

The First, the True, the Real Ally: Our Physiotherapist

By *Nana Manolias Kyrzidis*

She came one day to our house with a big warm smile on her face and that determination in her eyes. She did not ask much at the beginning. Slowly we got to know each other. I discovered a very professional woman.

She explained to us what the Bobath programme meant and was eager to present to us the methodology of her work. She showed us an evaluation form to be filled before starting the sessions and after certain milestones were met.

She explained that our boy was to be videotaped so that to record the progress and the timing of the progress. She asked for the phone numbers of all doctors that have seen our baby, then 4 or 5 months (and they were in fact quite many!) and she called all of them and talked about what she was about to start. She even visited the neurologist who was 4 hours away from where we live, so that to closely discuss the case of our baby.

That was the first meeting. She added that she follows babies at home so that they are kept as far away from viruses and infections as possible.

I was very happy about it. It was very convenient for me, since I would have to carry all around the therapy sessions my elder daughter then 3,5 years old. I was still in pain and confusion and she shed light to my heart and mind.

Speech Therapy - continued from page 8

food tastes and textures as stimuli during meals, children learn to move foods through the mouth and control tongue muscles. These same tongue movements will be necessary for the development of many speech sounds, such as "l" and "d". By learning to drink from a cup without a lid, children learn to retract their tongues, an important movement for many other speech sounds, such as "r" and "s".

Motor activities that assist a child in developing oral-motor strength and stability (and are still fun!) include blowing bubbles, horns and whistles and using straws. Imitation can be facilitated through activities such as rounding lips, throwing kisses, or clicking the tongue. Breathing exercises strengthen respiration (and the diaphragm) and lengthen the duration of exhalations, which positively impacts speech development by improving breath support and trunk stability.

Many of these activities can easily be incorporated into a home program and don't require large amount of isolated time for families. By giving a child an adapted straw to use for all drinks at home, the child will work on improving oral-motor strength every time he/she take a drink.

Implementing an approach that incorporates direct oral-motor therapy, language stimulation techniques, alternative means of communication, and sensory activities) is the best way to have a significant positive impact on the verbal, linguistic, and cognitive abilities of our children. By beginning speech intervention at a very young age, we give our kids the best chance to be all they can possibly be.

Mrs.
Theocharopoulou
Vlahogianni Fani,
physical therapist,
works with
Konstantinos,
who has PWS,
while his sister
watches.



I realized that after all, what happened to us was not the most dramatic thing and that there were solutions. "Solutions" is the key word for me. When something can be fixed, why worry about it? I said to myself: Work, work and work. See what you can do every single day. Just concentrate on the work and the results will come. Of course I had a vision. Of course, this woman was the first and only one that gave me this positive vision. Work without vision is like wondering around without beginning or end.

So she took me by the hand, she explained to me very clearly, she gave me the tools and I was eager enough to absorb everything that was said or done.

She gave me orders. Yes, this is the right word. In these issues there is either black or white. "This is the right way to feed this baby." Or, "This is the proper way to hold your son. You have to change the tone of your voice, make it louder, more theatrical. Put mirrors all over the house." This is right, this is wrong.

Our baby walked independently at 24 months, immediately after the eye surgery for the correction of strabismus. Till then we had followed a very strict programme of Bobath positions and exercises, every day, every hour, every minute of his and our life. We had incorporated the Bobath philosophy to our everyday life and she was there to ensure that we properly follow the right steps.

I am proud of our son. I am proud of our selves. I feel honoured and privileged that in the middle of nowhere, perhaps my tears and prayers brought to out life our physiotherapist, a real Lady: Mrs. Theocharopoulou Vlahogianni Fani.

I hope that the rest of the therapy team that have entered our life in the meantime prove themselves to be as fruitful and result-oriented as she was and still is.

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