

Nicholas's Story



Nicholas was born on March 8, 2007, and at birth was very healthy and scored very high on the Apgar testing. When our son was an infant, he was a happy baby and seemed perfectly normal. It wasn't until he was about 10 months old that we knew something was different with Nicholas because he began to behave differently towards his older brother, and we could not bring him to crowded public places without him crying and screaming. When he turned 12 months old, we began to really see that he was developing pretty rigid routines that had to be adhered to or he would just totally fall apart. He spoke no words yet, and was a late walker who walked on his toes. He had sensory issues with his hands, feet, food textures, loud sounds, etc.

We spoke to our pediatrician about our concerns, and he referred us to a developmental pediatrician, who diagnosed Nicholas with the early stages of autism. His doctor said to us, "Don't think about the word 'autism' as if it scares you." "Just think about your son and what strengths he has, and where he needs help and love." And with those words of wisdom, like many other parents, we were able to begin the demanding journey to help our child reach his full potential.

We were referred to the Hunterdon County Early Intervention program so they could begin to work with Nicholas quite vigorously. Nicholas was enrolled in the Douglas Program at Rutgers University, and we had therapists working with him about 18 hours per week from the time he was 14 months old until he turned 3 years old. They bombarded his senses to help him overcome many of the sensory issues that he had as a toddler, and still has today. They taught all of us how to interact with Nicholas so that we could help him to be more affectionate, and to make better eye contact. A

dedicated speech therapist works with him a few times a week to help promote language.

When Nicholas turned 3 years old, he became eligible for the special education preschool program provided at Three Bridges School, where he is still currently enrolled at almost 5 years old. He also works with a private ABA therapist and speech therapist weekly to continue working on his social skills and his speech development. His speech is still limited to one to two word phrases, and his functional behaviors are still not consistent from day to day. From time to time, he may speak a sentence, but it is very difficult to understand him. Everyone works hard to improve and encourage more language and cognitive skills. Nicholas cannot be left alone near a street of moving cars. He is not aware of his surroundings, and must be supervised at all times. Nicholas has abnormal eating habits, similar to many autistic children, in which they will not eat a large variety of foods. It is difficult to get Nicholas to eat different foods consistently. He sees a doctor at St. Joseph's Feeding and Swallowing Center to help us with his eating habits and his stomach issues.

We take one day at a time, and have learned that our Nicholas is a precious gift from God and we wouldn't trade him for anything. We accept him the way he is, and we are learning more and more how to become a part of his world, instead of trying to push our world onto him. His sibling, John Michael, is Nicholas's best friend, and we are very grateful that Nicholas has his big brother as his role model.

We have been so blessed with all of the incredible therapists, teachers, family and friends in our community that have helped shaped Nicholas's life for him to develop to his full potential. Even though Nicholas has a long way to go to achieve an independent, self-functioning life, we are confident that with all of the love and support he has received and continues to receive, he will continue to grow and develop in this direction.

