

# Joshua

AUTISM



Joshua's story isn't his own. It involves us, his family. Without his brother, Josiah, or his sister, Abby, Joshua wouldn't be who he is today. Each of us together make up this family and we follow and trust God to keep us together and growing.

Everything seemed "normal" throughout my pregnancy with Joshua. The birth experience was "normal" as well. Holding Joshua for the first time, I knew, just like with his older brother, Josiah, that this little boy was going to do something great someday. I knew I was blessed to be his mommy.

But somewhere along 14 months, I started to wonder about things. Why wasn't Joshua doing some of the things that Josiah had done at this age? He was doing physical things well, but socially, emotionally and

developmentally he was not on track. When I voiced my concerns, my family said to give it time. He is just doing things at his own pace. But by 2 years old, he was still not talking, so we went to First Steps to see if we could get some answers.

At the age of 3, Joshua started Goshen Montessori school, he had a teacher, Asia who had a son with autism. She noticed that Joshua had some of the same issues as her son and she asked me to watch a video that helped her understand what was happening with her son. That video changed my life. Click here to see the video. As I watched the video, I sat there with tears streaming down my face, wondering how could I have not known this? How did this happen? What are we going to do? What does this mean for our family? What

does it mean for Joshua? When I finished crying, I decided, Joshua is Joshua. He is not autistic, he has autism. He is special and will need extra training but he is a part of this family. He will not be allowed to sit on the sidelines and do what he wants. He can pick up toys, he can learn to communicate, he can be smothered with hugs and kisses, he can be a part of his family. Our family may not look like other families but that is okay.

At the age of 4, we started the process of getting a diagnosis, Joshua still did not use words to communicate. He would point at things or just go get what he wanted himself. We knew that we needed help and to get help we needed a diagnosis. Once diagnosed with Autism, Joshua could have therapy. It was a long and frustrating process but when it

## Joshua's favorites:

letters, 20th Century Fox, glue, tape, designing things with all the above, iphones and ipads!



was finished we were thankful. Once again we saw God at work. Over time, we developed a relationship with the PT and OT that Joshua saw each week. They gave us advise on top of therapy. Eventually both of these therapists went with us on a mission trip to Manta, Ecuador to train professionals and parents.

When we started therapy we were able to incorporate ways to begin communication. We started out with pictures of things he wanted and then went to written words with pictures then just the written words and now he can verbally ask for things and we do not have to use the tools we first started with! Once he mastered one word verbal communication, we were able to move into 2 and 3 word sentences and now we continue to work on proper ways of asking for things and appropriate manners.

When Joshua was first diagnosed, he had no concept of danger. We had to lock doors, windows, and even kitchen cupboards and the fridge. We felt we said no, more times in one day than most parents say in a week! Our saying no, did not stop him. Everything we did not want him to have had to be locked away. Now, just saying no to him will usually stop him. We still have padlocks on our main doors to the outside world and we keep one room locked with all paper, tape and glue inside the locked room or we would run out by the end of the day. However, we don't have to lock our cabinets or fridge, we can just say no!

We did not go places because of temper tantrums. However, we were told that he needs to learn how to handle social situations. If we never put him in the situation, he will never learn how to behave. So we went to town. It was really hard the first 20 to 100 time, but we went. I was embarrassed by his tantrums or angry at how people looked at me. "Can't you control your kid?" their eyes would say? Fortunately the tantrums stopped and we can now walk hand in hand thru the store without much of a problem. Sure, he still wants things and sometimes has to be told to be quiet or keep his hands to himself but he listens and he obeys and MOST importantly... NO tantrums, no meltdowns, no screaming!

Each day is a new day, filled with hope for a better future for Joshua and our family. Some days I feel we have gone backwards a few steps but we get back up and start again the next day. Don't give up. Yes, it is going to be hard, but you can do it. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Trust in God, lean on your support team (spouse, friends, family, etc...), and start each day with hope!