



My Life With Autism

For years, Connor, 19, kept his diagnosis a secret. Once he shared the truth, his whole world changed. **By Connor Archer, as told to Jessica Press**

AS YOU READ How does autism affect Connor's life?

My family says I was the happiest baby. But when I was 3 years old, I still wasn't talking. I often couldn't understand what people were saying. I didn't notice people around me, except for my family. I was in my own little world.

Because I couldn't speak, it was hard to express my feelings. I'd get frustrated and use physical force to show that frustration. I had temper tantrums, kicking and screaming on the floor.

When my mom went to the hospital to have my little brother, Colby, I didn't understand where she went and I didn't have the words to ask. Instead, I screamed and flipped over chairs. The next day when I went to see my mom, I was so exhausted from the night before that I crashed right there

on the floor in her hospital room. That's when my parents decided to take me to the doctor.

Getting Help

A team of doctors diagnosed me with autism **spectrum** disorder. Autism affects your language, social, and physical skills. It can also affect how you think, understand other people, move, act, and speak. One doctor told my mom that I might never talk.

My parents were determined to help me however they could. My

mom enrolled me in a preschool here in Maine where teachers were trained to help children like me. I began talking a little when I was 5. Starting in kindergarten, I went to a regular public school. My parents knew how important it was for me to be **integrated** into a typical classroom setting. They wanted me in a school where I'd have the opportunity to interact with kids of all different abilities so that I could learn from them.

At first, my classmates weren't very friendly. But then my mom started inviting them to our house for occasions like Halloween and birthdays. After that, they began including me more. I still didn't talk much, but I made friends. Maybe they could tell I was different in some way, but they accepted me anyway. I've had the same friends ever since.

