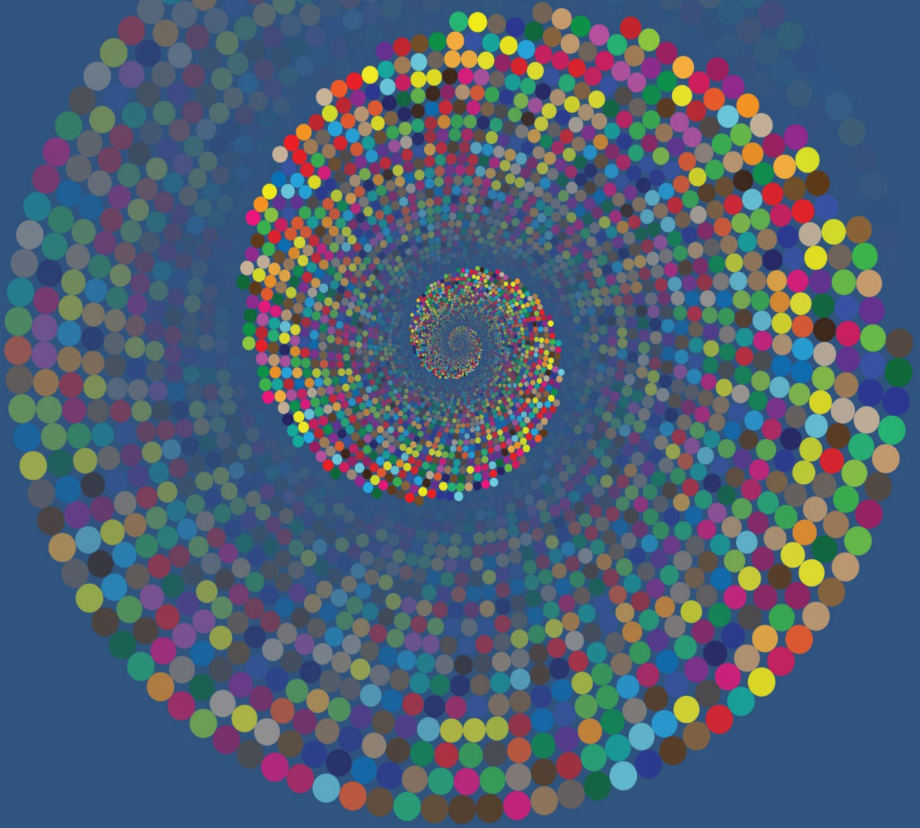
Playing for Their Lives

Marty The Little Cyclone



Dorothy Singer

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MARTY, THE LITTLE CYCLONE

Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity

Marty's Background

"He tried to choke me—can you believe it? My own child tried to choke me. Marty climbed up on a chair to get at the cookie jar, and when I reached up to get him down, his hands went around my neck with a hold so tight I couldn't breathe. He's as strong as an ox and as destructive as a cyclone." These words, spoken by his mother, were my introduction to Marty, three and a half years old.

Helen and Craig Newman had been referred to me by a pediatrician who had just treated Marty for a severe laceration on his leg that required ten stitches. Marty had jumped off a high rock behind the Newmans' house and had landed on a sharp stone jutting below.

Helen said that she had just turned her back "for a minute" when the accident occurred: "We can never, never leave him alone. I'm worn out physically and mentally."

The pediatrician characterized Marty as a "whirling dervish," a child with a limited vocabulary and a short attention span, impulsive and "hell on wheels." Helen Newman was at her wit's end, exhausted, frustrated, and concerned that Marty was "defective." The Newmans described Marty as "difficult from birth" in contrast to Louisa, their six-year-old daughter, who was the "perfect" child: "smart, sweet, kind, and quiet—a joy to live with." Marty had "always" been "active, walking early, but still not speaking clearly. He has no friends and can't sit still a minute."

According to the Newmans, Helen had been in good physical condition during her pregnancy with Marty and had not smoked, drunk alcohol, or used any drugs. Her diet had been proper, and there had been no undue stress in the household. The delivery had been normal, without the use of drugs or forceps.

Helen admitted, however, that as Marty grew older, she had "nagged" him continuously,

demanding from him “proper” behavior like Louisa’s. Louisa had been an easy, good baby, nondemanding and compliant, according to Helen. Marty’s behavior was a complete contrast. Helen lost patience with him, and his lack of language skills exacerbated their difficulty in communicating with each other. Helen was ever-vigilant with Marty, never able to relax. This necessity had to have built up some resentment in her. Indeed, she knew, “in my heart of hearts,” that she was being “unreasonable” and contributing to Marty’s emotional problems.

The Newmans went on to add to my picture of Marty, each parent contributing details.

“We have tried to enroll Marty in the local nursery school,” Helen said, “but that didn’t work out. On visiting day, I sat with the other mothers while all the children were being observed. Most of them played with the toys, but Marty ran around the room, touching toys, dropping them, banging on the piano, trying to turn the lights on and off—he even tried to grab the fire extinguisher, tugging at it. A teacher trailed after him, picking up the toys, trying to hold onto him. He was like a cyclone, leaving disaster in his path all around the room. Finally, the director, as politely as she could, told me that Marty wasn’t ready for her school, and perhaps we should leave. Well, we left, with me dragging—and I mean dragging—Marty across the parking lot, and struggling with him to get him into his car seat. I was a wreck, crying, embarrassed, feeling terrible.

That wasn’t the only place that wouldn’t take him. I tried the library story hour, and the librarian asked us to leave after about ten minutes. She tried hard to keep Marty interested but it didn’t work. I tried a local exercise group for preschoolers. I thought Marty would do well where he could just use his body, but that didn’t work either, because he wouldn’t listen to the instructor. He just wanted to tumble on a mat, hit the other children, or run around the room upsetting the routine.”

By now, Helen was in tears: “He’s a failure. I’m a failure. I can’t seem to do anything right. Is Marty retarded? Is he crazy?”

Craig looked beaten and forlorn: “This is my only son. He’s big and, as Helen said, strong as an ox. He weighs over fifty pounds, and he’s tall for his age; we just had him measured, and he’s forty-three inches tall! So everyone thinks he’s five or six and expects him to behave. Isn’t it OK for a kid three and a half years old to have a lot of energy?” Craig wanted reassurance that Marty was not abnormal, just overly

“rambunctious.”

I told the Newmans that I would see Marty, assess his needs, and help them make some plans for the coming year. It was late in the spring, and nursery schools were setting up their fall schedules of classes. From both the Newmans’ and the pediatrician’s assessment of Marty, expecting him to fit into a typical nursery school didn’t seem realistic.

I gathered more information from the Newmans. Marty was a good eater, was toilet-trained, and slept through the night. In general, aside from the frequent cuts and bruises sustained in his many wild adventures, he was in excellent health. The Newmans seemed to be a devoted couple who were at a loss over Marty. They obviously needed help—especially Helen—with his daily management. Their concern about his mental ability was a realistic one, given his inability to “relate” to people, to adhere to rules, to control his temper, or to sustain any prolonged play. Television was the thing that could keep Marty “under control,” and as a result, he watched television nearly all day so that Helen could “get relief and get chores done.” His behavior in church had been a “disaster,” so now he didn’t accompany his parents, who attended services separately. He couldn’t go to birthday parties or to visit relatives because a “scene takes place,” in which Marty “grabs his cousin’s toys, hits them, or shouts gibberish at everyone.”

Helen had become a recluse, remaining at home all day, standing guard over Marty like a “jailer,” and feeling totally incompetent and depressed: “I can’t handle his temper tantrums. There seems to be a couple each day—even more if I cross him. He rules us completely.” Three nights a week and on Saturday, she worked as a waitress, “just to get out” while Craig took over. Craig insisted that Marty was much better when he was around and even “showed affection.” Much of Marty’s wild behavior was apparently more subdued when Craig was in charge: “There are times when Marty can be on the swing or kick a ball, and even smile, and seems like every other kid—just normal. There are also times when he’s able to sit and concentrate for a long time and seems busy and intense, like when he moves his cars along or uses clay. What does all this mean?”

“It sounds as if Marty can concentrate when he’s motivated to do so. That’s not unusual,” I said. “When children find that a task is difficult or boring or that it offers no satisfaction, they often tune out. Even children who have attention deficits or who are described as overactive sometimes become

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engrossed in a game if they can understand it or if it offers them pleasure."

Helen appeared to accept my explanation and listened quietly as Craig continued: "I have my own roofing business and enjoy making things with my hands. I tried once to interest Marty in making a bird house, but after exploring the toolbox, he tried to run off with a hammer. I chased after him, afraid that he would throw the hammer at me. I really want my son to be able to do things with me when he grows older, but it looks as if that's just a pipe dream. Is there a test to find out what's wrong? Maybe he'll just outgrow this. Or maybe I'm kidding myself. I've been saying he'll outgrow this for a long time now, and you know what? It's just getting worse, especially since he's been getting so big."

Indeed, Marty probably would grow to be a tall boy. His father was over six feet and huge of build. Helen was also tall, about five feet ten. It seemed that Craig's prediction about Marty's size, at least, would be fulfilled. I was less comfortable with the notion that Marty would "outgrow" his behavior pattern.

We agreed that I would see Marty to determine whether I would work with him, and that I would give them some ideas for Marty's management. The Newmans left. During this interview, I had felt their frustration and their sense of defeat and worry. From their description, Marty sounded like a hyperactive child with an attention deficit. A child diagnosed as having this disorder often fidgets with his or her hands and feet, has difficulty remaining seated when required to do so, and is easily distracted by any stimulus in the environment. According to the Newmans, Marty often had difficulty sustaining his attention in play or in completing the tasks his parents demanded of him, such as putting away his toys or helping with simple chores. In addition, he did not seem to listen to what was said to him, appearing to be in his own world. He shifted from activity to activity before he had completed one of them. Finally, he engaged in physically dangerous activities. The incident with the hammer, his jumping off high places, and his riding his tricycle into the road were further indications of his lack of awareness of limits and boundaries.

The only thing that kept Marty quiet was television; its short scenes, loud music, changes in voices, funny characters, action, and movement seemed to keep him focused on the screen. These are just the elements, research tells us, that lead to hyperactivity in children. According to Helen, Marty "loved cartoons" but could not sit still during a program like "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," which has a slower

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pace. The Newmans owned a videotape collection of animated stories and simply used the VCR to fill those hours when TV cartoon programs weren't scheduled. Without television, Marty ran around the house, used the couch as a "trampoline," or threw a temper tantrum if he was crossed in any way. Marty was the "ruler" of the Newman household, and clearly, the family needed help in handling his behavior, as well as some guidance concerning his future.

A verse from an old German children's book translated into English as *Slovenly Peter* came to mind as I listened to the Newmans:

> Phil stop acting like a worm
> the table is no place to squirm
> Thus speaks the father to his son
> severely say it, not in fun.
> Mother frowns and looks around
> although she doesn't make a sound.
> But Philip will not take advice
> he'll have his way at any price.
> He turns and churns
> he wriggles and jiggles
> here and there on the chair,
> Phil these twists I cannot bear.

Would Marty, unlike Phil, ever take advice?

Marty, the Cyclone

When Helen brought Marty to me for his first visit, she announced at the door, "Here comes Marty, batten down the hatches."

She was right. He was on a rampage as he tore into the waiting room, tried to knock over the lamp, grabbed the magazines, pushed over the wastebasket, and ignored me completely.

Setting things to rights, I asked, "Marty, why don't you come with me to see the toys?"

Helen urged him to go with me. He refused. I then asked if he would like his mother to come, too. Marty nodded yes, and all three of us went into the playroom.

Marty was indeed huge for three and a half years old, exactly as Craig had described him:

physically, more like a five-or six-year-old. He had a mop of curly brown hair, hazel eyes, and a short nose covered with freckles.

Helen sat to the side of the room and watched as Marty began his “investigation,” her expression a mixture of resignation, embarrassment, and “I told you so.” Marty touched everything. I decided just to observe him and to interfere only when I thought he might get hurt or do damage to some object. I told Marty that he could look at the toys and choose something to play with. He glanced sideways at me as he explored the room, seeming to be fully aware of me and wondering how far he could go. He finally picked up a doll and threw it.

Jumping up, Helen yelled, “No, no. Stop that, Marty. It’s Dr. Singer’s toy.”

I motioned to her to be quiet and observed Marty’s reaction to her and to me. I also kept quiet. Marty looked puzzled and leaving

the doll on the floor, went over to Big Bird, a plastic scooterlike toy. He sat on it and rode around the room.

I commented, “That’s a good ride, Marty. I like the way you ride.”

Marty rode awhile and then rode the toy into the door. He did this several times, aware that he was bumping into the door and creating a loud bang. Helen looked quite anxious. I just watched.

“Well, getting no rise out of these grown-ups” Marty’s expression seemed to say. “This is boring. I’ll stop.” We were ignoring Marty’s negative behavior, and he stopped his “bumping.”

During that first hour, each time he acted negatively, I ignored him. After repeated attempts to elicit a response from me for behavior that was not constructive, he appeared more subdued and stopped. (However, his therapy was not to be as easy as I had thought after our first visit. The worst was yet to come.)

Marty seemed willful, out of control, and angry, but responsive to praise. I wondered what he was all about. What was causing his recalcitrant behavior? Why wouldn’t he sustain attention? Could he play

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imaginatively instead of stereotypically, as in that first hour? What was his speech like? He had barely spoken, and I needed to know. Could I try a behavioral therapy approach with Marty? So far, so good: When I had ignored his negative behavior, he had stopped it. When I had praised (reinforced) his positive behavior, he had repeated it. I knew that Marty was interested in the playroom but needed help in learning how to play.

First Steps

My plan for Marty's psychotherapy involved four steps. First, I wanted Marty gradually to become able to separate from Helen, and come into the playroom by himself and remain there for the entire session. Second, I planned to try behavioral therapy to get him to eliminate his destructive behavior and play more appropriately. Third, I wanted to reinforce any play that involved sustained attention. If I could keep Marty on-task, perhaps I could evaluate his intellectual functioning. Fourth, I felt that Marty needed to learn "how to play." His parents told me that he often seemed to be talking to himself, and I wondered if he had an imaginary playmate.

My goals involved plans for Marty's parents as well. Helen needed support and guidance in her handling of Marty. In addition, she needed some daytime relief from him, and I planned to suggest that she use a sitter for some hours each week. As nursery school had been ruled out, Helen had the responsibility for Marty's care all day, every day, except when she went to work in the evenings and on Saturday.

Helen did not socialize with her friends during the week: "When I take Marty over to play with my friends' children, it's always a disaster. He can't share or play in a nice way. It ends up with me screaming at him. Or if he doesn't fight with a child, he just runs around my friend's house. That makes her mad. No one calls me to come for coffee, and I can't blame them. Marty's hard to take.

"I try to read to Marty, but he won't sit still long enough to listen to a story. Maybe that's why his speech is so backward; he doesn't learn any new words. When I point to something in a picture book, he just wriggles out of my arms and pushes the book away. It gets me so upset, I just give up." Helen reported this to me at our second parents' visit.

How, then, to begin? Marty and Helen came two days later for his second session. He again refused to remain in the playroom alone with me. Helen had walked him in, said she would be in the waiting room and tried to leave. He screamed at her, “Me go. Me go!” My telling Helen to stay quieted him. He needed her presence for a sense of security. He found the Buddy doll, then gave it to his mother, going from toy to toy and handing each to Helen. I took Buddy and put him on the slide. At first, Marty ignored me, but gradually he came over to watch my “game.” I made Buddy climb up the stairs and let him slide down, talking about this activity all the while. Marty then tried to help Buddy climb the stairs but threw him down the slide and then ran around the room.

Well, he was not about to play *that* game with me. He was curious but clearly wanted me to know that he was not going to join in *my* game. He now tugged at the curtains, tried to turn the lights on and off, and touched everything he could, always darting a glance my way. “What is she going to do about this?” he seemed to be asking himself. Helen watched, clearly upset, but controlled and quiet.

Marty then needed to go to the toilet to “pee-pee.” Helen got up and led him across the hall to the bathroom. I waited and listened.

Marty asked, “Where she is?”

Helen said, “Dorothy is in the playroom. Finish, wash up, and we’ll go back.”

Marty wanted to know where I was? Good. He was aware of me and interested. Was he making a connection with me?

Marty came into the playroom again, picked up Buddy, went to the slide, and let Buddy slide down.

“Do,” he commanded.

“Yes, thank you,” I said. “I’ll play too. Good boy. I like this game.”

We “played” this primitive game repeatedly. Up and down the slide. No variation. No further conversation on Marty’s part. A more typical three-and-a-half-year old would have used more words than Marty and would have elaborated on the game. There would have been “tricks” on the slide that Buddy

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could do, conversation with Buddy or about Buddy, and more involvement with me. This game lasted about three minutes. Marty ended the game by tossing Buddy across the room.

"Marty, it's OK if you want to stop this game. Just tell me, but don't throw Buddy."

Marty picked up Buddy and threw him again. I remained silent. He threw him again. No response from me. Marty took Buddy to Helen. We both praised him, and he smiled.

I suggested to Helen that we would begin a simple behavior modification program at home and in the playroom: she would try to ignore the negative aspects of Marty's behavior except when it involved potential danger and would be effusive with praise whenever he complied with her requests, or whenever he did something positive on his own. I was in no hurry to wean Marty away from his mother because I could serve as a model for Helen in my handling of the child. She would have an opportunity to watch me as I taught Marty how to play; as I encouraged his use of vocabulary; and as I shaped his behavior through reinforcing acts that were more social and ignoring those that were destructive or offensive.

At our next parents' visit, I explained to Helen and Craig what I meant by a behavior modification program.

Parents have been successful "change agents," people who can carry out a behavior modification program with their children. They can easily learn to use behavioral techniques to improve or change a child's specific (targeted) behavior. Parents have access to numerous books that will acquaint them with the general theory of behavioral therapy, including exercises that will help them develop skills in analyzing their reactions to their child's behavior and that offer concrete information on how to achieve a particular goal. I gave the names of several of these books to the Newmans. Videotapes are also available that demonstrate behavior modification techniques for nonprofessionals.

While I was working with Marty and trying to get a clearer picture of his problem, it seemed appropriate to begin a program aimed first at getting his trust and then at bringing some of his hyperactive, negative behavior under control.

I suggested to the Newmans that the first step in working with Marty would be to keep a log to determine both what were his quiet times and what led to an outburst of screaming, when it occurred, how long it occurred, what Helen or Craig did about it, and how it stopped. I also told the Newmans to be aware of any purposeful, positive activity of Marty's and, when they "caught" him at it, to reward him immediately with verbal praise. I also suggested "modeling," like mine with the Buddy doll on the slide, so that Marty would begin to imitate the play behavior they wanted. Speech is important, and wherever possible, Helen and Craig needed to urge Marty to ask for something rather than grab it and to tell them how he felt rather than to react with anger and demands. Again, I suggested that Helen and Craig use the very words that they wanted Marty to use, so that he could learn how to interact socially.

Most of all, I asked them to be patient and consistent, to ignore the tantrums, and to reward correct responses immediately. I knew they would need much encouragement and support from me, as it was very difficult to ignore one of Marty's full-blown tantrums which consisted of throwing himself on the floor, kicking everything near him, and trying to bite; it generally took two people to move him or lift him.

I began to think about a diagnosis for Marty. His physical examination had ruled out any gross organic deficits, including hearing impairment, but there still might be some subtle brain dysfunction that caused his excessive, purposeless movement. This type of dysfunction is difficult to detect even with sophisticated brain-scan techniques. Some allergists even claim that specific foods contribute to hyperactive behavior, but there has been no scientific evidence to support this theory.

I did not completely rule out autism. However, whereas autistic children generally seem to lack awareness of the existence of others, Marty seemed to be aware of me and of Helen. His awareness of me was obvious from his question concerning my whereabouts when he went to the bathroom, his constant glances, and his willingness to play at the slide with me. On the other hand, he found it difficult to play with another child, preferring solitary games. Socially, he was grossly impaired. For example, he did not comply with social conventions, could not make appropriate contact with his peers, and displayed no understanding of how to behave in a structured situation, such as the library story hour or the exercise class. Marty tended to perseverate; that is, he would repeat an action endlessly, another characteristic of autism. Also, he would tolerate few deviations in the format of our games of hide-and-seek, his favorite activity early in therapy. And like many autistic children, Marty could sit for "what seemed like hours,"

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according to Helen, moving the same car or ball back and forth.

Marty had speech, although it was somewhat babyish for his age. Autistic children have marked abnormalities in their speech—in its volume, pitch, stress, rate, and rhythm. Marty's intonation was not completely normal, and at times, I detected a monotone or a questionlike pattern. Despite his capacity to communicate verbally in one- or two-word phrases, he seemed unable to sustain a conversation.

According to Helen, Marty sometimes played by himself and seemed to be talking to a "friend." Later, I discovered that Marty's "friend" was "Petey," an imaginary playmate, atypical of autistic children, but not an impossibility. Marty did not present any evidence of the stereotypical autistic body movements, such as hand twisting, spinning, or head banging. He was, however, interested in mechanical objects and was upset by changes made in his own room or even in the rest of the house. Later, I found that to be true in the playroom as well. He insisted that I keep a storybook on a certain shelf. If another child had removed it or misplaced it, Marty became frantic, and we could not continue our session until the book was returned to its original spot. Only as therapy progressed, and as Marty became more flexible, was I able to move objects around the room without his reacting with distress.

Marty also could not tolerate transitions from one activity to another for example, from undressing to bathtime or to bedtime, and he was upset if times were changed in his daily routine. If meals were not on time, or if Helen shopped at a different hour or took him to see her parents in the evening rather than on a Sunday, he was distraught. Shopping with Marty in tow had become increasingly difficult over the six months before his therapy began. He constantly tried to run down the aisles or fingered groceries on the shelves and dropped them into the cart. Finally, the Newmans decided that Helen would shop in the evening, while Craig baby-sat with the children.

So, Marty showed a mixture of autistic symptoms (solitary play, perseveration, poor speech, an interest in mechanical objects, rigidity, difficulty in relating to others, and no sense of danger) and a pervasive developmental impairment (behaving like a much younger child).

Marty's hyperactivity was also a serious problem. He found it impossible to sit still, and he was easily distracted by the objects in the playroom. If he picked up one toy and began to play with it and another toy caught his eye, down would go the first as he examined the second. I found it extremely

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wearing to keep Marty involved in any structured task, such as drawing, molding clay, or even playing at the dollhouse. His drawings immediately became scribbles, the clay was rolled into a ball and hurled onto the floor, and the dolls set up to play a game were thrown out of the dollhouse.

Marty didn't seem to listen to me. I often had to repeat what I said or gently hold his shoulders to get him to look at me and to pay attention.

Often, Marty tried to do something dangerous in the playroom. For example, he would stand on the slide platform and, instead of sitting down to slide, would try to jump off backward or to run down the slide. I needed to be constantly alert to keep him from jabbing himself with a pencil or sticking it in his ear. Helen reported that he had no sense of danger at home either. He was not allowed to ride his tricycle even on their dead-end street because he was unaware of cars. He was allowed to ride it only in the yard and only when she or Craig was present. He tried to leap off anything high, as he had on the day he needed stitches.

Thus, at the beginning of therapy, I had a rather confused picture of Marty's condition, but it also seemed to me that a label was not crucial that early. My objectives were helping Marty to become more socialized, to control his temper tantrums, and to use speech to make his needs known, rather than action, such as kicking, hurling objects, or running away. I hoped that I could engage him in make-believe play for longer periods each session, and that I could keep him focused on one game for a sustained amount of time. But first, as I mentioned, he had to trust me enough to separate from Helen and play alone with me.

I was seeing Marty three times a week, and when he came for his sixth session—surprise!—he wore a big smile. His smile told me that he liked to come and that, despite my rules, he was finding some pleasure in our encounters. I think too, that he felt some relief in being with a person who didn't say "no" all the time. However, he still wanted Helen to come into the playroom with him. In advance, I had set up some miniature people on the table, and I asked Marty to come and play. He did come to the table, knocked the figures down with one sweep of his hand, and stood there staring straight at me, waiting for my reaction.

"Well, I guess you didn't want to play with these people," I said.

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No response.

“You can *tell* me that you don’t want to play with them, Marty. Can you tell me that? Can you use words?”

No response.

“Shall we pick these up, put them away, and play something else?”

Marty reluctantly came over, picked up a few of the figures, and dropped them into their basket.

I praised him profusely. Progress. At least he had picked the toys up; Marty had understood my request and followed it through. But then, in his typical manner, he moved around the room sampling the toys, unable to stay with any activity for more than a minute or two. He tried testing me again by playing with the light switch, banging Big Bird into the door, spilling the plastic spoons out of their holder, and touching everything without purpose or plan. He was more fully aware of my presence, however, and I noticed that his exploration of the room and his tossing of materials had less of the frenetic quality than he had displayed on previous visits. But he still moved like a whirling dervish.

As the days went by, I began more and more to think I was dealing with a child who, although he had some of the autistic symptoms I have described, was more like a child with a severe attention deficit and hyperactivity, which led to emotional problems. His restless behavior, limited speech, and inability to sustain a game suggested that there were some learning deficits that might have a neurological cause. Marty seemed to have trouble processing information. His receptive language (his ability to understand or interpret what others said to him) was faulty. When he was told to do something or even when he was asked a question, he seemed unable to comprehend the request or to make sense of it unless the words were repeated, slowly and simply. I decided that the language of adults and of his peers must often seem blurred and even foreign to him. Hence the confusion, the untamed behavior, the seeming ignoring of others. No wonder Helen and he were at swords’ points: much of what Helen demanded was a mystery to Marty.

Marty’s large motor ability, however, was excellent. He could jump, hop, and do a sort of a half skip.

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He threw and caught a ball extremely well, and he could balance himself on one foot. He rode a tricycle with ease. His fine-motor movements were a complete contrast: he could not properly grasp a crayon or a pencil, and it was hard for him to do puzzles, stack blocks, or put pegs into a board geared to his age level.

At the end of each of Marty's sessions, I was physically exhausted and confused. There were moments when he seemed to be listening to me and would maintain eye contact—and then he would drift away, not heeding my words or my presence. I began to empathize with Helen's frustration and confusion, her feelings of impotence, and even her anger. She wanted to help Marty and didn't know how. I hoped that some of my skills and techniques would begin to make a difference in both their lives.

At this sixth session, Marty found the Play-Doh again, and we actually made a "cookie." I showed Marty how to feed Buddy, placing the "cookie" close to Buddy's mouth, and I "talked" for Buddy: "Mm, this is good. Marty, please give me more!"

As Marty watched, I repeated the game and urged him to feed the doll, too. Finally, he joined in the game.

- Cookie, here, cookie, good cookie.
- Yes, Marty, you're a good boy to feed Buddy.

Marty gave the cookie to Buddy once more and then threw it on the floor. Helen jumped up to retrieve it, and I motioned to her to stay seated. I ignored Marty as he watched me out of the corner of his eye. Making another cookie, I continued the game with Buddy. Marty slowly advanced toward me. I kept feeding Buddy but acknowledged Marty's presence now: "Good boy, Marty. You want to play, too!"

Marty came closer, took the cookie from me, and fed Buddy. I gave him effusive praise, and we repeat the game. It was soon time to clean up. I waited to see if Marty would pick up the cookie. He did! Helen clapped her hands, and we both praised him. He grinned from ear to ear.

These small moments of success served to reinforce me in the therapy and helped to soften my feelings of defeat each time Marty left.

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And Marty—what must the world seem like to him? It must be confusing, overwhelming, full of sights and sounds that he could not always decipher. As a result, he responded in a way that appeared to others to be willful and inappropriate. Certainly, he was different from Louisa, Helen's "sunshine child." His tantrums were responses to his frustration—shrieks, I believed, for understanding: "Why isn't anyone listening to me? Why isn't anyone helping me sort out this confusion?" But he hadn't the words to ask these questions.

His play excluded me for the most part, as if he had his own script, his own dialogue, his own direction. I would be the observer, and hopefully the facilitator. If Marty began to understand that the playroom was nonthreatening, that I was willing to listen, and that I would not punish him but would be consistent and firm, perhaps he would eventually respond. Meanwhile, he didn't ask who I was. He was wary of me, but not fearful. What was his inner experience? How could I reach him to find out? Could I become an echo of his language and his play? Would I ever be able to interpret Marty's true meaning, the content of his mind?

Marty Comes into the Room Alone

Feeding the Buddy doll must have been a critical experience for Marty. The next session, two days later, was a triumph of sorts. Marty took off his jacket in the waiting room and ran on ahead of me into the playroom without his usual refusal to be separated from Helen. I signaled her to stay in the waiting room. Marty immediately found the Play-Doh, made a crude "cookie," and fed Buddy. I was delighted. I praised him, but he was more absorbed in his game than in responding to any reaction from me.

Marty "fed" the doll for a few minutes, then suddenly looked around and realized that his mother wasn't there. He scooted out of the room, yelling "Help, help," and ran to Helen in panic. She kissed him and soothed him. Then, looking at me, he reached for my hand and returned with me to the playroom. He stood there, arms akimbo, as if to say, "Well, here I am. What next?"

He was funny in a way, signaling to me that he was ready to enter into a relationship with me—alone, in this room. But would I be able to keep him there? It was Marty's silent challenge. He came to the table and rolled out more cookies. I commented on what a good job he was doing but got no response.

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Soon, bored with the clay, Marty went to the slide and hid his face against the side.

• You count.

• Count what, Marty?

• You count.

I didn't understand this game, but I counted, "One, two, three, four."

• You hide.

• You mean hide-and-seek?

Marty nodded his head vigorously. I had made a good guess. He wanted to play hide-and-seek! Later, I found out from Helen that this was the only game he played with Louisa or Craig. He could play it "forever," Helen said. "He can't count, but yells out numbers at random. He likes to hide best of all while someone else counts."

Helen was right. Marty loved this game, and this first day that I was alone with Marty, we played it over and over. At least, he was able to separate from Helen and remained in the room for the rest of the session.

The next visit was a carbon copy of this one. Marty wanted to play hide-and-seek again, and I complied. Soon I introduced some variations. I hid Buddy, and Marty had to find the doll. When he did so, he shouted with joy.

Marty "hid," too, but not very successfully. He would leave his feet exposed as he crawled under a chair, or behind the couch, or behind the drape, unaware that he was only partially concealed. I counted to ten and made a pretense of not knowing where he was. When I found him, Marty insisted that I shout too: "Here you are! I found you!" He preferred hiding himself to my hiding or hiding Buddy. This game made me think of the more primitive peekaboo games of infancy and toddlerhood, which babies adore as they discover that we go away and come back. It's the beginning of what Jean Piaget, the psychologist, called "object permanency," the notion that objects maintain their existence even when they are out of

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sight. Marty, perhaps, wanted confirmation that he existed and that I existed. He could appear and disappear in this game, playing out his need to verify his own existence, to find "himself," the child who was now so diffuse and without substance or inner core.

From this point on, from Marty's willingness to remain alone with me and trust me a little, our sessions began to change. His parents were learning how to reinforce any positive act on his part. The tantrums were subsiding, and when he did have one, it was shorter than previously. Our play now consisted of my attempts to engage him in games of role playing, such as doctor, firefighter, and mailman. These games gave me the opportunity to use language with Marty and to help him carry out simple scripts that were related to everyday events. I wanted him to begin to develop his imaginative capacity. Through play, he could increase his vocabulary and learn a sense of order and sequence; he could learn how to delay gratification, take turns, cooperate, and share; and he could learn how to empathize. If we played doctor, he could see how we would take care of the hurt doll, bandage it, give it "medicine," and put it to bed. If he could begin to take another's point of view, communicate with me, vary his behavior, and relinquish some of his perseveration, I could begin to rule out the autism diagnosis.

With the use of simple props, I would enact short scenes with Marty. For example, I gave him a cap, some old envelopes, and a small bag, and we "delivered" mail to all the dolls in the playroom. I constantly used simple phrases, urging Marty to repeat them: "Here's a letter for Buddy, here's one for Peggy doll, here's a letter for teddy bear," and so on. Marty's speech was actually improving and becoming less singsong and monotonous. He could sustain our vignettes for only a brief time—no more than four or five minutes—but this was a vast improvement. When he threw a toy, I ignored him. When he picked up the toy or cleaned up, I praised him. As he began to play more, his interest in random touching and turning the lights on and off gradually subsided.

Over the next two months, I saw Marty's parents every three weeks to get an update on his progress, and to reinforce their behavior modification program. Of course, I also saw Helen three times a week when she brought Marty to therapy, and I would spend a few minutes with her then, encouraging her to continue her work with Marty.

For two afternoons a week, Helen had a sitter, a college student whom I had recommended because

of her ability to deal with a child like Marty. As a result, Helen began to visit her friends, shop, and have an afternoon coffee break. She began to "feel like a human being again."

As Helen relaxed, Marty seemed to respond to her more calmly. Because of the changes in Marty's behavior, Helen asked if she could take him to her nephew's fourth birthday party. I suggested that she prepare Marty by telling him what would take place. I also advised her that, if he started to get excited, they should leave immediately, while things were still upbeat, rather than wait until Marty got out of hand. I wasn't sure it would work, but Helen was eager to try it.

Unfortunately, Helen did not follow my suggestions, and Marty was unable to handle the confusion at the party—too many children, too much stimulation. When his cousin opened his presents, Marty started to scream and tried to grab all the gifts. He threw himself on the floor in a typical tantrum, kicking in all directions while Helen tried to pick him up. Finally, she managed to get him to the car and into his car seat. She was "mortified" and "so angry that I slapped Marty across the face."

Helen called me that evening, crying and ashamed. She had felt humiliated in front of her family and asked me repeatedly, "Why is he like that? All the other kids sang and played nicely, and all Marty did was run around touching the balloons, poking at the other kids, and ruining the party."

I tried to explain to Helen that Marty wasn't ready for such a prolonged event, and that the stimulation in the room was more than he could handle.

Helen said, "You told me he was better."

"Yes," I answered, "Marty is better, but he's not ready yet to play the way other children his age do. It takes time. Remember, Marty is alone with me, and I'm prepared to handle his outbursts. Even though you're doing a good job, there will be setbacks. Don't get discouraged. Marty will gradually be able to spend longer periods with other people."

Helen listened, but I knew she felt as if she had failed. In her eagerness to have a normal child, and to do what other mothers did—attend birthday parties, take their children shopping, go to restaurants, and go visiting or to the library—she had moved too quickly and had suffered a defeat.

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In the meantime, I decided that I would test Marty and, perhaps in the near future, set up a new plan for him. If he was of normal intelligence—and I suspected that he was, (he was moving along satisfactorily, and he was more responsive than during his early days with me)—I would try to enroll him in a nursery school that I knew accepted children of normal intelligence who had emotional problems. If we started him with a five-minute period at the school each day and built up his time as he progressed, I hoped he would eventually be able to stay for the whole morning. An aide would be assigned to Marty to help him adjust to a structured classroom with other children.

I decided to test Marty before I described my plan to the Newmans because I didn't want to disappoint them. Marty and I had been together now for almost five months, and he was more compliant with me, played for longer periods of time, and only rarely refused to clean up or to pick up a toy he had thrown down. He was able to relinquish his fixation on the book that had formerly been his symbol of safety in my room, which had at first been a strange and unfamiliar place to him. We rarely played hide-and-seek now; Marty enjoyed our role-playing games, especially "postman."

I decided to give him a test that required no expressive language of him. On a day when Marty was relaxed, I gave him the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, a crude measure of intelligence but one that has proved to be nearly as accurate as more refined measures. All he had to do was point to the correct picture on a page as I asked him the stimulus word. Marty seemed pleased with this "game," pointing proudly as he responded, and wearing a big smile of satisfaction with his accomplishments: he was aware that he was doing well. In this way, he conveyed to me that he had a sense of himself and pride in his successes. This was not the same little boy who had originally not seemed to care about himself or about how others reacted to him. It was important now to Marty that I valued him—and perhaps he was beginning to value himself. I was delighted to find that Marty was of average intelligence and that I could now proceed with the arrangements for this next phase in Marty's therapy.

I spoke to the Newmans about my proposal. Marty was now doing much better in a one-to-one situation with me. It was important, too, as he was approaching age four, that he learn how to play with a peer and conform to a group. I could not provide this experience for him, and I felt that preschool would be a beneficial adjunct to his play therapy.

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The Newmans were apprehensive at first, especially because of the birthday party incident and because of Helen's prior visit to the other nursery school, where she had had such a bad experience. I explained that it would take time to make all the arrangements: I wanted the Newmans to meet Mrs. Langdon, the director; visit the school; and then have Marty meet the teachers and the aide. It as important, too, that Marty have time alone with the aide, Karen, before he began attending the school. Karen would play alone with Marty each day before he entered the classroom, so that she could calm him down and prepare him for the classroom activities and the presence of other children.

Preparing Marty for "School"

Marty came into the playroom alone, as he had for the past few months. He approached the teddy bear and took the doctor's kit form the table, motioning me to join him.

"Do you want to play doctor?" I asked.

Marty nodded yes.

• Say "yes," Marty. You can ask me to play doctor. Can you do that?

• Play doctor.

• Good, Marty, that's very good. We can play. Can you say "yes"?

• Yes.

• Good. We're talking to each other now!

Marty smiled, placed the bear on the couch, and pretended to examine it.

• Petey sick, too.

• Petey? Where's Petey?

• Here Petey is.

And Marty pretended he was examining Petey, his imaginary friend.

This was the first time that Marty had introduced Petey into our play; he was feeling enough trust in me to share his friend. I watched as Marty "talked" to Petey and to the bear. His speech, racing along, was unintelligible to me, filled with nonsense words, his own private vocabulary, but obviously affording him pleasure. He was peaceful as he played—for the longest time he had remained with one game. I watched. Fifteen minutes went by. I was pleased by Marty's progress, but cautious; we'd had our setbacks before.

Petey was Marty's "friend." Petey made no demands on Marty. It didn't matter if Marty used gibberish to communicate with him. Marty was in control and enjoyed his game. And I was delighted that Marty had an imaginary friend because it demonstrated that he had imagination and the ability to respond to another person, even if that person was not real. Marty was using Petey to compensate for the real friends he didn't have.

I capitalized on this "friendship" to help Marty continue to interact with the dolls in the playroom, hoping that eventually he would be able to transfer his skills to interactions with other children. When next we played doctor or postman, I urged Marty to take Petey along. Sometimes Marty tried to bathe a doll and pretended that Petey was in the tub as well. Gradually, he began to feed the dolls, put them on the slide, and put them in the wagon with Petey, interacting more with the dolls and with me. I knew that I had to prepare Marty for preschool and that our doll play would make a good transition to playing with other preschoolers.

Marty finished playing a game with Petey one day, and I asked him to come and sit near me.

"Marty, would you like to go to playschool and play with other children?" I asked.

Marty didn't seem to understand. I described the playschool, mentioning the toys, the sandbox, and the big sink where he could play with toy boats. He liked the idea of boats, so we took two plastic boats and filled my small rubber tub with water, and I urged him to "sail" the boats. As we played, I told him about the school, and about how he could sail his boat in the big tub there. I asked if he would like to visit the school with Mommy and me. We would meet Karen, I told him and the teacher, Mrs. Langdon. I was not sure that Marty comprehended the idea of playschool and decided to keep on talking about it during our next few sessions.

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In the meantime, Helen had arranged for a visit to the school, and I agreed to join her and Marty. Helen had phoned me every day since I had presented my plan to her, her apprehension about Marty's reaction palpable as we talked.

Mrs. Langdon, Karen, and I had spent much time discussing Marty and how they would proceed. They were just as nervous as Helen, even though Mrs. Langdon had taught other children with emotional problems over the years, and despite Karen's obvious skill in working with similar children at this school and at others. Mrs. Langdon told me that she had seen Marty in church about a year before and remembered a "scene." In a small town, word travels fast, and nursery school directors do know each other. Nevertheless, she was looking forward to the challenge. Mrs. Langdon was a woman of tremendous vitality, astute, sensitive, and patient. I felt that Marty would be in competent hands.

Our visit was scheduled for ten in the morning. As Marty and Helen came up the walk together, I was waiting with Mrs. Langdon and Karen, and we could see them from the office window. Marty bounced along, face shining, curls framing his round, snub-nosed face. Helen followed right behind, wearing a look of dread. She had had so many failures with Marty, each one causing her to doubt her competency as a mother. As they came to the door, she looked as if she was uttering a silent prayer. Mrs. Langdon guided Marty with her usual warmth and charm, and Helen smiled and began to unwind. Karen showed Marty his cubby and took his hand to lead him into a small room where she had a few toys. They would play with these toys first and then take them into the larger room where the other children were. We waited in Mrs. Langdon's office, out of sight, but nearby in case Marty wanted Helen. I was delighted that Marty had been able to separate from Helen so easily and accept Karen. After about ten minutes, Karen and Marty came back, and Marty ran into Helen's arms, clinging to her. I felt that this was enough for one day and suggested that we wait until tomorrow, the day of our next scheduled session, for Marty's introduction into the larger room with the other children. We all praised Marty, and he obviously basked in the praise. He sat on his mother's lap, beaming with joy over his success: he had been able to stay with a new person alone—and he had survived!

Nursery School

Karen kept a daily record of Marty's progress that was helpful in my work with him. I was able to

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identify trouble spots before they grew. The teachers and I had numerous contacts about Marty by phone or note, and I continued to work with him, emphasizing speech more and more so that he could communicate with the other children.

In the beginning, Marty's time in the large room was short. He could tolerate only five minutes among the children before he began his "touching" of objects and running around the room. Karen was his shadow. She stayed closeby, ready to intervene if Marty tried to hit a child or destroy property. She offered praise when he sat quietly, or when he found a toy that engrossed him. Gradually, his time in the class was extended to ten minutes. If there were any wild moments, Marty was removed from the group to a "time-out" chair. At first, he would get up from the chair, but Karen put him back each time, explaining calmly why he had to be separated from the other children.

After Marty had been in the school for three weeks, I decided to observe him there. He had been able to remain in the class without incident for ten to fifteen minutes on average but, on some mornings, for as long as twenty or thirty minutes. I was curious about his behavior in the classroom, as he was now talking more to me, playing with more toys in the playroom, and generally appearing to be more composed. I arranged to observe Marty on a day between his visits to me, so that I could let him know I was coming to see him, and so that we could talk about the visit afterward.

I arrived at the school at 9:30. Marty was due at 10:00, to have time alone with Karen, and then time in the large room. Our plan was to see if Marty could stay for snack time that day, an extra fifteen minutes that, it seemed to me, would be a good time for socializing. The children were all seated at tables, about eight at each, for a distribution of juice and crackers; there was relative quiet—no one squabbling over toys, and no one in an active game. Marty could even help clean up. He was getting quite good at this in my playroom, and I hoped he could transfer this "skill" to the school.

I observed Marty from behind a one-way mirror. He entered the room with Karen. They had just had their usual quiet time together. Marty was holding a puzzle, and he sat at a table near some children who were playing with some pegboards. He did not talk to the other children, but as he put his puzzle together, he watched the children, and if they giggled, he did, too. His attempts to become part of the group were usually imitations of what the other children did. He didn't ask any questions, initiate any

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conversation with the children, or respond if one asked him a question. He seemed content to sit near them, engaged in what is called *parallel play*, that is, play near another child, but without social interaction. This reminded me of his crude version of hide-and-seek, which was also characteristic of a younger child. Karen sat nearby, smiling with approval or praising Marty for his appropriate behavior.

Marty soon left his puzzle and began to roam around the room, always on the periphery of other children's small play groupings. I felt this tremendous urge to change my form and become a dybbuk, a spirit that could enter Marty's body and use the words that would give him access to the world of the other children. I watched and felt a mixture of pride because Marty had come so far and sadness because he didn't yet have the tools to become like the other four-year-olds.

Marty came back to his puzzle, put it together again, and gave it to Karen. She took his hand and led him to the sandbox, where three other little boys were involved in an elaborate game of "construction. " They wore yellow plastic hard hats and moved their small trucks and cars around with much noise and shouting. As Marty sat on the wooden rim of the box, Karen offered him a car. He moved it in a desultory fashion, eyeing the other boys, and then throwing the car at one of the small trucks, upsetting the pile of sand. The boys all yelled at him, and Karen, speaking to him gently, took him to his "time-out" chair. I couldn't hear her, but she told me later that she had told him he must not throw cars. Marty, I believe, wanted to play with the boys but didn't know how to make the proper overtures. Throwing the car was his method of making contact. I decided that we must practice role-playing "how to join a game." Marty needed both the language and an awareness of the other person's reaction to a request.

Soon, Karen gave Marty permission to leave his chair. He went to the block corner, and while he started to build a tall tower, Karen sat on the floor and watched. A little girl, Lisa, came along and sat next to Marty. He seemed oblivious of her. Again, I felt myself aching inside.

"Marty, please," I murmured to myself. "Say, 'Hi,' say anything! Don't just ignore her. Here's a chance to respond."

Silence.

I was keenly aware at that moment how crucial language was for Marty. Without the easy flow of

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words typical of four-year-olds, he would remain isolated from his peers. He didn't talk to the child; he continued his block building, content to be alone, but at least he didn't run around aimlessly, as he had during his first weeks in the large room.

It was time to put away the toys and come to the table for snacks and juice. Well, this was a success. Marty lived to eat, and he was on his best behavior for this little feast. He sat between Karen and Lisa, drank his juice, ate his graham crackers, and looked like a contented pussycat. He helped clean the table, scrubbing with vigor. His time was up now, and he willingly left on a positive note.

I left, too, suddenly realizing that I had been tense and in a cold sweat for the entire forty-five minutes of my observation. My identification with Marty was more powerful than I had realized. So much of me was invested in his success. He had come so far, and yet he still needed so much help. It's true, his attention span was now lengthened, and the hyperactivity was less in evidence, but he was in a structured situation at the school, with one-on-one attention. What was happening at home? I looked forward to finding out in the Newmans' next session.

Marty came for his session the day after my school visit, and he wouldn't get out of the car. Helen urged him, begged him, and finally, dragged him to the door. When I opened it, Marty lay down on the waiting-room floor, stiff as a board, and refused to move. He then began to cry and throw a tantrum. He shouted, "No go in, no go in."

I asked Helen what had happened. She told me that she and Craig had gone to a movie the night before and had used a new sitter. Marty had been asleep and usually did sleep through the night. He awoke, however, at 10:30, and his parents were not yet back. He was terrified of the sitter, a "perfectly fine young woman," according to Helen, and had cried until the Newmans returned. He hadn't gone to school that morning.

"This has been the worst day," said Helen. "He's been driving me crazy all day. I couldn't wait until we got here."

Marty remained on the floor. We ignored him and just sat until he calmed down.

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I spoke to Marty. "I think you were upset when you woke up last night, Marty. You had a new sitter. Laurie couldn't come last night. It's all right now. Everyone is here who loves you. Will you come and play?"

Marty sniffled and wouldn't budge from his prone position. I told him that it was all right; we could skip our time together, and he could come back next time to play. Marty got up, hit his mother hard in the face, and tried to run out to the car. Helen looked stunned.

I ran after Marty, who now sat down in the driveway and cried: "Sorry, sorry, sorry."

Helen came out and picked up Marty, and we all came back in. I gave them each some water. Helen dried Marty's face, but her cheek began to swell. When I offered her some ice, she refused, and just sat there, looking small, despite her size, and helpless.

I talked to Marty about the episode, explaining again that when he was upset, he must use words, not his fists. I told him that I understood how upset he felt. Marty looked contrite but refused to speak to me. We canceled the session, and I asked Helen if she and Craig could come to talk to me that evening. She was eager to come. We said good-bye, and Marty waved to me as they drove away.

I especially regretted that Marty had missed school this day because his time the day before had been extended to include "snack," his most successful event in the school's schedule.

The Newmans' Visit

Helen and Craig came in the evening. Helen's mother was sitting: the Newmans weren't taking any chances! I told them about Marty's progress in school and what I had observed. I urged them to use language continuously, and not to respond to Marty's pointing or gesturing, but to make him ask for what he wanted. I offered them support and commended them on their continued efforts to reinforce his appropriate behavior and ignore his negative acts. The Newmans were using the time-out technique at home rather than sending Marty to his room.

"This works out much better," said Craig. "He never thought his room was punishment because he

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has so much stuff in there to keep him busy. And I think he really didn't mind being alone, away from us. He always had 'Petey.' "

I agreed that the time-out form of discipline worked well for Marty.

We talked about Marty's behavior in the waiting room. I tried to explain that Marty did his best when he had structure, when there were no surprises, when he had a steady routine, and when he was with people he knew.

"It was pure chance that he awoke the one night when you used a new sitter, but this was scary for Marty," I said. It was almost as if a sixth sense had alerted Marty to some change in the household.

"It would be best if you make sure that Marty knows your sitters beforehand," I continued. "He tried to retaliate and punish you, Helen, for leaving him with a stranger. That's why he hit you, and that's why he wouldn't go to school or leave you to play with me today. He needs to know that you're there for him. It's too soon for Marty to adjust to new situations. He's doing well in school, but he's not ready for situations that involve any new changes or unfamiliar faces."

The Newmans understood this and agreed that they would be more vigilant in the future. Helen told me that she had actually been feeling better since Marty started school; it gave her a short respite in the morning. She stayed at the school but had a cup of coffee and relaxed. And she "loved" her afternoons when Laurie came. She could go the hairdresser, or shop, or visit a friend.

I suggested that she try again to take Marty to the library. I explained that she should prepare him first by setting the ground rules, telling him what to expect and what they would do there, and leaving immediately if he was not "good." I explained that this preparation would be similar to the way we had approached his going to the playschool.

It was simply a question of time before Marty could extend his time at the school and transfer his appropriate behavior to a new setting. We were "shaping" his behavior, just as trainers shape the behavior of animals so that they perform certain feats. The Newmans had been reading enough to understand what I meant and did not take offense. They understood that the behavior modification

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program had its roots in experiments in animal laboratories, and they were cooperative parents who obviously cared deeply for each other and for Marty. Just as we were shaping Marty's behavior, the Newmans were learning new approaches and techniques to use in coping with him. In effect, they were breaking their old cycle of responding to Marty's negative acts and were reinforcing his behavior that was socially desirable. We parted with the library "assignment" for Helen.

Helen was able to separate from Marty at school the next day, phoning me from the school office to report. Marty also came that day for his next session, racing into the playroom just as he had been doing. For several sessions, we played "library," and soon after, Helen felt ready to try the library visit.

She prepared Marty for their outing, describing exactly what they would do: look at books, borrow some at the desk, always talk in whispers, and stay close to each other. It worked. Helen kept the visit short, and Marty had a good experience. He brought one of the books, *Mr. Tall and Mr. Small*, to our session and curled up next to me while I read the story, urging him to point at each object or character described. He also took the book to playschool to show to Karen, and Mrs. Langdon permitted him to sit through storytime while she read it to the class. She explained that this was Marty's library book and that he had gone to the library and had chosen it himself. Marty was the center of attention, "loving every minute of it," according to Karen. As Mrs. Langdon read to the children, he sat close to her. When she finished, the children commented on the story, and Mrs. Langdon talked about libraries as special, friendly places. It was a good morning for Marty and the beginning of his being able to stay a longer time at school.

Marty was still shy about talking to the other children, and they were still a bit wary of him, never quite knowing what to expect. His unpredictability put them off. Although Marty could talk to me more in the playroom and could role-play with the Buddy doll, he was still unable to ask another child to play. Helen had tried inviting a neighbor's child over, and Marty had ignored him completely. I explained to Helen that Marty felt less comfortable playing with another child than with Karen or me. His isolation from other children because of his hyperactivity and aggressiveness, coupled with his language deficit, caused him to be socially inept. He didn't know what to expect from other children, and their demands would be difficult for him to understand and to meet. He feared rejection and would not chance it. I assured Helen that gradually, as Marty got more used to the school and was more accepted, he would

venture to play with another child. On the playground, he had let a child push him on the swing, and he had also taken turns riding in a wagon with another child. These were major accomplishments for Marty, compared to where he had been eight months before.

The question ever-present in the Newmans' mind was whether Marty would be ready to enroll in the local kindergarten. He was now four years and two months old, and we had a long time to work with him before he would be of kindergarten age. I felt that it was important to go slowly, and if need be, he could remain with Mrs. Langdon until he was ready for kindergarten—even if it meant starting when he was older than the other children. In connection with this possible delay, the Newmans were concerned about Marty's huge size—he was, indeed, the tallest child in playschool. His size created many problems because people expected him to behave more maturely. In a strange way, this child was hindered by his height: his speech and manner were incongruous with his body build.

Saying Good-bye

Over the next months, my work consisted of further role playing, continuous behavior modification, and targeting different kinds of behavior trying to extinguish negative ones such as hitting, biting, and tantrums. Marty's speech became clearer, less singsong, and less jumbled. He could speak in full sentences when he took his time, and he no longer made errors in his subjects and verbs. His relationship with Louisa had also improved. She was willing to play with him and even to read stories to him.

Helen and Marty made a weekly visit to the library and attempted to stay for story hour. It worked. Marty sat quietly while the librarian read a story, but he did not join in the singing afterward. Helen knew she had a long road ahead, but her spirits were better, and she was more optimistic each time she came with Marty.

It was time to begin decreasing the frequency of our sessions. The Newmans and I met to discuss this process. Over the months since Marty had enrolled in playschool, his behavior had become increasingly stabilized. My notes on our earlier sessions when I had pondered over Marty's diagnosis, now seemed to describe another boy. They demonstrated to me how difficult it is to draw conclusions about a young child's intellectual or emotional behavior. Yes, Marty was still unable to remain in his

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classroom every day for an entire three-hour morning session, but he had made enormous progress: his attention span was longer; the hyperactivity had been substantially reduced; the autism-like symptoms were no longer in evidence; and he spoke in sentences to let us know his needs. He was still fragile, however, and could benefit further from professional help that would consolidate his gains and help him compensate for his developmental impairments.

Fortunately, the essential ingredients had been present to enable Marty to make such strides: His parents were intelligent and concerned and had changed their approach to him so that his deeply entrenched negative behavior patterns had gradually subsided. And Marty's pediatrician had wisely refrained from using the medication that is so often prescribed for hyperactive children even before an accurate diagnosis has been reached and before therapy had been attempted.

So many children are overmedicated, so that the symptoms diminish, but not the underlying causes. Some physicians suggest that medication be used as the sole treatment for hyperactive children with attention deficits. Others suggest a combination of medication and psychotherapy. Although medication may be effective in diminishing the hyperactivity or distractibility of some children, their learning disabilities and social behaviors still need to be addressed.

My emphasis in play therapy was on helping Marty to develop language and social skills. Mrs. Langdon would continue to reinforce Marty's cognitive development, and of course, there would be ample opportunities at the school for Marty to engage in social interactions. Mrs. Langdon and Karen were essential partners in contributing to Marty's improved behavior. He had responded well to therapy; it was time to see if he could sustain his gains without my frequent intervention.

We agreed that Marty would now come twice a week instead of three times. Gradually, we would reduce these visits to once a week. I would continue to monitor his progress in playschool through observations and telephone talks with Mrs. Langdon. Helen and Craig were pleased with this arrangement. If Marty regressed, I would increase the session frequency. It was important to be flexible because Marty was still testing the water. I felt that one more year in playschool, combined with a weekly play therapy session, should be enough to maintain Marty's gains.

Now it was time to let Marty know that we would be together less often. I told him that he would

still come to play with me, but not on Wednesdays anymore. At first, he seemed confused. We marked off the days on the calendar, and Marty, with my assistance, drew a circle around Wednesday. Wednesday would be “library day” for Marty. Helen and I thought the library visits would make a pleasant substitute for his therapy session and would still afford him structure and regularity.

The twice-weekly sessions went along smoothly. Marty would turn five in January and would remain with Mrs. Langdon until fall, when, if he had adjusted to the full morning schedule with only minor mishaps, our plan was to enroll him in kindergarten. He would be slightly older than some of the children, but socially and emotionally he would probably be more like the younger five-year-olds in the class.

Marty had made progress, but I knew that there would be setbacks for him. He was a calmer child and more tractable, but he was obviously more immature than his peers. There were still developmental lags in his speech and in his social behavior, but compared to where he was when I first met him, his gains had been remarkable. His growth in language and his willingness to communicate by words rather than by negative acts had made a substantial difference in the way others responded to him. In this regard, the school environment had been an essential part of his therapy program, along with the change in the Newmans’ behavior toward him. The Newmans had learned how to handle him, relying in part on behavior modification techniques and using charts to document his progress in specific areas, and in part on their own willingness to accept my suggestions about relief for Helen (the use of sitters), more consistent handling of Marty in terms of preparing him for changes in his schedule, generally slowing the pace of his routine, and of course, constantly using language, in songs, reading, storytelling, and explanations of the events in Marty’s life.

As the months passed, Marty’s sessions were reduced to once a week. He was now spending a full morning at school and only occasionally had a tantrum. Usually, these took place when there was a change in routine, such as a visitor, a field trip to the park, or a classmate’s birthday party. Slowly, Marty learned that sometimes a day can be different. With preparation beforehand and Karen’s support, he was soon able to respond appropriately when a child celebrated a birthday at school.

In our sessions, Marty and I read books about birthdays, drew cakes and candles, sang “Happy

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Birthday" to the Buddy doll, and made a Play-Doh cake for him. Marty drew a picture for Buddy—primitive, but his first picture. It was a "ball" for Buddy, simply a round circle that Marty colored red. We hung it up in the playroom. Marty's pride in this picture led to other attempts to draw, both with me and at school.

The birthday preparations in the playroom had facilitated Marty's adjustment to parties at school, and I knew that Helen was eager to take him to the birthday parties of his numerous cousins. She also wanted him to have his own birthday party in January, even though she remembered with trepidation how embarrassed she had been by his behavior at her nephew's party when he was a "holy terror." I reassured her that Marty had improved, and that taking him to a party would be worth a try. It was crucial, I told her, to remove him immediately from the party if necessary, even if it was before the cake and the present-giving "ceremonies." I suspected that having to leave the party would be a sign of defeat for Helen because she had been telling her family how well Marty had been doing. I reminded her that it was essential to keep up the behavior modification program since it had been so successful with Marty. I also suggested that she forewarn her relatives of her intentions.

Marty's cousin's birthday came. Helen phoned that evening. I could tell by the lilt in her voice that Marty had done well.

"Do you think I can invite a few children from school and give Marty his own party" she asked.

"Yes, try it," I responded. "Keep the party short and simple. If things get out of hand, just ask the mothers to leave. Again, explain to them what you plan to do, so that everyone will cooperate. Helen, they're parents and they know Marty; they'll understand."

Marty's birthday party was a huge success. Helen kept it short—about an hour and a half, just enough time for a couple of games, songs, cake, ice cream, and the opening of presents. Marty proudly gave each child a small gift to take home.

At our next session, he brought along one of his presents, a plastic tape recorder. He put the tape into the proper slot, pushed the "play" button, and smiled when the song "On Top of Old Smokey" began. He insisted that I listen to it twice, and he sang along, trying to learn the words. He was able to tell me in

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his own way about his party, his other presents, and his cake with five candles. We then relived his experience by making a Play-Doh cake for him with five "candles." Marty "blew" out the candles, and we both sang "Happy Birthday." It was a happy time for Marty. He sat there grinning at me with his goofy smile. I felt like grinning, too. This had been a long, hard eighteen months for both of us. We would still see each other regularly until the August break. Then I planned to see him once a week to help him make his adjustment to kindergarten, and after a couple of months, just once a month.

When August came, we said good-bye.

"Next time I see you," I said, "you'll be a big, big boy. You'll be in kindergarten."

Marty was ready. He had passed the kindergarten screening test in the spring, and we had spent May, June, and July talking about what to expect. I had tried to make the connection for him between Mrs. Langdon's school and kindergarten. Marty, Helen, and I had visited his new school and had toured the building, the playground, and the classroom, Marty had met his new teacher, and I could see that it was love at first sight. Helen and I were concerned about the bus and agreed that Helen would drive Marty to school until we felt that he was ready to go on the school bus.

Six months after Marty started kindergarten, where he was fitting in well, he and I said our final good-byes. He hugged me for the first time and gave me a picture: it was a stick figure of me—a gift from his heart.

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