

# A mother's account

"I feel proud to say that he is a very confident child," says this mother

**Pritha Chatterjee**

**Child** is the father of man, said William Wordsworth, and definitely not without reason. Here's presenting a mother's first hand experience in bringing up her autistic son, age 11.

**When and how was your child diagnosed?**

He was diagnosed properly when he was three years old. Initially we didn't take his problems very seriously, though we were perturbed by his inability to pick up every day skills like other kids around. We thought he would pick up stuff slowly and gradually. But after a while this delay became aggravating and we started getting more and more anxious about his lack of speech, the apparent disinterest in everything around, and his hyperactivity. Eventually we took him to a pediatrician who told us that it was more than a simple delay and there was more than what met the eye. He directed us to Action for Autism where he was diagnosed.

**Do you have any other children? How do they interact with your son?**

I have one other son who is now in Class VIII. They have a three-year age difference between them. The

equation between them is like that between any other siblings and they get on wonderfully with each other.

**How would you rate the education administered at AFA?**

My son has been going to AFA for almost seven years now. What I find best about AFA is that he is respected for what he is, and not made to be any different. Apart from basic academic training, he is also trained in social skills, which is very important for autistic children. He is given a lot of love,

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## It's a different challenge, say Nikki & DJ

According to WHO, typically about 20 in a population of 10,000 people will be autistic, 80 per cent of them boys

Three institutions in India offer government-approved diploma courses for training teachers on how to deal

with autistic children



specialised centre for children with autism. Earlier, the children were put in schools for the mentally retarded though the two disabilities needed different treatments.

The 1990s was a decade of change both in mindsets and policy framework. The Rehabilitation Council of India Act (1992), the Persons With Disability Act (1995) and the National Trust Act for persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, MR and Multiple Disabilities (1999) came with a mandate for early intervention programmes, training of schoolteachers and professionals in Rehabilitation and Special Education.

If a career in teaching autistic children is your calling, you need to be patient, sensitive and caring. A background in psychology would give you an edge over others in the field.

At present, there are three institutions in India offering government-certified diploma courses for the training of teachers for autistic children. Action for Autism, registered with the National Trust of India, however, remains the only pan-Indian organisation providing this specialised training. "Though we prefer people with a background in psychology, we do take in graduates from other fields as well," says Baruah. In addition AFA also conducts intensive three month workshops, on a regular basis, for training parents and teachers.

## IN THE NEWS

### JAM's new engineering admissions guide

Mumbai-based youth magazine JAM has published an engineering admission guide with ratings of 500 colleges across India based on infrastructure,



faculty, placement and brand value. With a foreword by popular author and IIT-IIM alumnus

Chetan Bhagat, the 428-page guide is a well put together book that takes the reader on a roller-coaster ride with tongue-in-cheek, unofficial prospectuses, student feedback, practical tips and more. Priced at Rs 395, the book will be sold through major book stores like Crossword, Oxford and Landmark. Says Rashmi Bansal, Editor JAM and JAM Engineering Admissions Guide, "Our aim is to not just help the meritorious students who may manage to get into one of the top colleges but also to provide information to the average student about the choices available to him or her."



Freescale Semiconductor is inviting entries for its green design contest open to engineering students and professional developers worldwide. The contest have to 'go green' using a range of advanced Freescale technologies to build environmentally-beneficial embedded systems. Organisers are offering cash prizes up to \$61,000 and recognition at the Freescale Technology Forum Design Challenge India, scheduled for November 13-14. The deadline for the India programme is June 20, 2008. More details are available at [www.freescale.com/designchallenge](http://www.freescale.com/designchallenge).

### Management's Prodigies

The Indian Institute of Management-Lucknow organised Prodigies 2008, a pan-IIM leadership summit in Mumbai. The main speakers were J.J. Irani, Director, Tata Sons; Naina Lal Kidwai, CEO, HSBC India; Manish Tripathi, Honorary Director, dabbawallahs, and Raghunath Dondhiba Medge, President, dabbawallahs, who spoke on 'Leadership and the New World Economy'. Tripathi said, "Globalisation cannot be achieved without localisation".



emotions. children react initially, learn "tolerance," sums

Children with autism do better when they are given the opportunity to build up their self-esteem. If they can be helped to learn early, well-focused skills, they can lead relatively normal lives. Depending on the child's individual skill profile and the severity and intensity of the disability, children with autism can lead relatively normal lives. According to experts, children with autism have been in mainstream schools for some time and are now doing well.

A concrete beginning for the autistic was when Merry Baruah for Autism in Delhi, the first exclu-



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respect and this has boosted his self-esteem and I feel proud to say that he is a very confident child.

Would you say he is able to interact better with the non-autistic world now?

At AFA they teach kids how to deal with people, interact with the world and

relate to it. It is a behaviour modification that these kids have to undertake. My son can now deal with the difficulties he has in these areas. The problems can obviously not be eradicated. But the point is that he is learning how to deal with them. Also, fortunately he received intervention from a very early age and so he was not ever exposed to a regular school. Probably things would have been very diffi-

cult there. He received this specialised form of education right from the start.

Do you plan to try integrating him into a mainstream school now that he has spent some considerable time in AFA?

That would have been wonderful. But it has not been possible yet.

Is there an upper age limit at AFA? Do they oversee and direct the child's future employment?

The upper limit at AFA is 16 years. After this they are moved to Adhaar, which is their own vocational centre where young adults work. They are currently working on expanding this unit. Some former students are even working as part of the training team at AFA. There are other vocational units available across the country. But frankly speaking, I haven't planned that far.

Names withheld on request

