

Life with Deion

I HAVE A SON WHO IS 11 YEARS OLD AND HAS AUTISM. AUTISM IS a complex disability. It affects communication, behavior, socialization and the child will experience developmental delays. An example of one of his behaviors: He likes the sound of crashing. One morning when I took him out to the school bus, all my dinner dishes were broken in the walkway. He had thrown them out the window without my knowledge!!

Although his behavior can be humorous, it is also challenging. It has been a difficult and trying journey trying to get my son, Deion, educated properly which meant battling with school administration personnel at IEP meetings, consulting specialists, attending workshops and conferences to educate myself on his disability, enrolling him in speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, social skills classes, therapeutic camp, therapeutic horseback riding, Special Olympics; and a developmental clinic to help with his progress, just to name a few.

I have been so stressed out at times I have lost my hair, gained weight and quit my career in the federal government where I had worked for over 20 years. I have broken down and cried at meetings, hearings and in parent support group meetings.

Doctors and administrators will often tell you all the negative things about your child and not focus on advising you to challenge your child, expose them to many opportunities to help them become the best they can possibly be. There are documented stories about individuals with autism and other disabilities who have become very successful despite their dismal diagnosis—obtaining jobs, attending college, completing college but in the beginning their parents were told to institutionalize their children.

One bit of advice I will give is never give up on your child and don't believe what others tell you is not possible. The sky is the limit for my son and one day we will write a book called "I Told You So."