

THE ASIAN POST
1 MINUTE INTERVIEW - Shahidun Rahman
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Mrs Shahidun Rahman wrote the book 'Ibrahim - Where in the Spectrum Does He Belong' to tell the readers about her son's struggle with SPLD (Semantic Pragmatic Language Disorder) and also to create awareness in the Asian communities where autism is not widely recognised.



Q: What is autism?

Autism is a life-long development disability which affects people in different ways. Autism is a spectrum disorder which means the condition has wide-ranging degrees of severity. You can have a child at one end of the spectrum with barely noticeable traits, whilst another at the other end of the spectrum has full-blown autism.

Q: What is your purpose for writing this book?

I wrote this book to raise awareness of autism, especially speech and language disorders, particularly in the Asian community. I come from a Bangladeshi community where autism is not recognised.

Q: At what age was your son diagnosed with SPLD and how did this affect his behaviour?

My initial concerns for Ibrahim began to emerge when he was about two years old. He developed into a healthy toddler. He was not saying any recognisable words and babbled constantly. At this age, Ibrahim was a very energetic and boisterous child. His awkward behaviour had an effect on his diet, sleep and he lacked social skills as well as having inappropriate speech.

Q: Did you know much about the disorder yourself when he was first diagnosed?

I knew very little about speech and language disorders at the time of diagnosis. It was difficult trying to understand something that I knew little about.

Q: How do you feel the Asian community responded to Ibrahim and his disorder?

Ibrahim was very boisterous. It was as though he was being truly disobedient. He behaved this way in front of family and friends. We all expect our children to behave well in front of other people. A lot of people did not actually realise that he had a disorder. He was seen as a very naughty boy who spoke little Bengali and was experiencing delayed speech. His disorder was something that I did not talk about openly to people. Many people only believe a disorder exists if it is physically visible. A person who has a disorder is sometimes labelled as being 'mad' or some may suggest the person has been possessed by evil spirits. Sadly, this conclusion is not uncommon in the Asian community.

Q: How has Ibrahim coped with Semantic Pragmatic Language Disorder over the years and what do you feel could be done to help improve his general life style?

Ibrahim received intensive therapy and help learning social skills. When a child has SPLD, it means that they have difficulty understanding what people say to them and they do not understand how to use speech to make themselves understood. They talk on top of people, constantly interrupting and making irrelevant comments. This was the case with Ibrahim. Ibrahim is able to lead a life just as a normal 13 year old, although can find it hard at times to express something accurately. For example, recalling a phone conversation he may have had a few minutes ago. Expressive language has been his main difficulty. Ibrahim does not require any specialist help anymore. But he still needs some guidance in certain aspects of his life. He is managing very well and is a bright boy.

Q: What do you feel can be done in the Asian community to better educate and raise awareness about the conditions surrounding autism?

I think that the media can play an important part in helping to raise awareness of autism. Today we have many Asian TV channels, as well as newspapers / magazines which more and more people are reading everyday. They can reach the heart of the community to educate people about autism. We also need more Bengali / Hindi /

Punjabi / Urdu speaking speech and language therapists to help educate the parents who speak little English. It would have made a difference to me if there was one to help Ibrahim.

Q: Introduce us to - 'Ibrahim - Where in the Spectrum Does He Belong?'

My book is an autobiographical account of a mother's struggle to bring up a child with a learning disorder. It tells the story of my son and his struggle with Semantic Pragmatic Language Disorder, (a speech and language disorder) part of the autism spectrum of disorders. It highlights the lack of awareness of this condition within our society, but particularly within the Bangladeshi community where autism is not recognised.

Q: Where can it be bought from the market?

It is available to buy from Amazon, Foyles, Waterstones, Blackwells, Methvens and all other major internet bookstores, as well as retail bookstores.

