

# Ryan's Journey Through ASD

Ryan is an 8 year old boy with an energetic, all-encompassing, endearing personality paired with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Raised by his grandmother, Ryan had been seeing me for conventional Occupational Therapy sessions for several years. He loved, craved, sought out and engaged in movement activities at every given opportunity and playing freely within a Sensory Gym was the highlight of his week. He could spin and not get dizzy, climb with never a sign of fear, crash with no sense of danger and his 'engine' continued apace from dawn to dusk. I had tried, using all of the clinical management and traditional therapy tools to influence Ryan's control of his regulation and behavioral skills, with limited to inconsistent results. Ryan was comforted by deep pressure and would calm for short periods, but as soon as it was removed he seemed to be right back to square one. He enjoyed heavy work and was tolerant to his routine including lifting, pushing and pulling activities but again, the results of such calming activities were short lived. Ryan lived in a world where he was constantly being told and directed to 'Slow Down'; 'Press lightly'; 'Be Careful'. His grandmother frequented the school office with insidious regularity as Ryan's movement and learning style spilled over into his academic performance and classroom behavior. He could not sit still; could not follow directions; could not keep in class without a personal aide. Ultimately it was decided that placing Ryan in a self-contained class for students with an Emotional Handicap would serve best for his own safety and the wellbeing of his peers.

It was about this time that a new product was introduced into my therapeutic 'tool-kit' by the name of Interactive Metronome (IM). I completed the certification training with both interest and intrigue as to how a modality with the express purpose of improving a child's motor response to an auditory stimulus, could also help in the remediation of multiple classroom skills, functional daily living skills, behavior and communication skills to name but a few. I reviewed carefully my functional goals for Ryan, which included learning how to slow down, control his behavior and attend to task for a functional time frame. With these goals in mind we embarked upon a journey

together that transformed not only Ryan's life but also the course of my professional ambition. As we progressed with the program, it became clear to me - Ryan was learning to reference the auditory beat and identify when he was too fast or too slow in his response speed, he was learning from the 'inside-out' what it meant when someone told him to 'slow down'. Progress was steady and at a ratio of two sessions a week, each of 45-60 minutes, Ryan was demonstrating positive functional outcomes. He was beginning to attend for longer periods in class, could stand in line with his classmates, was listening and understanding with more clarity and consistency. But most

of all, his negative behaviors were diminished to the point of recommendation to move up, once again to an integrated classroom.

As we well know, when faced with increased challenge or stressors, children with ASD often need a higher frequency of lifestyle modifications or support and Ryan was no exception. With the progression to integrated learning came a greater need to refine his response to his environment. His grandmother was concerned that he would fall back into his old ways if he did not maintain the same frequency with his Interactive Metronome training and brought to me a request to move his session frequency to three times per week. Now any of you that are familiar with attending therapy session will be fully conversant with the commitment involved in both time and personal finances, not to mention the act of a "Higher Power" it often takes to add another session into a therapists' schedule. With all of these elements in mind I was thrilled as a professional to be able to extend structured program to Ryan and his family in the form of the IM Home Program. This program enabled Ryan to access Interactive Metronome interventions at home for short bursts before test taking, for longer periods when transitioning to newer challenges required for maturation (consider the stressors involved in Middle School!) and even to wind down and 'reboot his brain'. More importantly it allowed me to keep in touch, professionally with Ryan and his family at a much more functional level for a far greater, more affordable time frame to help him get into gear for all that life had in store for him.

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