

Finding Joshua

Behind the tormented behavior was the wonderful boy he is now.

My son, Joshua, was plagued with social and behavioral problems. He was asked to leave two private schools, rejected from several local day care facilities, and finally placed in a program for “severely emotionally handicapped” children and put on medication for ADHD — all before the age of five!

He was in a class of six children and three teachers to deal with the behavioral challenges these children presented. Throughout the years my son was diagnosed with severe ADHD and ODD (oppositional defiant disorder), along with traits of obsessive compulsive disorder, Tourette’s syndrome, and mood disorder syndrome. These years proved to be more difficult than I could have ever imagined.

Even before they’re born, parents have so many hopes and desires for their children. I felt as though my dreams turned to nightmares and it seemed like I’d never wake up.

Even though testing indicated the Joshua was extremely gifted, his emotional and behavioral problems kept him labeled as emotionally handicapped.

During the next four years he was on three medications, totaling nine pills a day. It seemed necessary to keep him medicated 24 hours a day, every day. Symptoms that were treated with one medicine caused him to have trouble sleeping, so he had to take an additional medication for that, and yet another for the endless anxiety resulting from the issues he faced daily with social and behavioral problems. He had huge problems with opposition, defiance, aggression, anger, and impulsivity. The doctors tried different dosages and combinations of the medicines but without success.

He was kept medicated 24 hours a day and the problems only got worse.

Toward the end of his fourth grade year Joshua was placed in an outpatient facility for depression, leaning towards suicidal. Children typically attended this facility for a week at the most, just enough time to be evaluated, receive recommendations for therapy, medication, behavior modification and family counseling. However, Joshua’s behavior was such that he continued for five weeks.

None of the many professionals we saw were able to help him.

Time passed and problems remained despite medication and continual counseling. Two other medicines were recommended, in addition to the three he was on, but I couldn’t bring myself to give my ten-year-old 5 different drugs. Towards the end of his fifth grade year he was placed in a children’s psychiatric facility after he threatened to kill others and tried to hurt himself. Joshua had reached the end of his rope.

I was told that I could not see him or call him for the first 24 hours he was at the facility. As I said “good-bye” there was so much hurt behind his beautiful blue eyes, so much uncertainty of “Where do I fit in, why am I like this? When will my life be normal, and when will I feel at peace inside?”

The immense pain I felt for my child left me numb and hopeless. I wanted so badly to take him in my arms, hug him and tell him that everything would be okay, but I didn’t know that to be so. I would go to the ends of the earth for him but felt as though I was already there and didn’t know where to go from here. Despite all the avenues I took, all the endless hours of searching, every year continued to grow darker and darker.

My immense pain for my child left me numb and hopeless.

After several days Joshua was released from the hospital. Since the medicines were not helping his doctor recommended we remove them all and start on a different regimen. For the remaining weeks of school he was in a homebound program where the teacher came to our home.

The doctor assured me that by weaning Joshua off the medicines slowly there would be no problems with withdrawal. The opposite was true! We went through three weeks of severely out-of-control behavior. Several times Joshua became extremely violent and I came close to calling 911 for help.

His reaction to withdrawal from the many drugs was a nightmare.

Next, I tried allergy treatments at a clinic and they helped somewhat. Still searching, I learned of the Feingold Program and that’s when my son’s recovery began in earnest. [www.feingold.org / (800) 321-3287]

Joshua has a severe behavioral reaction to certain synthetic food additives.

Joshua has traveled down a difficult road filled with hurt, disappointment and fear for as long as he can remember, which is a long time. He has lost much of his childhood to this journey, but because of Feingold Joshua has a new beginning.

We are now on our third year that he does not carry the label “emotionally handicapped.” After thorough testing and review, this label was permanently removed from his school records.

continued

This is the third consecutive year Joshua's teachers have told me he shows respect and cooperation without any opposition. This is the third consecutive year Joshua has managed to keep his anger under control when things don't go his way. (This feat alone was like a mountain to conquer.)

Josh no longer has trouble controlling his behavior. He is thriving in school and in all areas of his life.

His teachers view him as pleasant to be around as well as a good student. This is the third consecutive year Joshua: is able to remain seated for an extended period, has been capable of thinking before acting, has not been in some type of behavioral therapy. This is the third consecutive year: I have not been called to come pick him up at school because he's out of control and disruptive, Joshua has been able to attend events through the school or sports where I was not required to stay "just in case there's a problem."

This is the third consecutive year Josh went from being medicated 24 hours a day with three medications (totaling nine pills a day, for 365 days a year), to only one pill on school mornings, along with a good diet.

Joshua is finally forming healthy friendships. This list could go on but the bottom line is...since Feingold this is the first time I like my son, and best of all HE likes who he's become.

Our life finally feels, and is, "normal." This is what we have both hoped for.

I know my son's "transformation" did not occur due to maturity, changing schools, peer pressure, a reward system, or anything of the sort. The changes in Joshua came as a result of the simple changes we made in the food we eat.

A few months after we began seeing success on Feingold Joshua wanted to do what he called "an experiment." I allowed him to eat the synthetic chemicals for a week because I knew his cooperation is essential for this to work. On the fourth day he began having rage attacks, showing opposition and defiance, just like before. He shouted at his teacher, threw a book across the room at another student, and spent a day in the principal's office.

When he went back to eating the synthetic chemicals, the old behaviors returned in four days. It was a humiliating experience for my son.

He embarrassed himself terribly in front of his peers and came home asking to ditch the experiment. This validated the fact that the diet was truly the key to his happiness and success.

During Joshua's seventh grade year he became involved in athletics and I watched with admiration as he showed dignity and self-control with each competition. Josh demonstrated a wonderful balance with athletics and academics. In football he was cool under pressure and always showed good sportsmanship. As a basketball player, he illustrated great coordination and superior instincts handling the ball. He was awesome on the court, scoring a majority of the points at nearly every game. In track he surprised everyone when he went to district in pole vaulting and won 1st place. This was a sport he'd never attempted, yet he was smooth with style and grace. On the swim team he enjoyed the meets and swam his heart out, going to district with his team and placing 2nd in several relays.

Today he is cool under pressure and treats other people with respect.

During these athletic events he demanded much of himself but was still a solid team player with a friendly approach to his teammates and competitors. He has a lot of respect for the rules and for his opponents. At the end of the school year I had the joy to see him presented with the 110% Award from his coach. This was one of the two top awards given to athletes at his school. It represented sportsmanship, hard work, self-control, dedication, respect towards coaches and peers, and overall athletics. The coach described how Josh was at every practice with a smile on his face and a determination to do his best, with an attitude that was hard to surpass as he showed a tremendous amount of cooperation towards being a team player. That award meant even more to us. It signified a 110% turnaround from his oppositional defiance and lack of self-control he displayed daily in previous years, and the very behavior that would have prevented such an accomplishment.

Joshua was singled out for a top honor from his coach, receiving the "110% Award."

Seventh grade went so well that when we went to the annual meeting required for all students that receive "special services" they announced that since Joshua had completed two consecutive years without any behavioral or academic problems they would have to close out his nine year special needs folder. He no longer exhibited any signs of needing help in any form. This was truly a victory!

Joshua will grow up to be a man of strong character and will exhibit a zeal for life that will make everyone around him a little bit better for having known him. My heart beams with pride when I see the young man he's becoming and leaps with joy as I marvel at his future.

I am hoping this story will help others become aware of the importance diet has on behavior. Perhaps it will result in giving other children a chance to live a happy "normal" life like my son now has.

Taunya Stevenson