



The Path: Building Bonds Through Parent Child Interaction Therapy

Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) is a **parent coaching model for young children** with behavioral challenges. In PCIT, parents are taught specific skills to strengthen a nurturing and secure relationship with their child while teaching positive discipline and behavioral management techniques. The caregiver receives coaching and direct feedback from the clinician during session using an earpiece to aid in the development of effective parenting skills. PCIT is shown to avoid further involvement of the child and family in the behavioral health and other child serving systems.



This story highlights how PCIT helped a grandmother to learn effective skills and to grow a stronger bond with her grandson. Ms. Williams started caring for her grandson Sam* at birth. Having already raised four children, she felt confident that she could raise Sam just as she had her other children. Ms. Williams reports that she realized she needed help when she started to see behavioral issues including aggression and tantrums. Ms. Williams described feeling overwhelmed which led her to ask her pediatrician for help. She was then connected to PCIT at [Bethanna](#). The following is an interview with Ms. Williams about her experience with PCIT.

*Pseudonyms provided to minors to protect their identity.

EPIC: How did you get connected to PCIT?

Ms. Williams: After having already raised four kids, I thought of course I have this, there's nothing to this. You provide shelter, food, love. I wasn't quite prepared for the behavioral issues. I don't remember having these issues with my other children in this manner. Trying to deal with the daily tantrums he was having including being defiant and aggressive. He had poor social skills on the playground and in preschool. I decided due to my age (58) that I would reach out to the pediatrician for help. I talked to Dr. Cruz at Philadelphia FIGHT where Sam goes to the doctor and they gave me a PCIT pamphlet from CBH. I still have that pamphlet! I keep it in my "to-keep" box. On the back of the pamphlet was the address and phone number of Bethanna. I called the very next day to make an appointment. And that's how I got connected to PCIT.



Ms. Williams and Tina Thomas (PCIT Therapist).

EPIC: How were you motivated by the therapist to participate?

Ms. Williams: For me there was one word that was important and that word was PRIDE. Ms. Tina would keep reminding me of this word. I just focused on that. Pride stands for praise, reflect, imitate, describe and enjoy. Even when I doubted myself, Ms. Tina kept telling me "you got this, you got this." It was just wonderful. She was patient, kind and compassionate.

EPIC: What was your first impression

EPIC: What was different about PCIT for your child? As compared to other

or what did you think when you started the treatment?

Ms. Williams: I have to admit I was a little skeptical at first. I asked myself how is coming to therapy and playing with Sam going to correct his behavior problems? How is this going to stop his tantrums and defiance? I don't see this working but I was willing to try it because I needed help.

EPIC: What was your favorite part?

Ms. Williams:

Sam's favorite part was going to Bethanna because he knew we would have our special play time together. He loved to see Ms. Tina. He wanted to not only please me but also to please Ms. Tina. He grew to love her like I did. He was very sad when we graduated. Ms. Tina had to explain to him the whole process and that he had graduated and that he and I didn't need to see her anymore.

My favorite part of PCIT was how I learned that giving Sam 5-10 minutes a day of my undivided attention could have such a positive effect on our relationship and his behavior. It's important that he knows that I'm not just hearing him but I'm listening to him. We get so caught up in our daily tasks like shopping, homework, cleaning that we don't give complete answers to our children. That was the best thing because it helped strengthen our relationship. I learned parenting skills that promoted positive behaviors in him. The negative behavior reduced drastically. The play changed our lives. I couldn't believe that you could accomplish that much with PLAY. The stress of parenting is much lower now.



Artwork by Sam

EPIC: What is the story behind Sam's

treatment?

Ms. Williams: PCIT was our first try at working on the behavior. As a parent I was trying at home what I had done with my other four children. That was time-out or taking away his favorite thing from him but that wasn't working.

EPIC: What was the hardest part?

Ms. Williams: The hardest thing for me was learning to give direct commands to Sam. I would always start what should be a command with the word "would." Would you not do this? Would you put this down? And he wouldn't want to do that. Ms. Tina would tell me in the ear piece to give a direct command: "please put that away." For him when we switched from Child Directed Interaction (CDI) to Parent Directed Interaction (PDI) was the hardest part. That's where we saw the defiance and he would have tantrums and have to be put on time-out. I didn't want to see him cry. Ms. Tina would help me through his crying by saying "you have to follow through."

EPIC: What was the biggest change you saw in your child after PCIT?

Ms. Williams: He has no more tantrums and he is great at listening and minding when I give those direct commands. He wants to make sure he does what he is supposed to do and obeys the command because he wants to make sure that nothing interferes with his special play time with me. His social skills have improved at school and at home.

EPIC: What was the biggest change you saw in your parenting after PCIT?

Ms. Williams: Parenting is now less stressful. I have become a better parent for Sam now that we have gone through PCIT. I'm able to implement the behavior management skills that Ms. Tina taught me during PCIT and in doing so this has promoted such positive behavior in Sam because we practiced at home, on our way to and from school. The bond has strengthened. He loved me before but now we feel it more. He's a kid that loves to cuddle.

EPIC: What would you say to someone skeptical of PCIT?

Ms. Williams: I would say "try it" and if you put the time and energy into the whole concept of PCIT IT REALLY WORKS! Sometimes I sit with parents and nannies after school and I can't say enough about

artwork?

Ms. Williams: Sam had to read a book at school and one of his assignments was to draw a picture of a path that he would go down and what he would do on that path and he had to choose someone he had to take down the path with him. I said Sam who do you choose and he said, "I choose you because I don't want to go down this road without you." You know I must be doing something right because he doesn't want to go down the path without me. He actually drew a picture of us going down the path together.

PCIT. I referred one parent to PCIT. I was just talking to another parent last month and they are doing PCIT. I told her how well it worked for us. She said I hope it does the same for us.

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Special Thanks

Special thanks to Dr. Kamilah Jackson, Tina Thomas, Ms. Williams, Christine Nichols and Bethanna for their work in making this story possible. A special thanks is also extended to Caitlin Lobach for her assistance in making the family's referral to PCIT.

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