



Francisco

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Our son's difficulties were always present – Francisco had constant meltdowns, huge mood swings, seemed not to understand that he was a child and we were the adults and being very fantasy oriented - but particularly came to the fore when he started primary school. His first year was a nightmare, refusing to work and being sent to the principal's office or home on a daily basis.

Things rapidly deteriorated from difficult to unbearable. Initially we sought help with psychologists who took a psychoanalytical approach. This didn't help, in fact everything they said seemed to make things worse. Mostly our parenting was blamed, which made us feel guilty and stressed. However we never stopped looking for answers, as we felt deep down that something wasn't right and that it wasn't just a question of being firmer with him or setting stronger boundaries. A friend recommended a different neuro-psychologist and she was the first to detect that his profile was compatible with PDA.

The diagnosis process was very interesting. With the questions that the professionals asked we began to understand that Francisco's behaviour wasn't down to poor parenting but that he was in fact on the autism spectrum. This was a hard, but at the same time very revealing, moment. Francisco's official diagnosis is PDD-NOS (Pervasive Development

Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified) because PDA isn't in the diagnostic manual, but all the intervention strategies and therapy are based on PDA.

From the point of diagnosis onwards, Francisco has improved considerably and our daily life has become much simpler. The first step was in understanding what is behind our son's difficulties. We're now able to accompany Francisco through life with much greater calmness, confidence and love because of this understanding. Having clear guidance and appropriate strategies makes all the difference.

After spending a year out of school, Francisco is now in a new placement at a school which is much more open-minded, with an adapted curriculum and a psychologist who accompanies him in school. He has a team around him, parents, teachers, therapists, psychologists and we're all working hard to help him. It's not always easy but Francisco is happy and doing well.

Personally I found that it helped to connect with other parents who are in the same situation. I've learned to relax and respect Francisco's rhythm and his witty, creative approach to life. And it's so important also to take time for yourself – we are our children's rock and we have to do what we can to keep ourselves happy and healthy too!

My fervent hope is that PDA is included in the diagnostic manual in future and not muddled up with other diagnoses which are not relevant, and that schools are better aware of PDA so that children aren't misunderstood and excluded but valued as important members of the community. In the words of Dr Ross Greene 'kids would do well if they could' and if they can't it's because they need our help not our judgement.