

Crawling comes before walking

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My little boy Danyaal was born on the 19th of October in 2013. I had a fairly normal pregnancy and other than my baby lying in the breech position, there were no complications during pregnancy and birth. Like most new mums, I was excited about finally meeting our brand new baby but soon also became completely overwhelmed as we struggled through sleepless nights and feeding difficulties. It seemed like struggling was the norm for most new moms so I saw no need to complain or seek guidance as most would say "... he will grow out of it, it is quite normal..."

So the struggle through days and then through months continued. By Danyaal's 7 month check-up with the Paediatrician we learnt that Danyaal had fluid in his ears and was also lagging behind in terms of his physical development and baby milestones. This probably contributed to the continuous crying and sleepless nights and we were referred to a physiotherapist who could help Danyaal to develop his body and muscles. Hearing this was a big wake up call for myself and Danyaal's father Zayn, we were violently jerked to face reality: our little boy needed help, he was developmentally delayed, had sensory integration problems, gravitational security problems and amongst more challenges, had floppy legs! There seemed to be nothing 'normal' about his situation!

We clearly understood the seriousness of the situation and started therapy weekly. His therapist was gentle and kind but Danyaal refused physical contact, he would scream and kick throughout every physiotherapy session. I also suffered through each 30 minute session, I couldn't bear to see my son battle like that. He would cling to his blanket every time we needed to leave home and with all his fussing there was little improvement, so eventually we stopped the physiotherapy sessions.

When Danyaal turned one he was able to sit but he was very reluctant to do almost anything else, and I quietly continued to hope for some miraculous change in his development. Seeing other babies at the same age, doing so much more was difficult, and hearing comments about Danyaal's development was even harder:

"How old is he?... So he is not walking yet?... Also not crawling, REALLY?"

Eventually I started to avoid these gatherings. Actually, I started to avoid people altogether.

By the time Danyaal reached 17 months he had mastered the art of bum shuffling. By now we desperately wanted him to walk and were hoping that BabyGym[®] would help us reach this important milestone. We met our BabyGym Instructor, Zharina Wajoodeen, and to our disappointment Danyaal was very unhappy with the introduction, Zharina had to sit far away and at times had to look away and talk to us because even looking at Danyaal unsettled him. I felt totally helpless. However, Zharina wasn't startled by Danyaal's reaction and continued with an overview of the way forward: Zharina explained the functions of the skin and how massage is used to calm the skin and make the body feel safe and secure; she warned that BabyGym was not a quick fix but that daily attention and exercises would soon show results; she explained the importance of reaching each milestone in sequence and that walking would only become a priority once Danyaal was able to crawl confidently on all 4's for some time; finally, she also stressed that rushing the milestones would not benefit him and that the sequence in which milestones were reached, was more important than the speed at which they were reached. After our first BabyGym session we were still quite unsure of what was to follow, but we had a sense that we were in good hands.

As the BabyGym sessions followed, I felt less and less obliged to push Danyaal to walk as we learnt that he would get to that stage when his body was ready for it. We were also pleasantly surprised that the visits to BabyGym didn't stress him out, he responded very well to Zharina, the massage, and the various BabyGym exercises.

Danyaal's BabyGym classes started out with an 1 hour-session per week, but we soon came to realise that he needed more frequent sessions, so we schedules 2 (30 minute) BabyGym sessions per week and the results were much better. I was encouraged by the progress and persevered with the exercises at home. My job was to massage Danyaal as often as possible but at least once a day, repetition repetition repetition was key! When massaging I focused on his lower body as he needed more awareness of his lower body for crawling and later walking. I also massaged his ears daily as this helps with spatial orientation and balance; skills necessary to become mobile. Because he is stronger, Danyaal's dad was responsible for the 'rough' and tumble play on the floor which involved: rolling, sit-ups, lots of pedalling, trunk rotations, hand and knee cross over exercises, ball games and dancing with Danyaal in the various directions: forwards and backwards; side to side and up and down.

Although we joined BabyGym to get Danyaal walking, we also saw other improvements throughout the sessions. Stimulating his nose and mouth helped him to experience a variety of textured foods, and this has also impacted on his speech - we still hear new little words clearer and clearer every day. In our day to day interaction we have also noticed that Danyaal seems more 'awake' and alert, as he responds to the people and environment around him- this makes spending time with him very entertaining and rewarding.

Zharina was also gentle but firm about putting Danyaal on his tummy daily, she was persistent in reminding us that sufficient tummy time would strengthen his body so that crawling would become possible instead of the bum shuffling he was doing at the time. The daily tummy time was no easy task but we persisted and on the 29th of July Danyaal finally moved into the crawling position all by himself. We were ecstatic!

Danyaal's progress leaves us feeling grateful, thankful and blessed! We are still continuing with the BabyGym exercises daily as the hard-work is not over yet. He crawls very slowly and has a long way to go to master the skill, but we are confident that his crawling will progress to walking when the time is right.

I hope families with similar journeys will read our story and know that there is hope and light at the end of the very dark tunnel. I have learnt to not compare my baby's development with other babies, but to simultaneously pay attention to daily development dates. Thank you to Zharina and BabyGym who taught me this valuable lesson.

