

Navigating Autism: A Mother's Journey with Naziah

For the first nine years of my son Naziah's life, I believed he was developing just like any other child. He met all his milestones, walking, talking and engaging with the world around him. Nothing seemed unusual. It wasn't until my second child was born 4 years later that I started to notice differences in Naziah's Social behavior.

He preferred playing alone, even in a room full of children. He clung to television shows that were meant for toddlers, long after other children his age had moved on. Most noticeably, he thrived on routine. Without realizing it, he had trained me to structure our daily lives in a way that kept him comfortable and minimized the chances of a meltdown. At the time, I didn't fully understand what was happening, I just thought he had particular preferences

Even as these signs became more apparent, I struggled to accept that something might be different about my son. By the time he turned nine, I could no longer ignore what I was seeing. The "tell-tale" signs of autism were there, and I knew he needed to be tested. When the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder was confirmed, I felt a wave of emotions.

Grief hit me first. The future I had envisioned for my son seemed to shift before my eyes. I felt guilty for feeling this way, what kind of mother mourns the dreams she had for her child? Over time, I realized that these feelings were normal. I wasn't alone in my experience.

For years, we maintained a structured life, and as long as we stuck to the schedule, things remained calm. However, as Naziah entered his teenage years, everything changed. He became aggressive, throwing violent tantrums when things didn't go his way. He punched walls, threw objects, and even ran screaming out of the house.

I tried everything, stricter consequences, extra attention, but nothing seemed to help. Finally, I reached out to **PerformCare**, the administrator for **New Jersey's children's system of Care (CSOC)**, which connected us with **the Care Management Organization (CMO)** and the **Family Support Organization of Essex County (FSOEC)**. These organizations provided the support we desperately needed, offering access to therapies and resources to help Naziah manage his emotions and behaviors.

It wasn't an easy journey. There were setbacks, and I often second-guessed myself. But after a year and a half of consistency, I saw a transformation in my son. Now at 19, Naziah is a calm thoughtful young man who has learned to process his emotions in healthier ways.

Looking back, I wouldn't change a thing. This journey has shaped both of us, and I know that everything happened exactly as it was meant to be.