

SCARBOROUGH, JULY 2015

INTERVIEW WITH MOTHER OF JACK

FAMILY DETAILS:

Jack lives with his mother and father with no siblings. Mother is French, and has lived in England for ten years. His paternal grandmother, a speech therapist, is a significant figure in his life.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND CLIMATE:

Jack's mother experienced some confusion about how to deal with bilingualism. She was told by her health visitor that to speak to him in French would confuse him, but it never felt natural to speak to him in English. Jack doesn't like it when she speaks in French. However, he becomes interested in French at certain times, for example if at school they are learning about different cultures, e.g. Chinese New Year, or when packages arrive from his grandmother. If he learns about a new custom, he will link it with France and discuss if there is an equivalent. She describes severe stress in Jack's environment in his early life, when the family's summer holiday letting business was struggling, and when she was experiencing severe post-natal depression. "The first three years are a bit blurry. I was not really

interested in Jack as a baby, and I was really struggling when he had colic and was screaming through the night, but from three years old he has been a breath of fresh air, absolutely awesome(...). From the very moment I started feeling that I was communicating with Jack, everything changed. He started responding to what I said in the way he understood". During the difficult times, Jack's father felt excluded and not trusted with the baby, and so she took on the whole burden herself, becoming very depressed and close to tears most of the time. Her mother-in-law was extremely supportive, taking Jack out at every opportunity, whilst never overstepping her place, always respecting the mother's way of doing things but always there when needed, taking Jack to nursery, etc. Sending Jack to nursery at two and a half was "the best thing I ever did" and it was during this time that Jack began to develop a closeness with his father.

As Jack began to look up to him, he developed more confidence as a parent.

During periods of absolute desperation, it was thoughts of Jack that saw his mother through, and for her husband, the realisa-

tion of what she was fighting was a key turning point. She is now coping on medication and is settled. "I enjoy being me now. I will have two weeks of hyperactivity and will then be quite happy doing cross-stitch and being quiet.". She says that Jack is able to understand her in his own way and knows that "when mummy is cross and shouts easily, it's because she's not feeling well and needs to be quiet". At these times, he knows he needs to play quietly beside her.

Both parents are now working very much as a team in a much happier and settled environment. The approach is not to go against Jack's will, but to follow his interests and inclinations.

"The past six years have been amazing. I have learned so much about myself"

CHILD CHARACTERISTICS:

Jack is described as "a chatter-box, inquisitive, always on the go, a very popular boy, resilient and able to bounce back after a telling off". His closest friendships change between four of

five boys and a girl who is one year older. He is usually fairly relaxed, but driven at times. He has demonstrated a number of different obsessions, e.g. dinosaurs, Power Rangers, recently, space exploration. An interest could absorb him for days, for example he is currently fascinated by earthquakes and was shown on at atlas where they took place, etc. A toy in which he is really interested, e.g. a Power Ranger can hold his attention for an hour or more if not disturbed. He also loves Lego and other construction games. He learns a great deal from TV and will often ask “Is it real or pretend for the film?”

He will always ask questions when he doesn't fully understand something. On a recent trip to a castle he interrupted the guide to ask a relevant question.

Behaviour is good and his mother insists on politeness and manners, and describes herself as very strict in this respect, ignoring Jack if he doesn't say “please”, but making sure he is praised when he shows good manners. They have developed a signal for when his mother is conversing with another adult, whereby Jack knows not to interrupt, but will put his hand on his mum's arm to show her he wants to say something or needs attention. Jack can get very frustrated if

if something is particularly fiddly or needs untangling. He is well schooled in what to do if he is hit by others, i.e. say “Please do not hit me. That hurt. Please say sorry”, and then to walk away and tell a teacher. He is very sensitive and his mother is able to explain when she is upset: “I feel sad today”.

Jack demonstrates skills of mimicry and can quote full sequences, word for word from films, with voices. He is always able to remember songs from school, and loves his mum to sing to him in French.

HOME EXPERIENCES AND ACTIVITIES:

There are lots of books in the house and both parents are keen readers, (mother has recently re-started). She reads to Jack, often repeating favourites and sometimes inventing stories. He has developed imaginative play with his grandma.

When very young, his mother made sure he was out of the house as much as possible, spending time on the beach, exploring local building sites in which he expressed a real interest and curiosity.

He has access to Wii console, iPad and his father's computer. He enjoys watching the Simpsons with his father and they

will laugh together for hours. They also enjoy a lot of physical activity together, e.g. football or wrestling. Wrestling is a real bonding experience and if there is any tension or his mother needs some time, she will get out a duvet on the floor and instruct them to wrestle, with the father giving a TV style commentary.

Eating together at the table, though very much part of his mother's culture, is not an option because there is not a table in the house. This was initially a cause of friction but now “I stopped fighting for my world. Meal time is now Simpsons time and we have family time in other ways”. Jack eats healthily, loves fruit, vegetables and white fish, and will talk enthusiastically about what he has learned at school on this theme.

PRE-SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND ACTIVITIES:

From birth, Jack attended Baby Matters and baby massage at the local children's centre and his mother stayed with him and made friends there. This was very important in getting mum out and Jack would cry on the way home because he enjoyed it so much.

He began to use language from 18 months to two years.

He learned basic sign language



with Signing Hands. He had great experiences, especially with outdoor learning at the nursery, which his mother describes as “fantastic”, and which gave her, for the first time, some freedom. Two key persons were extremely significant figures in Jack’s life and were very fond of him. His mother says they did an amazing job in stroking her ego and helping her to become more confident as a parent, keeping on top of records, taking photographs, encouraging Jack to be more independent and giving him responsibility. The first was very maternal towards her, offering reassurance when she felt guilt at leaving a crying baby. When Jack did something well, “She was as proud as me”. The second was a very reassuring figure to Jack at this difficult point in his life, equally proud of his achievements.

Jack adores his reception teacher who responds to him in a very similar way to his previous key persons.