

BIRMINGHAM, JULY 2015

INTERVIEW WITH MOTHER OF TOBY

FAMILY DETAILS:

Toby is the eldest of 2 boys who live with their mother, who is currently enrolled as a University student and at the time of the interview was on a placement at a Birmingham hospital.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND CLIMATE:

Toby still has a lot of contact with his father who is still on good terms with the mother. A huge influence on Toby was his uncle, (the brother of Toby's dad) who was only 7 when Toby was born but who loved children and invested a lot of time with Toby, particularly in terms of developing a passion for football. Whatever his uncle did, Toby wanted to copy. Sadly, his uncle changed in character as he became adolescent and has become withdrawn so there is now much less contact, but Toby's enthusiasm and skill at football are, according to his mother, a direct legacy from his uncle and father (a coach for Cadburys).

Maternal grandfather gives support. She moved to Wiltshire after separation from her husband, so used to see her daughter only once or twice a year but after Toby was born, came over in school holidays to spend

time with him.

Toby generally gets on well with his brother and can be very close (e.g. feeding each other) but together they can be naughty and will fight to the point where they can draw blood through scratching and punching each other.

CHILD CHARACTERISTICS:

From the start, it was always obvious that Toby was very able. His mother says that she has often heard the comment that Toby "has lived on this planet before" because he knows so much. She gave several examples of his very rapid development as a toddler, e.g. he took his first steps at 9 months and was walking properly before his first birthday. He was able to line up cars in colour order before he could name the colours.

Currently, Toby likes cars/megablocks/ Lego. He is able to focus for long periods if it's something he chooses himself, e.g. he will become involved in a story of his own choosing but doesn't like to have books chosen for him, and prefers to read himself rather than having stories read to him. He has always been very independent, unlike his brother. Mother says

she tends to mollycoddle the younger boy because he needs attention, whereas Toby never did. The younger boy generally chooses to be on his own, but when with Toby, he is ultra-confident and fearless.

Toby is extremely popular, with a kind and gentle nature. His mother described how he always attracts attention, for example when he goes to the park. Other children are clearly drawn to him. Generally, he prefers to play with older children. He enjoys using a computer, but not just for playing games; he will read the manual avidly before starting a game. Similarly, if his mother is putting together flat pack furniture, he will patiently read through the instructions and make sure that everything is properly prepared. This sort of extremely organised behaviour and planning is very different from the way his mum operates; she describes herself as messy and disorganised, but Toby amazes her with his sense of order and meticulous planning. He willingly keeps his bedroom tidy and makes his own bed every morning. Still refuses to wipe his bottom after using the toilet "because

it's dirty". On the other hand, his mum describes him as 'a real lad' who you would not expect to be so fastidious. "I don't think he has autism or OCD but there are certainly traces of it".

His mother said that in their relationship, they "take it in turns to lead" and Toby can frequently 'outwit' her. An example of a conversation:

Mother: Please get yourself dressed and brush your teeth"

Toby: " No, because if I get dressed before my breakfast, I might drop things on me and if I brush my teeth first it will taste horrible"

An interesting comment was that "He sometimes thinks too deep"; when asked to expand. Mother gave an example of a recent comment, picked up from Youtube:

" If you crash into one car, the police won't come after you, but they will if there are two cars". She felt that this links up with his fear of the police and of going to prison (mother blames herself for giving him a scare for behaving badly by taking drawing up outside a police station, which left him screaming in terror).

He sometimes says at bedtime "I don't want to go for prison".

Recently, he has become very curious about God and has asked for a lot of detail about the story of the crucifixion. He has also spoken a great deal about

Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole; this is fairly unusual because he doesn't normally discuss what he is learning at school. We discussed the possibility that he may have made a connection that his mum is currently studying nursing and therefore might be particularly interested.

HOME EXPERIENCES AND ACTIVITIES:

He has an obvious talent for football and is currently due for trials at Aston Villa and Birmingham City. Aside from physical skill, he is also very knowledgeable with a prodigious memory for football facts and figures.

His mother has always talked to him a lot; " about nothing really...just chatting all the while. The Health Visitor told me to when he was a baby". He is always asking "why?" but will always remember everything he is told.

An example of his ability to use logic:

Toby: Why does snow stick to the window but not the ground?

Mother: The ground is warmer, so it melts.

Toby: Well that can't be right, because we are breathing inside the car so we are warming the windows up.

His mum commented that he is

very often able to 'outwit' her, but it is done unconsciously and without any hint of one upmanship.

Recently he has explained to his mum about diagraphs (seeing a signpost for Cotteridge).

Mother buys him Key Stage books to encourage his love of numbers which he goes through with astonishing speed. She was anxious that he was getting behind in English because he was slow to learn to write his name and his handwriting was (and is) poor.

PRESCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND ACTIVITIES:

Toby hated going to day nurse at first and his aversion continued until he was 3 or 4, although the staff assured his mother that as soon as she left, he was perfectly happy. His mum found it difficult to drop him off after saying at bedtime he didn't want to go, and crying as she left.

Key persons changed fairly frequently but Toby had good relationships. Mother felt that she receives good information but also commented that the experience her younger child is having is nowhere near as good because the staff are much younger and in her view, less qualified: "kids looking after kids".