



CROTCHED MOUNTAIN

Ready, Set, Connect!

Building Communication Skills Through Trust and Consistency: Jameson Reaches Milestones and Makes Emotional Connections at RSC!

In many ways, Jameson is a typical 6-year-old boy: he loves dinosaurs and sharks, he loves pizza and his iPad, and he loves his family. When he was 3, Jameson was diagnosed with autism.

In 2012, Jameson arrived at Crotched Mountain's Ready, Set, Connect! (RSC), an applied behavioral analysis (ABA) treatment program for young children with autism, with very low verbal skills and he often demonstrated what is termed "explosive behavior." His tantrums were long-lasting and included hitting, kicking, biting, pinching and throwing. His family needed help understanding Jameson's diagnosis and finding guidance for his behavioral and academic issues.



Jameson and his sister

"We were very concerned with Jameson's tantrums and needed to support him at home and at school," said Deborah, Jameson's grandmother and guardian, in recollecting their first visit to Ready, Set, Connect! "For the first time, we felt hope that our grandson could live a happy life. Very early on, Jameson developed a strong bond with his therapist Jess and it was through this trust and consistency that he began to thrive."

Over the course of two years, Jameson and ABA therapists, Lindsey Konkol and Jess Dupuis, worked closely together, steadily meeting milestones with his verbal skills and working on his social and emotional skills as he prepared to enter kindergarten.

Behavioral Plan

Providing consistency through a team approach was an essential component of Jameson's journey. That consistency began with an individualized treatment plan created through Jameson's VB-MAPP assessment which was developed by a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) and implemented by the entire treatment team.

"Because Ready, Set, Connect! is specifically focused on each child, Jameson had his own treatment plan - tailored to his individual assessment, his skills and his needs," said Lindsey, who worked with Jameson on his basic learning and social skills. "Our BCBA is here every day, supporting our work with children like Jameson and modifying each child's treatment plans as progress is made."

Learning to Regulate and Express Himself

Like many children with autism, Jameson found moving from one activity to the next very challenging and would often become aggressive and scream as a result.

“One of the goals in Jameson’s treatment plan was to reduce the severity of his tantrums by establishing routines, managing his transitions, helping him to self-regulate and express his emotions,” said Lindsey, who consistently worked with Jameson on managing social situations.

A first step in this process was to encourage Jameson to follow cues and to pair adult interactions with positive reinforcement.

“We began by just playing near Jameson and gently encouraging him to play along with us,” said Jess. “This casual play gradually included giving him simple directions followed by his preferred activities. In this way, prompts from adults became what we called ‘discriminative stimuli,’ – events that signal that positive things would happen if he responded positively.”

The therapists also employed another evidence-based practice called Differential Reinforcement. With this technique, positive behaviors such as working on a project without any aggression were reinforced, while Jameson’s vocal or physical outbursts were disregarded and did not result in getting what he wanted.

“By taking this positive approach Jameson learned very quickly that if he finished a task, such as working on his letters, he could read his shark book or watch a video on his iPad – he could make a choice based on what he wanted,” said Jess.

Signs of Emotional Connections at Home and School

“One of the biggest breakthroughs for Jameson at Ready, Set, Connect! was his ability to identify his feelings and receive and show emotion,” said Deborah.

With the use of an ABA technique called Functional Communication Training, Jameson was encouraged to use words to express himself as a replacement for his emotional outbursts.

“Almost any attempt by Jameson to use words to make a request or protest was honored,” Jess said. “We then taught him words for various emotions, such as being happy, sad or angry. In this way, he became much more effective at letting others know what he liked and what bothered him.” This required very systematic prompting over several weeks and months. Once Jameson demonstrated these skills with prompting from his therapists, the prompts were gradually faded until he was independent.

Jess added, “After Jameson had a tantrum, he could explain why it happened and express how he was feeling. He made incredible progress.”

In addition to using words to engage more with his environment and those around him, Jameson also improved his ability to pay attention to specific tasks and demonstrated greater control of his own emotions – both at school and at home.

“Jameson is much more tolerant of his little sister too,” Deborah added. “He’s more interested in what she’s doing and there is less of an impact if she wants to play with a toy he has. You can tell they love each other a lot. He even sticks up for her if she’s scolded – and his ability to make that connection is huge.”

A Bright Future

Jameson transitioned out of Ready, Set, Connect! this fall and entered kindergarten in his home school district. He is in a classroom with his peers learning sight words, numbers and letters.

“The Ready, Set, Connect! program was heaven sent to us. It was an amazing experience to work with Jameson’s therapists who understood and respected him, and knowing they truly wanted to see him succeed. Thanks to them we have a much better understanding of his world,” said Deborah.

“Leaving Ready, Set, Connect! was a sad day for all of us, she added. But it was like a graduation of sorts for him. I know it will be hard, but the sky is the limit for Jameson, he has learned so much and he is ready to fly.”

Let us help your child with autism acquire skills for success.

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