

What does it mean to have a child who is handicapable and how do I show her the world? This was how I was feeling when my beautiful daughter was born into this world with numerous unexpected disabilities. She spent 7 weeks in the NICU; she had undergone numerous procedures and surgeries and at the end of it she had no diagnosis and very few expectations. Until her Early Intervention team met her.

My daughter was about 3 months old when Early Intervention started visiting. She receives services from a physical therapist, occupational therapist and a Teacher for the Deaf and Visually Impaired. To understand my daughter's needs, she is visually impaired, hearing impaired, has global developmental delays and relies on constant suctioning to clear oral secretions as she cannot swallow. Take a moment to imagine living in her world. My daughter was extremely defensive, on edge and was never able to relax because she could not anticipate what would happen next. What more could I expect from my beautiful fighter, when no one knew how to communicate to her? Until of course, her amazing team came into our lives and showed me there is so much more behind her beautiful brown eyes.

In the beginning my daughter would not trust her therapists or teachers. We all very quickly learned that she required gentle approaches, using the top of the hand to gently touch the underside of her arm as if to say "Hello". Her teacher suggested using home signs to give her a chance to understand what would happen next, like a diaper in her hand to change her, or her favorite sponge for bath time. In time, my daughter was less stressed, she started to understand what these things meant. She started blossoming, her personality started to shine through all her fear.

Major changes started happening. Through her physical therapist, we found ways to encourage her to move her body. Could you believe she can now hold her head up for longer periods of time and is now starting to roll! Her occupational therapist has taught me strategies to calm her, to prevent her from shutting down and how to stimulate her in a way that is fun for both of us. To see my little girl looking at objects, moving her arms to play with toys and grabbing at things is nothing short of a miracle to me and my family and it would not have been possible without her teacher showing me how to create an environment that is visually stimulating but not overbearing. To hear her 4 year old brother yell "She's doing it!!" fills my heart with more love and happiness than I could have ever imagined. They have given us a gift to truly know my daughter, to be able to communicate with her, to teach her, to challenge her.

"Happiness often sneaks in a door you did not think was open" - John Barrymore.