

SCARBOROUGH, JULY 2015

INTERVIEW WITH MOTHER OF MATT

FAMILY DETAILS:

Matt lives with his father, mother and a brother, two years his junior.

Both parents were at home during maternity leave and the mother returned to work after 5 months, leaving the father (retired) as the primary carer. This led Matt to develop a very strong connection with his father. There are no paternal grandparents. The maternal grandmother saw little of Matt as a toddler but has recently moved nearby and developed a closeness to Matt. There is a large extended family and the father's oldest daughter by a previous marriage has become a very important figure in Matt's life.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND CLIMATE:

Matt is very close to his younger brother; both have very different temperaments and TJ is generally shyer, though now they are both at school, "he will stand no nonsense from Matt and more than holds his own". The two are inseparable, and "spend half their time hugging each other and the other half wanting to kill each other". Matt's father found it difficult to cope with the two little ones while his wife returned

to work. He admitted having less patience and feels that the boys picked up on this and knew when their father was becoming frustrated. This was a stressful period as there was no family or circle of friends close by to help out and they were living in a rented farmhouse in Wales and were very isolated. Matt's father found it difficult to attend Mother and Toddler groups but was always made welcome. Both parents say that they treated the boys like adults and would always answer questions candidly: "I don't know why" if they couldn't provide reasonable answers.

Since moving to Scarborough things are much easier and the whole family is much more settled.

CHILD CHARACTERISTICS:

Matt shows a mixture of personality traits; sometimes relaxed but also highly driven at times and anxious to get things right. He was "an easy-going, smiley baby" but could throw tantrums when stressed. He is innately curious and always wanting to find out how things work. He still occasionally has tantrums caused by frustration. At two and a half, his parents described "an epic tantrum in

a supermarket because he was not allowed a toy he wanted - he lay on the floor and would not stop screaming." He is generally confident and rarely bored. He tends to follow the obsessions of his friends, e.g. Batman at present. He shows resilience and seems to have good coping strategies.

He can be extremely focused when he sees the purpose of an activity; one example is making very intricate Lego models. Conversely, if he doesn't see the point, he will not engage and progress is slower. In reading and writing, his progress was much slower than in Maths because initially he couldn't see the point in reading. Now that he does, he can easily sustain 6 or 7 pages at a time. His memory and capacity for total recall astound both parents. He can remember incidents when he was a baby in Wales, for instance, or will relate things in great detail, for example: "Do you remember the shop where we brought that red and yellow plane with a propeller?". Both boys are good mimics but TJ is more of a performer than Matt. Matt loves things which involve problem-solving, particularly

in construction terms. He is fascinated by moving things, particularly cars and tractors. He likes to work out how to make things by himself.

Whereas TJ often talks to his toys and enjoys small world play, Matt would be reluctant to do this on his own, but will engage if they do it together. Similarly, he doesn't like soft toys and would prefer to take a car to bed, but will occasionally adopt a soft toy if he has seen his brother do it.

He loves physical activity, particularly riding bikes and scooters. He also enjoys writing stories, making up plays and playing the piano. He has a musical ear and says he wants to be a musician. Both boys like dressing up and re-enacting scenes from Spiderman and other superheroes.

Empathy skills are very well developed and Tom shows a keen awareness of when others are unhappy or sad. He will pick up when his mother or his friends are upset and respond appropriately. He has one best friend and one girlfriend and is generally quite popular with other children.

HOME EXPERIENCES AND ACTIVITIES:

The parental approach is never to push but to "see what he wants to do and then support him". The family home is full of books, as both parents are avid readers. Parents read to both boys "but not excessively" and they have tended not to read the books Matt brings home from school but will instead read 'Folk of the Faraway Tree' at bedtime. Neither will they do what homework Matt is meant to do or push Matt with reading or phonics.

Matt has always asked lots of questions so there were always opportunities for sustained dialogue. The house is described as "chaotic" but within the mess, Matt will always know where his important things are.

One important aspect of his early childhood was to go on long walks with his parents during the second period of maternity leave. Matt began to name things on the walks, e.g. saying "car" when he saw a tractor.

The walks were given specific names because of things related to them, e.g. 'chicken walk' or 'Anna walk'. When the younger brother was born, the long walks would help to get him to sleep and Matt would take part, in his pushchair, in all weathers. Looking back, both parents now see

these walking experiences as being very significant in Matt's development.

The parents have resisted anything digital so far, and Matt has no access to computers or phones. He repeatedly asks to go on to the CBeebies website but is refused, though he is allowed to watch DVDs.

The family have always eaten together, even when the boys were very small and they feel that this was an important feature of Matt's upbringing. He is very aware of healthy eating and will ask "Is this healthy?"

PRE -SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND ACTIVITIES:

In Wales Tom attended Cylch (a play group) which his father described as a life saver. The groups were attended by only 6 children in a very informal atmosphere with toys all over the floor and two key persons in charge, with whom Matt developed very good relationships. The children would sit on the floor singing, playing with sand, painting or using an outdoor classroom. Matt's father described one incident where Matt refused to join the group. One of the key persons whispered something in his ear and immediately persuaded him to attend. Matt's mother said she was in awe of the them.