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 become aggravating and we started getting more and more anxious about his lack of speech, the apparent disinterest in everything round, 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 by 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.

Continued on page 2
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 percent of them boys. Three institutions in India offer government-approved diploma courses for training teachers on how to deal with autistic children.

IN THE NEWS

Mumbai-based youth magazine JAM has published an engineering admission guide with ratings of 500 colleges across India based on faculty, placement and brand value. With a foreword by popular author and ITI Eminence, 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 prospects, student feedback and tips. At Rs 395, the book will be sold through major book stores like Crossword, Oxford and Landmark. Says Rashmi Basal, 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 provide information to the average student about the choices available to him or her."

continued from page 1

A mother's account

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 APA 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 difficult 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 APA?

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

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

The upper limit at APA is 16 years. After 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 also working as part of the training team at APA. There are other vocational units available across the country. But frankly speaking, I haven't planned that far.

Names withheld on request.