

LIVED EXPERIENCE

SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT

PARENTING BY THE CHECKLIST:

I look back now with such compassion at the mother I used to be, the one who believed parenting was essentially a checklist. If I followed every rule, every guideline, every “Top 10 Things to Do for Your Baby’s Brain,” surely my premature son would flourish exactly as promised. I read to him nightly. I had him watch and listen to Baby Einstein. I fed him nutritious foods. Made sure he was good with socialization, visiting family and his grandparents often. I took him to the park across the street every single day,

OPERATING WITH DIFFERENT PRIORITIES:

His physical development was... interpretive. He’d attempt to roll over, get stuck halfway, and then simply remain there, perfectly content, because something on the ground had captured his attention. I worried he couldn’t roll. He was busy contemplating a leaf. We were clearly operating with different priorities.

NOT SOMETHING WRONG SOMETHING DIFFERENT:

Back then, I thought I was raising a baby who was simply very observant. In reality, I was raising an autistic child who was already quietly rewriting the rules I was trying so hard to follow. I didn’t know it yet, but those long, silent moments of intense concentration were early clues, not of something wrong, but of something different. Something uniquely him.

TWO COMPLETELY DIFFERENT WORLDS:

Toby treated the park like a personal racetrack, sprinting with the enthusiasm of a dog who had just discovered freedom. And then there was Chris, sitting in his stroller with those intense blue eyes, quietly observing each leaf and blade of grass. Other babies glanced around. Chris conducted a full environmental study.

THE WHEELS WERE TURNING:

My best friend Kim would watch him and say, “He’s so intelligent. You can see the wheels turning.” And she was right. The wheels were turning, just not in the direction any parenting book had prepared me for. In hindsight, the signs were all there: the focus, the stillness, the fascination with details so small they barely existed. The way he seemed to be studying the universe while other babies were eating dirt.

WHY DECODING DIVERGENT EXISTS:

And this is why Decoding Divergent exists: to help parents recognize these moments not as failures of the rulebook, but as early expressions of a neurodivergent mind. To help them see what I eventually learned, that sometimes the most important thing a child is doing is exactly what looks unusual. Exactly what looks “off-script.” Exactly what makes them who they are.