

BabyGym and a rare form of Down Syndrome called Mosaicism

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I clearly remember the day when I was told that my baby girl may have Down's syndrome. She was four months old and I innocently asked the clinic sister why her tongue was always hanging out. This gave her the opportunity to tell me that perhaps we need to have her tested. At that point my life fell apart because I could immediately see that she had a point. The tests were done and came back negative but I was told that she possibly had a rare form of Down's Syndrome called Mosaicism. Be that as it may, I knew I had to deal with the symptoms of the problem which were glaring at me. God had given her to me for a reason and I was going to do everything in my power to help her achieve her highest potential. I read as much as I could and eventually I stumbled upon a wonderful program, called BabyGym which is what I want to elaborate on.

By the time Bethany was 8 months old I started doing the 5 week firm foundation class for BabyGym and I could immediately see a difference. Up until that point I was exhausted, frustrated and operating very much in a survival mode. During the first week I learned how to do a proper baby massage. Well this encouraged me to bond with her in a new way and I as her mother moved from survival mode into victory mode. As I discovered the benefits of massage I was amazed and perplexed that touch had such a powerful effect on a baby. I helped her develop an awareness of her hands, feet, arms and legs, I helped her eliminate the possibility of being tactile defensive and I taught her how to relax.

As the weeks went by I diligently did BabyGym on my baby and I could hardly believe how quickly she responded to the exercises I gave her. Each week we stimulated a different sense and during the week when we stimulated the sense of sight I was amazed. I always felt like I wasn't getting through to Bethany. They say the eyes are the window to the soul and in her case it was as if the window was only slightly open. However during this week of stimulation I felt as if I had switched a light on in her little mind and made a connection for the first time. This sold me on BabyGym and I decided I needed to know more. More importantly I wanted to help every mommy I could who was in the same situation in which I was. So I became an instructor. The world that opened up for me amazed me and empowered me to do so much more for Bethany than I ever could have imagined.

I still have to take Bethany for Neuro-developmental physiotherapy. However, I knew the effort I made and the guidance provided by BabyGym paid off when her therapist kept saying to me that she is so "with it" and so well integrated. I still see progress in her development and I have to thank BabyGym for the huge contribution it has made in her life. Furthermore, by going to all these different therapies with her I have come to realise that BabyGym is very well researched because so much of the therapy is familiar to me. Furthermore, it is also such a good support program for the parent to feel empowered to go home and continue appropriate movement and stimulation and to facilitate bonding.

So far Bethany has reached each milestone, albeit later than normal. At two and a half she may be slightly behind her peers but she holds her own very well. Without the help of BabyGym I think the journey we travelled would have been a lot harder to endure. So I am very grateful both to BabyGym and her therapists for helping us to get to this point in her life.

Further information on BabyGym.

BabyGym was developed originally for normal babies to mimic their normal development so that they reach their milestones in the correct order within reasonable time frames. However it has proved to be effective for children with special needs. BabyGym is a program designed by developmental expert Melodie de Jager. The program focuses on three main concepts:

- 1). Baby Message
- 2). Stimulating the senses (far and near)
- 3). Building good strong muscles.

Since it is only a 5 week course it does not tie the mother down for weeks on end and is ideal for mothers that work. It educates the mother/father/caregiver why each concept is important and encourages constructive playtime.

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