

Case Study – The Listening Program®

Austin, Age 4, Autistic Spectrum Disorder

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Name: Austin
Gender: Male
Chronological Age: 4 years
Clinical Diagnosis: Autistic Spectrum Disorder

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Austin was a healthy baby who developed normally for the first year of his life. At his 12-month well child check, he was given five separate injections and immunized for nine different diseases. His mother later learned that all injections contained thimerisol. Within a month of this visit, his mother noticed that Austin seemed obsessed with water. A few months later, he didn't appear interested in other children. He also began playing with only a few toys. Shortly before the birth of his younger brother, he stopped giving eye contact consistently. When Austin was 21 months old, he ceased speaking altogether (or making any sounds at all other than when he cried) and withdrew into his own world. About a month later, he began plugging his ears for nearly every loud sound. Sounds that never used to bother him at all suddenly became unbearable. Along with the auditory hypersensitivity came sensory issues in all areas. When he was 2 1/2 he began showing signs of "visual stimming" (repetitive visual stimulation) and very pronounced obsessive-compulsive behaviors. Austin was formally diagnosed with "Autism Spectrum Disorder" in September 2001 by a pediatric neurologist at the Cleveland Clinic. Austin lives in a bilingual household. His mother speaks English to him, his father Hungarian. His three siblings also speak English and Hungarian.

TREATMENT

At the age of three, Austin was found to be farsighted and given glasses. At 3 1/2 years he was placed in a special education preschool. He was entirely nonverbal when he began preschool. Over the summer he attended Middleburg Early Education Center, MEEC. In the fall he was attending his public preschool in the mornings and MEEC three afternoons a week. He was also receiving private speech therapy through Easter Seals in addition to public school and MEEC speech therapy. Austin began speaking in July of 2001 after working with his speech therapist at MEEC. His speech was limited to "no," "bye," and "hi." He would repeat words if asked and also use single words to request familiar things. Occupational therapy was provided intermittently throughout this time at both locations as well as privately.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Austin had just turned four when he began The Listening Program® in February 2002. His mother and TLP Authorized Provider were unsure of compliance, so they decided to begin with the Sensory Integration CD for daily 5 minute sessions for a week. He ended up listening to all 12 tracks of Sensory Integration in two days. Austin enjoyed listening and was much quieter that week. At the same time he was more forceful in expressing what he did and did not want to do via his body language and the sounds he was able to make at that time. He was more emotional in his reactions and this was atypical for him.

Austin took a week off after Sensory Integration. We planned to begin TLP the following week. In that week off, he became very sick although he was a child who rarely ever became ill. He totally withdrew into himself and spent an entire week at home. He listened to ABT's Sound Health Sampler CD while going to sleep that week and so enjoyed it that he asked for it nightly. That week for the first time he allowed the dental hygienist to clean his teeth. He blew his nose for the first time. He stopped running away from his mother in public. He laughed more, had better eye contact, was saying "hi" and "bye" more regularly and played better with his brother Logan and his cousins.

The following week Austin started The Listening Program Base Schedule of 15 minutes, twice a day. From the first day, Austin tolerated the headphones and music well. He seemed to enjoy the program and appeared thoughtful while listening. On day three he called his sister by name throughout the day: this had never happened before. He appeared embarrassed in the bathroom in front of his mother, wanting privacy, the first time this has happened. He did not stim on the dog's leash as he usually did and did not stim the following day on his usual activities while at his Grandmother's house. After his mother showed him how, he licked a lollipop for the first time.

Week Two: His speech therapist says he is having another auditory shift. He correctly picked out the "blue cow," "green pig," etc. when asked but she had to use short succinct phrases instead of longer sentences. This week he said his cousin Nikolas's name after his mother mentioned that he was coming over. He said "Nikolas" when they visited his Aunt Lorrie's house, indicating he knew that cousin Nikolas lived there too.

Week Three: Austin wet the bed once this week, which never happens. He told his older sister a full Hungarian sentence for "the box is over there." He has been repeating a lot of Hungarian words for his Daddy and older sister and brother. Austin has been more social overall and more consistent with greeting people. He is also showing his preferences more and consistently making verbal choices among things. For the first time since he was a year old, he went down the "Step 2" slide face first and on his stomach several times after seeing his younger brother Logan doing it. This week he said "hi" to his speech therapist when he walked in. She was very surprised because he has never spontaneously greeted her before. Austin is completing thoughts and has done this several times with different situations. He seems to understand the sequencing and his syllables are always correct when he says a word, even when the word is hard to decipher. For the first time he blew a kiss back to his mother when she blew one to him and he did this several times. His public preschool teacher reported that he has had a sudden dislike for gym class. Before bed, he adjusted his pajama top by pulling it down over his exposed stomach. This is a first. He has been adjusting his clothing for the past week rather than taking them off altogether or leaving them bunched up after being in the bathroom. He has not been "streaking" naked lately like he used to, and he is looking in the mirror far less than usual.

Week Four: Austin wanted to listen to his TLP CD during the two days off, but readily accepted his mother's answer that he had to take a two-day break. He went to his cousin's birthday party where several relatives commented on his improvement. He was very social and didn't leave the group and withdraw into himself at all. Austin has been consistently choosing his own outfits each morning when his mother gives him two or three choices. His sleeping pattern has changed: he is going to bed earlier and waking up earlier, but he continues to sleep well. His speech therapist says that she believes Austin is shifting so much that he's having trouble filtering through the myriad of stimuli he's experiencing.

Week Five: Austin began to verbally respond to his little brother Logan three or four times throughout the week. In the bathtub Logan would say "hello" and Austin would answer back. This is the first time he has ever directly verbally responded to Logan. He has been stimming a lot recently. Austin went down the big slide in his backyard for the first time in over a year. This meant he had to first climb 10 feet to a platform. He has been afraid of this ladder ever since it was built. He did ball work and a lot of wheelbarrow walking which he would never do before. He has been cleaning up after himself much better all week.

Weeks Six through Eight: Austin brought his mother the headphones to listen and has started listening all by himself. He opened the door and called the dog into the house when his mother asked him to. He spent many hours at a birthday party with many unfamiliar children. At times he has been more emotional and he is now consistently crying when hurt. Austin had a substitute teacher at his public preschool and this didn't seem to bother him at all.

For the second round of The Listening Program, Austin listened to 15 minutes of TLP, once a day for 16 weeks and 15 minutes of the Sensory Integration CD daily for 8 weeks. For the remaining 8 weeks, he listened to the Speech and Language CD for his second daily listening session.

Weeks 1-8 with TLP and Extension CD Sensory Integration: The first two weeks Austin seemed more disorganized and sometimes defiant. He seemed to need vast amounts of movement and was craving sensory input. In weeks 3 and 4, he tried to sit with a boy in his class in the back of the van rather than going directly to his own seat near the front, a first for him. He told me that he was "going to sit with Balal on the van." This happened one more time before the end of the year. That week he and his mother also had their longest conversation to date. "Are you done?" "All done." "Are you sure?" "Sure." "Can you wash your hands please?" "No - towel." And he wiped his hands on the towel so he could go directly to play. By weeks 5 and 6, he was still emotional. He was saying things like "all done ice cream," "this please," and after dinner "I come out" to get up from the table. He was making a lot of spontaneous comments such as "fell down," "stuck," etc. During weeks 7 and 8 summer break began. He began to play more outside on his play set and with Logan. When the break began, his mother reported long periods of stimming. During week 8 his summer session began at MEEC. His speech therapist reported that he's talking himself through things when he does them. He was more withdrawn and still engaging in a lot of stimming this week.

Weeks 9-16 with TLP and Extension CD Speech and Language: The first two weeks Austin was making sounds while listening to the Speech and Language CD. He had his first conversation with Logan and his mother while lying in bed. He said "party," "grandma's," and was following the conversation and interjecting comments. On the 4th of July, he enjoyed the fireworks although he plugged his ears. During weeks 11 and 12 his mother noticed less stimming. During a session with his speech therapist, he was able to correctly choose plastic colored animals showing scanning and a sense of humor. He joined the neighbor children in jumping on the trampoline. He had his first sleep over at his grandmother's and slept well there. During weeks 13 and 14 Austin was listening well, commenting a lot, and was recognizing and returning facial expressions. When he saw an animated picture of ice cream on a Baby Songs video, he said "Ice cream, ice cream, Mommy. Birthday party. Logan's birthday party." The final two weeks of listening to the Speech and Language CD, Austin seemed more interested in other kids. He was interacting more with Logan. He was laughing more and saying "hi" to people. He was also more belligerent and sometimes emotional. But he was sharing nicely. He was also keeping his glasses on more and not throwing them.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

Austin was in a classroom next to mine at MEEC when he started TLP. I followed his progress through emails with his mother and she gave me the information I needed to be able to offer guidance. No other interventions were done at that time except for speech therapy and classroom activities. In June of this past year, Austin came into my classroom. After 8 weeks of TLP, I saw a child who was much more aware of where his body was. His eye contact had gone from 0 to 100%. If I say his name, he always looks my way. His play is now more purposeful as well as very imaginative. More abstract skills are emerging. Austin knows when something is funny, when someone isn't pleased, when his behavior is inappropriate. His ability to read the incidentals is increasing. When Austin started at our preschool, he couldn't stay in a designated area. He is now more focused and displaying a greater interest in his surroundings.

Austin's speech and language skills have blossomed. He walks into the room and says hello, immediately establishing eye contact. He is labeling, requesting, and initiating his wants and needs. The sentence order isn't correct but all the words are there. Our speech therapist isn't concerned as he is using a wider vocabulary and she can always concentrate on sentence structure later on. He is also better able to pull up language and share the tremendous amount of learned information he has stored. He is now able to listen, process, and carry through with most tasks. I can ask for three green bears and he can give them to me. Because he is able to communicate better, he is a much happier child.

Austin's behavior is more age appropriate. He no longer relies on negative behavior to get attention. Emotionally he has moved through the 2 year-old stage very quickly and we are moving through the 3's very rapidly. Austin's receptive language is very well developed. He understands and processes all auditory information within the classroom setting. His expressive language continues to develop. His voice tone is not normal as of yet because he hasn't had enough experience listening to it. He was playing with his voice a lot in the second session of TLP and making different sounds. If I imitated the sound, he thought it was very funny so we played with sounds. He knew it was a game. We had never had that interaction before. He has also made huge gains playing with the other children, in exploring purposefully, and in turn taking. He watched one day as we set blocks at the end of a slide. As peers came down the slide, their feet hit the blocks and knocked them down. This was a new classroom game, one that had not been introduced before. The following day, just as we started free play, some of the children began using the slide. When the activity began, Austin found the blocks, and set them up for his peers completely on his own and without being asked. Even given the distractions in a classroom setting, we have seen this much growth in Austin. I'm really pleased for him.

From Austin's Mom:

"A year and a half ago, my son was totally nonverbal after appearing to lose his ability to speak. He now has made great strides in spontaneous language, and although he mixes up the order of words, he can say phrases and occasionally a full sentence. His articulation is terrible and his voice quality is changing again. He went from sounding like a regular toddler to silence for more than a year to speech with a vastly changed voice that was guttural, harsh, and low-pitched. His voice is now higher pitched but still not of the same quality it used to be. I credit TLP with decreasing and even eliminating a great deal of his auditory hypersensitivities; he rarely plugs his ears now. I also feel confident in crediting the change in his voice to TLP, because the change from the low-pitched to the higher, more normal sounding voice occurred while he participated in the program and we were not doing any other new therapies at this time.

Austin has come a very long way in the year and a half that he's had intervention, and I owe a debt of gratitude to Bonnie Chojnacki and all of the other teachers, therapists and assistant teachers who have worked with him. Austin and I are fortunate to have the benefit of their incredible intuition and devotion to children with special needs. When AIT (Auditory Integration Training) was recommended for Austin by two different occupational therapists, I was thrilled to learn from Bonnie that something like The Listening Program was available. We can enjoy the program from the comfort of our own home, and purchasing a TLP kit is definitely more affordable than traveling to a facility numerous times a year for AIT. Knowing how much this intervention has helped Austin, I am glad to know that he can use it for the rest of his life if he needs to. Although TLP is but one piece of the puzzle, he and I have both benefited from the healing power of music."

FOLLOW-UP RECOMMENDATIONS

TLP will be an ongoing part of Austin's life as long as he needs to use it. He has done so well, especially with the Speech and Language Extension CDs. When he completes his current session, we will take a month off to see how he generalizes his new skills. I often see the need for TLP to begin again after one month off. I will have him start solo with Sensory Integration as this CD seems to help him to organize. He will repeat CD's 5-8 in the base program, followed by the Speech and Language Extension CD.

DISCUSSION

At our school, we try one thing at a time with our children. I have found that TLP is making a difference in the lives of the children I work with. Some children have such severe sensitivities that we start with only three seconds of listening through headphones. In my experience, no one has discontinued the program. When the child makes the connection between the music and the realization that it feels good for them, they leave the headphones on. At this stage, many will get the headphones and bring them to the parents for their listening session as Austin has done. We have used other sound interventions but some are very harsh. I appreciate TLP because it is such a gentle approach.

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End of Case Study

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