

"Enrico did not walk and did not he was talking. Today he knows two languages".

A new physiotherapeutic method from Tel Aviv helps the children with psychomotor delays to catch up with the stages of development. Francesca, who experienced it with his son, tells us about it. Play, challenge with yourself, participation in active family life are the three basic components of an innovative Israeli physiotherapy method, called First Step, which arrived recently in Italy. Therapy has been known also thanks to the commitment of Francesca Seegy Bohner, who has become a tireless promoter of it after having experienced its effectiveness on his child, Enrico, who was born with a psychomotor retardation.

### Something was strange

"From the very first days of life something was not quite right. I already had a son of two years and a half and it seemed to me that Enrico had less strength and response. My "mom's sixth sense" urged me to first consult a neonatologist who found mild hypotonia. Nothing serious, if not one not-well defined "muscle weakness" says Francesca. Her story is the story of many mothers who in skin-to-skin contact with their little one feel that something isn't right but they don't understand what. "As a child Enrico wept excessively (and so far nothing strange), cut the stages of development slow, and he would turn his eyes backwards, showing the white sclera of the eye", continues our main character. "At eight months old he couldn't sit up and he couldn't do any of the typical vocal sounds of a baby. When he was a year and a half old, we decided to have him examined at Zurich Hospital, the city where we live. What mainly scared us was that strange movement of the eyes, which repeated a couple of times a day. And in fact, through the electroencephalogram, they diagnosed him with a form of epilepsy. Each time when he rolled his eyes towards the back -showed the white part of the eye- Enrico had a few small, epileptic seizures, without loss of consciousness, that were repeated at few minutes distance from each other." When he was two years old, the little one started standing (when already his peers are running fast) and walking. Just held by the hand: to stimulate the brain's his development, his mother takes him to a speech therapist, a physiotherapist and the play houses full of balls, slides, cubes and walls to climb.

### The lucky encounter

It's in the playroom that Francesca meets Shai Silberbusch, who happens to be an Israeli therapist who has worked out a rehabilitation method based on Feldenkrais. She decides to visit the expert with Enrico, who not only has a muscle hypotonia but also problems of balance at the expense of the of the vestibular system. This is why that the child spends hours playing with the train lying on the floor and not has yet to learn to speak. But,

according to Silberbusch you can recover, and you have to. "The therapist explained to me that his approach was different from that of the other rehabilitation techniques. The intensity of the work he carried out involved the whole family, and he was going over the child's developmental stages to fill in any learning gaps through play, motivation, sensory-motor experiences. For example he would have created difficult situations to induce the child to find with the body strategies to solve the problem ", says Mummy.

### The trip to Israel

Enthusiastic about the optimistic outlook of the therapist, Francesca went with her family to Tel Aviv where Shai Silberbusch directs the First Step Center - where in the last 10 years he treated 400 Italian children with rare diseases, autism or attention deficit and hyperactivity. "Already after six days I had proof that the method was working... while we were sitting in a circle for the cordless phone, Enrico began to repeat the syllables: babe, but-but, pi-pi... It was an incredible emotion to hear him speak for the first time in his life." The therapy proceeds even with a few moments of anxiety. "The first time Shai put my son inside a mountain of pillows from where he had to get out, I was afraid. But For Enrico it was a new and stimulating experience. Slowly succeeding in sneaking out, he gained strength and confidence in himself. Swings, cubes, tubes to get into... everything became a game, exercise, therapy," says Francesca.

### The situation today

Enrico is now 13 years old, he goes to a Montessori school. He speaks two languages (German and English), plays the piano, swims and he plays tennis. And mother Francesca -with Milanese origin- who lives in Switzerland is dedicated to make known the method in Italy, organising cycles of therapy in Milan and, on request, in other cities (for info: francesca@firststepmethod.com).

### In Turin

Gathering the enthusiasm of mothers and children, the First Step Method was introduced, at an experimental level, to two municipal childcare centers called Piccolo Principe and Polo del Dialogo in Turin. This is thanks to an educational project called Thub06, supported by the association Con I Bambini. A successful, targeted initiative to favour a harmonic psychomotor development not of one child but of a group of children... Shortly, the method will also arrive in some schools in Milan.

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