

CSH Support Corner – Parent & Caregiver Blog February 2023



Yes, my son is autistic.

Yes, I adore him just the way he is.

No, that doesn't mean it's always easy.

If you had asked me what being a mom was like when my son, Tommy, was three, I would have summed it up in one word: hard. My life felt like it was full of can'ts: can't take Tommy to the grocery store, can't stay more than two feet away from him at the park, can't change our plans once he knows about them, can't deviate from routine. I must not be a very good mom.

Tommy wasn't diagnosed until he was 7 (for a myriad of reasons, but that's a blog post for another day). By the time he was diagnosed, we had a long list of those "can'ts". Our physician and therapists at Children's Specialized were able to help me understand that because Tommy's brain processed information differently, he had different needs than typical children. And as it turns out, I was actually pretty good at being Tommy's mom.

All those "can'ts" that I worried endlessly over translated into a need he had. A need for the security of mom close by in the large, open park. A need to be allowed to communicate that the bright lights and varied smells at the grocery store were too much for his over stimulated sensory system. A need to be able to know what he would be doing in a world that seemed to change faster than he could get used to.

Once I was taught to reframe my thinking and understand why he needed support that looked different than I expected I was able to step back, breathe, and understand it wasn't about me. It became easier to accept the help that's available for families like mine. Pre-boarding an airplane so Tommy doesn't get overwhelmed in the crowd at the gate? Yes, please! Participating in Special Olympics instead of rec sports so the environment works for Tommy? Absolutely! But most importantly, by giving myself some grace I became a better mom.

Ultimately, showing Tommy that we take his needs seriously has helped him develop the confidence to begin advocating for himself. And showing him that we love him – exactly as he is – has helped him grow into a happy, secure young man. I hope that you also find a little space for grace in your parenting today.

Resources that were helpful for me, include:

- [Special Olympics New Jersey](#)
- [ADDitude](#) provides information on ADHD and other Neurodivergencies
- [TSA Passenger Support](#) provides information on support while traveling

