



SOUMITRA GHOSH

Six-year-old Raju can literally hear a pin drop. His parents marvelled at his sharp hearing—he could identify a train whistle a mile away—till they discovered something else. Their son could hardly hear them. His

blank stares led them to discover that Raju was autistic. "Trying to get through to him was like moving a mountain," says Raju's father Anjan Sengupta. After years of relying on instinct, last week they got a crash course on how to communicate with Raju. With a workshop on autism, jointly conducted by Delhi NGO Action For Autism, its Calcutta counterpart Hope For Autism (HEA) and Greenfields Integrated School.

Delhi representative Merry Barua was clear she didn't want to "zap parents with jargon". The idea, she said, was not to make them feel tragedy-stricken, but teach them to be comfortable with their kids. For Calcutta's parents, anything would help. The city is not equipped to deal with autism. Says Indrani Basu, mother of two autistic children and HEA member: "There are no detection centres in Calcutta. Most of us have had to take our children to NIMHANS in Bangalore." There are no schools or crèches either. "An autistic child needs one-on-one attention which Calcutta schools don't offer," says a parent. HEA might have a solution in a do-it-yourself technique called TEACH (treatment and education for the communication handicapped) which is based on a US study. That's a good start.

—LABONITA GHOSH

