Case Study Part I

You are attending a family reunion and during a quiet moment, your cousin Elizabeth takes you aside and asks you what you think about the development of her son, Mark. She tears up as she tells you how worried she is about him. Mark will be 2 years old next month, and he seems so different from the other children on the playground. Although he is an affectionate and happy little boy, his behaviors can be so unpredictable. He is very shy and has terrible temper tantrums. It is usually impossible to reason with him. Small changes in his routine throw Mark off, and Elizabeth is worried that he won't be able to handle the crowd at this family gathering without causing a scene. You ask her what her pediatrician thinks.

Elizabeth tells you that Mark has been seen by his pediatrician, and she has expressed her concerns about his temper tantrums on a few visits. Mark enjoys going to the doctor’s office because they have a large tropical fish tank, and he has generally been calm in that setting. Mark’s doctors have all been very reassuring, and think he has a bad case of the “terrible twos.” The doctor has told her to “give him some time; he is still young and will likely grow out of this phase.”

You have been pre-occupied by your relatives, and you honestly haven't been paying too much attention to Mark. You know that your cousin is a doting and caring mother. Elizabeth and her husband, Sam, had fertility struggles, and she was thrilled to give birth to Mark after a grueling course of in-vitro fertilization treatments. You know that Mark was born full term without any complications. You heard that he was a fussy baby, but that he was otherwise healthy.

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Early Warning Signs of Autism Spectrum Disorder

Case Study Part II

During your conversation, you find out that Mark attained his motor milestones typically. By 1 year of age, he was walking. Now he is climbing on everything. He has started to repeat words and, thanks to a beloved DVD, he has learned many of his letters and can count to 10 in Spanish. You ask about how Mark communicates and gets what he wants. Elizabeth says that he is very smart and that he usually tries to get things himself. She cannot recall a time that he pointed or gestured to get his needs met.

At that moment, Mark wanders into the room. He starts to run back and forth while verbalizing “fast, fast, fast.” You call him many times, but he doesn’t seem to hear you. Elizabeth says that he is a very busy, active boy and that he acts this way a lot. He stops his playing and begins to spin the wheels of a toy train. You are beginning to get concerned. These aren’t normal play behaviors. You even think back on your family history and can’t recall anyone with an ASD.

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Case Study Part III

After thinking over milestones, early warning signs, and what you know of Mark’s behavior, you do have concerns about Mark. You commend your cousin for picking up these issues. Elizabeth tears up. She admits her sister thought it could be an ASD, but she wasn’t sure. Why was this missed? Anyone who works with children is in a position to make valuable observations about a child’s development, and they should be taken very seriously. Learn the signs!

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