tools to help Killian. For one no more screen time period (TV, ipod/ipad) she believes this is part of the reason why he doesn't maintain eye contact because a screen allows him to zone out. She showed us how to do some eye contact exercises and how to work on his vocabulary. She explained that you do not withhold anything. For example,

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if Killian wants a cracker and he takes my hand and walks me to the pantry for the cracker instead of saying “you have to say the word to get it” we are supposed to show him the object and help him say the word. When we withhold and say “no you can't have this until you say it”, she says he can go into distress and he can clam up even more.

Before leaving, I ask if we should get him into speech therapy in addition to our efforts at home. Her response is “it

will be hard to find a speech therapist who can speak English well.” One thing I never considered. She says since we are home with him and we speak English we are the best for him right now.

For the past week, before and after the appointment, I haven't been sleeping. I worry about my son but most of all I worry that I am not a professional and will not be the right person to help him. I could care less if he is diagnosed with

anything. Nothing would change in my mind, I would still love him unconditionally. The assessment did help us in the sense that we now know our son is having some issues, it helps us to understand

him and his actions better and now we might have some tools to help him. It's hard as a parent to not be a little discouraged and compare your child to others but then I realize we all have needs and my kid is very special to me, the most “special” person I “need” in my life, so I guess that means we both have “special needs”. ■

You can follow this family's story on their blog at www.beckyhorace.wordpress.com.

What We've Learned So Far

1. Listen to your gut. Don't listen to anyone that says "everything is okay he will talk when he wants to" or "Timmy didn't talk until he was three years old and he's just fine". Go with what you think is best and do not care what anybody else thinks.

2. Skip going to the hospital for the evaluation and go straight to an independent child therapist or specialist that focuses on delays or special needs. The evaluation we received at the hospital lasted 10 minutes the same evaluation done

by an independent therapist was a two week evaluation process using the exact same model.

3. Early intervention is key! Do not wait another day to get help for your child. The earlier you get your child the help they need their brain can literally be rewired and after extensive therapy in some cases they might not show any signs of delays.

4. If you do start a therapy program, you and all caregivers for your child need to be 100% committed. You must

do the homework given by the doctor and implement every aspect of the program into your everyday life or it will not work. It is a joint effort between you and the physicians, you are a team.

5. Your denial will not make the problem disappear. Your acceptance does not make it worse. There is nothing you have done to make this happen. It is what it is and a good parent will put their feelings aside and do anything to get their child the help they need.