

Dear Sir,

Many thanks for the referral of Manuel, who was examined by us on 31.05, 19.06 and 22.06 2007. A provisional concluding appraisal interview took place on 25.06.07.

Diagnosis according to the MAK S

Axis I Asperger's syndrome (F84.5 according to ICD 10)

Axis II -

Axis III Anamnestic intelligence in upper average level (K-ABC of 11/02: SIF 111); above-average abilities in reading and understanding of texts and in non-verbal test procedures.

Axis IV Myopia (spectacles)

Axis V Chronic, significant stress in relation to school with repeated conflicts with pupils and teachers, with the result that Manuel has been schooled at home since August 2004 by his mother.

Axis VI Serious, continuous social impairments in several areas.

Past history:

Manuel is his mother's first child and he also has two half-brothers, born in 2001 and 2003, who are healthy. There is no more contact with his biological father. Manuel's stepfather works as a construction supervisor and his mother is a qualified Heim- und Jugendzieherin.

The pregnancy with Manuel was unproblematic, except for a urinary tract infection and he was born full-term with normal birth-weight and measurements, apgar values and NsApH. Manuel was able to turn at about 4 months, was sitting at 7 months and walking unassisted at 13 months. He said his first words very early at 7 to 8 months, by 10-12 months he was already saying 3 to five word sentences. At the age of about 3 ½ years Manuel was out of diapers during the day and night.

The earliest peculiarity was that he required a very uniform daily routine. He then started attending a mother-toddler group, where he was not able to engage with the other children and just sat alone. At the age of 4 years, he started attending preschool, where he also played alone and refused to participate in group activities. Otherwise his behaviour was not very conspicuous. He did not develop any friendships and could tell his mother the names of any children who should be invited to his birthday party.

He played with Lego and puzzles and also constructed complicated structures exactly according to the instructions, whereby he was able to understand the designs quite quickly. He looked at books and had a great deal of knowledge about holes in the ozone layer, using relatives who were academics as sources.

Manuel entered school in 2001. There were already difficulties with the preparations, as Manuel was not keen on going and did not adhere to the rules during the school-readiness medical examination. The situation at school was then very difficult, because Manuel was teased and „bullied“ and the teachers did not intervene soon enough or only learnt about the violations when it was too late.

In the early summer of 2004, the family moved to their present residence in Pleinfeld, and Manuel was registered at the primary school in Pleinfeld. There he attended the last few weeks of the 3rd grade and was in the 4th grade till October 4. Here, too, the school situation became ever more difficult for the boy, as well as for his teachers.

In his 3rd grade school report, Manuel is described as a boy with a good comprehension, a good memory and a rich general knowledge. It states that he was, however, not able to deal with criticism or integrate himself into the school community. He was restless and disturbed the lessons by making noises and leaving his desk, could not continuously attend to assignments and often refused to follow the teacher's instructions. He was not able to give reasons for his resistance. His mother described a situation where Manuel sat in front of the teacher, yowled and made grimaces while he rocked himself. He refused to go from one class to another or to take part in sports lessons. Sometimes the teachers had to carry him into the new classroom, in order not to leave him alone. When the situation escalated, on one occasion, and Manuel threw a pencil case through the air, he was brought home by the police and temporarily suspended from the school.

The mother reports, regarding everyday life, that Manuel has huge problems with regard to independence and self-organisation. Simple measures such as bodily hygiene require a high degree of instruction, help and checking, because Manuel either forgets the sequences or only goes through them reluctantly, because he doesn't like touching himself but also does not like to be touched by other people. Certain procedures, such as combing his hair, hair-drying or going to the toilet and brushing his teeth are either carried out incompletely or not at all without support. He manages to eat and drink without any problems, but has little interest in either of these and, according to his mother, would eat and drink considerably less if she did not regularly place it before him and instruct him to eat. On the other hand, he sometimes gets up at night and fetches himself something to eat.

When he is pressured for time, e.g. before going to school and during the morning routine, Manuel often falls into stereotyped or aggressive behaviour. The mother describes, in this regard, bloody scratches on his skin, (...?) his earlobes, making noises such as snarling, seesawing and stamping his feet, grimacing, turning his head, cracking his fingers. Manuel also sometimes has problems adhering to rules in the family. Thus, he ran away when his school rucksack was going to be sold or disappeared whilst at the zoo or at Legoland. Once he was brought home by the police, because he had climbed into a car with two drunken strangers, who were supposed to bring him to his grandmother, although he was not able to give her address.

Manuel can ride bicycles and scooters. He is still not able to swim. He did, however, participate in a foil fencing group, where he was the youngest and fastest fencer and even obtained a diploma. According to his mother, his unique gait with the left foot turned slightly outwards comes from the fencing position. Manuel walks in an unusual manner, because he cannot move his arms and legs in the opposite direction, as other children do, but swings them. At home, Manuel is particularly occupied with anything to do with computers. He is good at taking equipment apart and putting it back together again and repairing things and occupies himself with computer programs and games. He also enjoys playing boardgames, such as chess, by himself.

He places dead insects in spirits, to add them to his collection and breeds fish. He collects semi-precious stones and knows the all details of every kind of stone. He likes car-quartet cards and other card games. His favourite cards are Yugioh cards, which he keeps on him all the time, like a talisman.

He wants to be a computer specialist, game developer or game tester when he grows up. Educational tasks are „prepared“ for Manuel by his mother. In doing this, the tasks are clearly

structured and the instructions and goals must be stated as clearly as possible. In this manner, Manuel can solve problems from the 6th grade curriculum with no problem. He like doing mathematics, whereby he „conducts“ whilst solving the problems, i.e. he waves his hands in the air like a conductor, while he is solving the problems. The subjects must all be taught in the right order and the books must lie ready in the right order as well, or no lessons are possible.

Manuel does not have any friends, but there are children with whom he has common interests and spends time with, often quiet time, in which both children are occupied by themselves. The contacts with these children have to be organised by the family, as Manuel does not demonstrate any initiative in this regard.

Because of the difficulties, Manuel was examined on several occasions by school psychologists and child psychologists. Those conclusions in the reports that were made available to us indicate that he has good abilities. However, none of these documents give rise to a clear and/or comprehensible diagnosis. There were indirect hints at a hyperkinetic disturbance of social behaviour in the previous reports and play therapy was recommended. In one assessment by a psychotherapist, there was a guess at school phobia and a post-traumatic stress disturbance as a result of bullying.

Ultimately the mother got the idea that Manuel might be suffering from an autistic spectrum disorder after reading a novel in which a character with similar characteristics was thus described. She made contact with the Kompetenzzentrum Mittelfranken and read literature.

Since January 2006, Manuel has been under psychological care from (name withheld) in Schwabach.

Reason for appointment: Manuel has been brought here to clarify whether he has an autistic disorder

Medical and psychological findings:

Manuel comes willingly to the first appointment, but does not want to shake hands on being greeted. He constantly makes eye-contact briefly but does not maintain it. He sits in the manner of an adult on the chair with one leg crossed over the other and his hands folded or his arms crossed. His inner tension is clearly expressed through the manner in which he flips his thumbs against each other when his hands are folded. His speech is very peculiar: Manuel speaks in a very accented manner, sharply, hard, with contrast, with a hint of an indignant undertone, often in a questioning tone, even when he is not asking a question and in a sophisticated, precocious manner. Often he splits hairs in the conversation by correcting details of his mother's conversation. For example, he throws in „56 600“ when she says“there he stood alone in a city of 50 000 inhabitants“ or corrects me out loud when I pronounce the name of a dragonfly from his collection incorrectly. In the discussions concerning the textual tasks, he describes them as „falsely formulated“ and maintains that „they could be constructed in a more humane manner“.

Because, from our viewpoint, there were hints at an autistic disorder in the past history and in the initial observation, we carried out a specific diagnosis.

We decided not to conduct a diagnosis of his psychological abilities or a bodily examination, due to Manuel's hyper-sensibility in this regard. The results of the tests that had already been conducted in this regard were conclusive enough anyway.

The autism diagnosis observation scale ADOS provides data from the direct observation of behaviour and is a structured process for detecting communication, social interaction and behaviour during play of children who are thought to be suffering from an autistic disorder. It contains standardised tasks and activities, through which the occurrence or lack of certain forms of behaviour, which have proven relevant for the diagnosis of an autistic disturbance, can be observed. Individually, the areas of communication, two-way social interaction, fantasy play and creativity as well as stereotyped forms of behaviour and circumscribed interests are assessed.

Module 3 of the ADOS was conducted on 19.06.07 in the presence of the mother and recorded on video.

During the examination, Manuel appeared calm and willing, but demonstrated his defensiveness through his language. He came across as extremely „adult“, serious, arrogant and refusing to follow certain requests. His language appeared hard, sharp, cold and subliminally aggressive, almost like in a verbal struggle. When the person conducting the exam asked him at least to try out the play material in certain, sometimes funny, play tasks, Manuel initially refused verbally, saying things like „Theoretically we could clear everything away“, „and the rest is uninteresting“, „I would rather clear it all away“, „We already illustrated that the last time“, „All I will say is that it is not going to happen here“, „The kind of thing I like is not going to happen here in the next hundred years“.

Astonishingly, he participated in the introductory task really well, where he had to place shapes in a very simple pattern, something that was actually too easy for him. It was, however, a purely constructive task. The other tasks required more creative play, or consisted of pictures.

When he was waiting for the examiner to take her turn, he fixed her with a look that appeared cool and challenging, but he remained, however, buttoned up and demonstrated his tension by strongly flipping his thumbs together while his hands were folded. Only twice during one such a confrontation were tears visible in his eyes, but Manuel was able to get them under control. This made clear the kind of extreme tension Manuel was under. Only when he started talking about a „machine“ during the interview and the examining team made a guessing game out of it, did Manuel warm up a little and was able to lead them to a solution through very logical explanations. This was the only situation in which Manuel visibly displayed more interest and fun in a game.

His verbal expressions were often strung with phrases like „We’ll see“, „Let’s just say“, „oh well“. Although he displayed certain conventional and instrumental gestures, he did not display any descriptive ones. Tasks that required more gesticulation were consistently rejected by him.

He commented on a picture book with a funny, but fantastical story, „Totally unrealistic, and that’s why I am only leafing through it“.

Particularly noticeable was his inability to talk about feelings or describe them or give examples. He was neither able to talk about the difficult school situation nor report on personal relationships or activities with other children that were fun for him. To these he answered: „That is difficult to describe“, „No clue, I can’t see into their heads“. In these conversational situations he appeared otherwise very cooperative, earnest and honest.

In the **ANALYSIS** (2 assessors) Manuel is, in the area of communication as well as in the area of two-way social interaction, clearly over the borderline value for an autistic disorder.

The autism diagnosis interview ADI-R was conducted with the mother on 22.06.07.

This interview is conducted with the closest adult and is used to collect detailed descriptions of behaviours that are necessary for the differential diagnosis of autism. Additionally, details about the development in the first years and about other behaviours that are often present with autism are also requested.

Manuel was assessed as being well over the cut-off for an autistic disorder in the area – **qualitative disorders of reciprocal social interaction**- and, on top of this, in all sub-sections, incorporating inability to use non-verbal behaviour for regulating social interaction, inability to establish relationships with peers, lack of shared joy and lack of socio-emotional reciprocity.

In the area –Qualitative disorders of communication- Manuel was also far above borderline, also in all sub-sections, incorporating gestures and facial expressions, „do as if“ games and social imitation play, inability to begin a conversation or keep one going and repetitive or idiosyncratic use of language.

In the area - **repetitive, restrictive and stereotyped behaviour**- the mother reported somewhat unusual interests (ozone hol in preschool years, perpetuum mobile with cars, certain parts of machinery or toy cars) but also about fears and resistance at harmless transitions, e.g. a different route or in a certain process or daily routine. Unusual sensory interests were also reported, such as licking certain things (wall of the house, fence, people), or smelling materials (mostly natural ones such as, for instance a handful of earthworms), as well as a certain sensitivity to noise or sounds, which had improved.

In total, the interview as well as the observation in the free situation and in the test situation of the ADOS clearly indicate the picture of an autistic disorder.

Summary

Manuel has an autistic disorder of Asperger-type, which is clearly evident and affects the development of the boy to a high degree. This is a psychological handicap.

Manuel is of average intelligence and can express himself verbally very well. He is not capable of dealing with everyday life in a school in a group of peers. It is clear from the documents and descriptions of his schooling that the school was overwhelmed by the problems of the child and was not capable of providing opportunities for Manuel to learn in peace according to his abilities. This is not an accusation against the school, but describes what usually happens to children with this disorder and which is something that they suffer under to a great degree. Conversely, the teachers also suffer under these unpredictable children, whose reactions are unique and who are defending themselves and are often misinterpreted as having ill intentions. It is urgently recommended that the child have an education that is tailored to the boy and to his strengths, to develop Manuel in his abilities, so that he can, in the future, have the professional basis to get on in his working life. This could, for example, be possible through a controlled education at home and later, possibly, in a small, well-led group with a teacher who is suited to him and has experience with autistic children and with the assistance of a tutor or attendant. The protection of the boy from teasing or denigrating behaviour is very important. Children with Asperger's syndrome are very often the victims of aggressive violations and bullying, often on the way to or from school and often without the teachers noticing it or with them tolerating it. Manuel thus needs close and continual supervision as soon as he is outside the protected environment of his home.

Autistic people with Asperger's syndrome obtain their self-worth more from their intellectual abilities and less through social contacts. In spite of this, Manuel must, in the course of time

and with professional aid, i.e. therapists who are familiar with the difficulties of autistic people, learn the social rules, in particular, too, the unwritten rules of social cooperation, in order not to offend or annoy others. Furthermore, he should learn suitable strategies to help himself get out of very stressful situations, without affronting people.

We are available for further enquiry from the family or for consultation at any time.

Friendly Greetings

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