



Case Study: Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Kai's parents became aware of problems with his development soon after his first birthday. Initially they noticed that he did not look at people and subsequently they became concerned because he was not developing speech. Kai gradually lost interest in people from the age of one year. He was referred to the local speech and language therapy service and then to the child development centre. By this time several people had commented on Kai's unusual social interaction and lack of communication, and his parents began to wonder whether Kai might have Autistic Spectrum Disorder. He was diagnosed at the age of four years.

Kai attends his local mainstream primary school and is in the reception class. He does not appear to understand much language in isolation such as stories but he is able to follow simple instructions in a familiar context, for example, get your coat, drink your milk. He is not very interested in the speech around him and does not look up if he is spoken to or if his name is called. He is most likely to respond if he is offered food or something else that he likes, provided he can see what it is that is on offer.

Kai points at things he wants with a finger or outstretched arm. He also points at things of interest, for example, the computer screen but does not direct this gesture at anyone or co-ordinate his looking at another person. He consistently shakes his head to indicate 'no' but does not nod for 'yes' or use any other conventional gestures although he will sometimes wave goodbye when prompted or clap at the end of a familiar song.

Kai's eye contact remains very limited and he does not look consistently at his teacher or teaching assistant or return social smiles from either familiar or unfamiliar people. He has a wide range of facial expressions but only some of these are directed at other people.

Kai is not interested in his peers but will very occasionally watch them and may approach a familiar child in a one-to-one situation. He will engage in rough and tumble games and chasing games but appears not to be interested in the children he is playing alongside. If Kai wants something in the classroom he takes the hand of an adult and takes them to what he wants. When he wants something important he uses a combination of pointing, dragging an adult by the hand, crying or screaming. He is not moved by people appearing to be upset or by children crying.

Kai is very good at puzzles and enjoys playing with mechanical toys. He enjoys sensory play and if allowed to would spend a great deal of time pouring sand from one container to another or through a funnel. Kai spends as much time as he can engaging in repetitive activities such as opening and closing the door of the classroom. He also enjoys separating segments of an orange and lining them up and he has been observed arranging the pencils in order of length. He is very interested in aeroplanes and will run to the window if he hears one. Kai is very interested in small details and will show great interest in them if they catch his attention.

