

Case Studies

mother and grandmother

Naprika Vaughan



Naprika Vaughan lives in Reading and has a five-year-old son, Eli, who was diagnosed with autism when he was three. He attends a mainstream school, where he is supported by a one-to-one teaching assistant.

“When we had the diagnosis, I think I originally felt more relieved. Once we had the diagnosis I understood why he wasn’t speaking, why he didn’t like loud, crowded areas and why he found it difficult to interact with other kids.

“For example, my cousin had a birthday party for her six-year-old and the rest of the kids were outside on the bouncy castle, the music was playing but Eli was inside the house, just focused on playing with a car park. My uncle was trying to speak to him but that’s when we first realised that he wasn’t making eye contact, as my uncle said ‘he won’t look at me’. I thought ‘there’s something not quite right, everybody’s outside but he wants to be inside the house’.

“My first feeling [about the diagnosis] was of relief, but the lady at the CAHMS was like ‘Oh, are you okay?’. I think she was expecting me to cry or something, but I was happier knowing we had got this diagnosis, we could plan what we need to do next.

“It was also helpful at the nursery, as I could say ‘well, this is the reason he’s doing A, B and C’. They had experience with autistic children already and they had picked up that

this was possibly the case, so at least they knew as well, how to put a plan in action of what to do to help him.

“I think later I maybe got more upset when it sank in the differences that there are going to be. I was doing more research and it was quite hard to see that possibly other people’s kids are going to go down this way and that Eli’s life is going to be a different path.

“I actually found I had to stop doing so much research – when he was first diagnosed I had to know everything, but then knowing everything upset me a bit. I stepped back and just focused on Eli.

“We accessed Parenting Special Children and I found that really helpful. Just be able to sit and talk to other parents, to talk about being upset, you know you love your child, but there’s also that sense of mourning the child you thought you were going to have.”



Julie Radbourne

Julie Radbourne is the grandmother and guardian of two boys who were placed in her care as babies a decade ago, because their parents couldn’t cope. One has a diagnosis of autism, while the other shows autistic traits and has a diagnosis of attachment disorder.

“Bradley was diagnosed at a young age, just as soon as he started pre-school. The brilliant pre-school leader realised there was something different about Bradley. If I hadn’t been so stubborn, he would have had his diagnosis a

year earlier. But I didn’t want them to have a label. Then I found out that if he doesn’t have a label, then he won’t get any help.

“Social services rang me as paternal grandmother and placed them with me for 24 hours. It’s now been 10 years and they live with us completely. They don’t have any contact whatsoever with their mother. Their father hasn’t seen them for 18 months, because he’s got a new family.

“After a year we went to court and we were given special guardianship, which means we have total parental control over the boys - we decide everything.

“I knew nothing about autism when Bradley and Jay came to live with us, I had a life, I worked. It wasn’t a fantastic job but I loved it. I had friends I used to go out with a lot – I don’t see those friends any more as they haven’t got young children, so aren’t in the same circumstances and don’t have to plan things round children; secondly, I’m a lot older than the parents I meet, so it’s different, sadly.

“The main thing about autistic children is stopping to understand them. Make sure they know they’re wanted, keep to their routine. If you know you need to change it, tell them. We haven’t been abroad yet with them, but we’ve been all over the UK and they’ve always coped, as we’ve prepared them beforehand.

“I’m not brilliant, but we’re coping. You get through it, because you love them and as long as they know that, half the battle’s won.”

To see Naprika Vaughan talk about life with Eli, scan the code, or visit: <http://prt.cm/160781f>

