

# BabyGym a life line

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Baby Gym was an eye opener for me. As an educator, I wish I had had this knowledge eleven years ago when I started teaching, as my whole outlook on the learning process changed. As a mother, I wished that Baby Gym had been available to me six years ago, when my first child was born. Fortunately it is never too late and Baby Gym proved to be a lifeline for me.

I had a little boy on 11 September 2001, yes, 911. A day none of us will ever forget. That day we had our personal 911, as everything that could have gone wrong during a birthing process, did.

Kavan came into this world with a struggle. He was diagnosed as having Pierre Robin Syndrome, shortly after birth. This means that his jaw was underdeveloped. He didn't appear to have a chin at all and it was quite scary to look at. Further, he had a cleft palate, soft and hard palate, and no sucking reflex, thus making feeding normally impossible. We tube-fed Kavan for seven months, until his first cleft repair. In addition he had a heart condition called Tetralogy of Fallot. In layman's terms meaning that there was a hole between the left and the right ventricle and he had an underdeveloped valve. To make matters worse, he was born without a right thumb and his joints were underdeveloped as well. His condition was a surprise to us when he was born. I did have a premonition during my pregnancy that all was not well, but nothing concrete was noted. I had a terrible emotional struggle going on inside. It was very difficult to come to terms with his condition. He needed to be kept alive, and that was the medical personal and my main focus. Even when he came home after spending forty-five days in hospital, my focus remained on keeping him alive. There were tubes and a suction machine, apnea monitor and stethoscope. Kavan had to be monitored twenty-four hours every day. My main focus was to keep him alive. I was scared, well actually I was terrified. I still had a thirteen month old that also needed my attention. It is only by the grace of God that I got through those early months.

The result of all the above stress was that my husband was more of a nurturer to Kavan than I was. My job was to keep him alive, I didn't even think of bonding emotionally with him. It is also so difficult to bond with something that you are sure you are going to lose. It is only natural to distance yourself emotionally from the situation, so that you can cope. After his Open-Heart surgery, at the age of two, I tried to bond with him emotionally, but to be very honest, it was a struggle.

Unfortunately it was very clear: Our eldest son was mom's boy and Kavan was dad's boy. I desperately wanted to change that scenario, but didn't know how. I got cross and upset, because no matter how hard I tried to bond with Kavan, I just never seemed to have the same kind of bond with him as I had with my eldest child. I beat myself up about it but persisted to shower my children with equal measures of love.

This is where Baby Gym made the difference for me. After attending the course with Doctor Melodie de Jager, I had such a new insight into my situation at home. I was

able to understand why Kavan had the kind of personality he had. It made me probably a little more compassionate towards him, not that I didn't have compassion before, but I was better able to understand where he was coming from. We were also taught how to massage babies for relaxation, and to build a better brain. I decided to give everything I learnt a try. I've always believed "rather late than never". I began massaging my children the very next day. I never saw any remarkable change immediately, but gradually over the next six weeks, a miracle began to occur...

Kavan and I have become closer than we have ever been. I feel so much love and affection flow from me every time I caress and cuddle him. (Cuddling has always been a problem for him, as children with heart conditions often feel claustrophobic when being cuddled, but as a mom it is hard to accept, as it feels like your little one is rejecting you.)

It is now my name he calls for in the middle of the night, it is me he cuddles and holds tight in the midst of a thunderstorm, and it is me he rushes to in the afternoons when I fetch him from school. It is so wonderful to finally have the beautiful relationship with my younger son that I have always yearned for.

Baby Gym granted me the opportunity to bond and have a meaningful, loving relationship with my youngest child. That is worth more than all the gold and diamonds in the world. Melodie, you are a gem. Keep up the wonderful work that you do, because I am one mommy that can never thank you enough for the positive change that you have helped me bring about in my own life.

It is not just about personal growth, but reaching out to all the people in our country who might find themselves in a similar position. Baby Gym is more than a business, it is a ministry and I thank God every day for bringing this wonderful programme into my life.