

Swiss Families and their Experience with ABA

Family 1

Our Experience with ABA

In 2003 at the age of 4 our son received the diagnosis atypical autism (PDD). The Autism Center IAS in Brugg, which has since moved to Baden, made the diagnosis.

The IAS recommended that we start Ergo-therapy and continue with the usual early occupational therapy two hours a week until it would be possible to place him in a special ed (HP) kindergarten class. Our son was benefiting from the one-hour early therapy and two hours ergo therapy per week but we knew he would benefit even more from more hours of therapy. His interest in learning was sparked and he wanted more. Our attempts to receive more therapy hours were in vain, because officially he was already receiving the maximum allowed hours.

The enrolment in special ed (HP) kindergarten with the social contact in the small group was good for our son. The teacher was a woman with experience with children with autism and interacted well with our son.

First Contact with ABA

Around November 2003 we read a newspaper article about ABA. ABA was known of in the IAS Brugg, but at this time it was difficult to advise us. The referred us to Dr. Gundelfinger at the KJPD in Zurich where we took our son for further evaluations.

At the same time we came across the address of Sylvia Senn. She was an experienced ABA supervisor and gave us the reference of a family that she worked with. We visited this family and decided that if Dr. Gundelfinger also recommended it we would start an ABA program.

After the tests at the KJPD we were recommended to start ABA as soon as possible. The KJPD couldn't offer us a place in their ABA project so we chose to start a program with Silvia Senn as supervisor. The KJPD offered to follow our son's progress with annual testing.

Putting the Team Together

Our first job was to put a team of people together that could successfully work with our child. Luckily we could find them in our social and family circle. They are all women that have their own families, and welcome the challenge to work and bring our son as far as possible.

Beginning ABA

We started on a weekend in May 2004 with a workshop. For two days Ms. Senn instructed us in the theory and practical method of ABA. We began with simple exercises and we could start step-by-step to work with our son. It was for everyone involved a new way to approach 'teaching' and also a big challenge. Because we had decided to still send him to the HP-kindergarten, we started with 16 hours per week ABA therapy. We added soon more hours over time to raise it up to an average of 20 hours per week.

Therapy – What We Did

Our son really took well to ABA therapy and made rapid progress with only a few tough days in between. His speech development in the first year of ABA was enormous. At the start he couldn't express his needs well and often screamed. Now he can use appropriate language and his behavior improves each day. At the start of August, 2005 we changed our son from the HPS-Kindergarten with ABA aide for six hours to the regular kindergarten. Although our son was old enough to enter the larger class in kindergarten, we chose to place him in the smaller class. At the recommendation of his HP Kindergarten teacher he continued with one hour of psychomotor therapy a week. Integrating our son into the regular kindergarten was a big step in his development and we think he will continue to make similar progress.

Supervision

At the beginning of therapy Silvia Senn came for supervision once every two weeks. After one year we reduced the supervision to once every three weeks. She controlled, and updated the therapy-plan in preparation for these team meetings. The supervision was serious, detailed, and goal-oriented and set strong demands on the team to stay focused and deliver to our son the best therapy possible.

The team meetings last three hours and cover the following themes:

- The actual therapy work by the therapists is analysed
- Any questions about the method or the child's workbook are discussed
- New exercises are introduced and practiced by each team member

The direct and authoritative style by Silvia Senn impressed us and continually kept us motivated. This is the reason we kept having the regular team meetings as often as was within our financial means.

Evaluation by the KJPD Zurich

One year later our son was evaluated by the KJPD in Zurich. A short quote from the report:

‘Your son is a lovable boy that has atypical autism. In the past year he has shown great progress in all areas and shows a definite reduction in autistic symptoms. Also **in the past year he has achieved 1.5 – 2.5 years of gains in cognitive development**’

Our View as Parents

ABA is the best thing that could have happened to our son. We would make any financial sacrifice to keep working with ABA in order to provide our son with the best chance to achieve the most self-sufficient life possible.

We are thankful what we have been financially supported by our families, but also sad that we know that many families have this same luck. It is increasingly urgent that the IV (disability insurance) finally acknowledges the wide acceptance and success of ABA in Switzerland – and adds it to the list of treatments accepted for coverage.