

Out Can Be In HANDBOOK



To begin with, it is important to emphasize that, just like an anthropological study of an unknown society, this is always a speculative exercise :

« Reconstructing what no longer exists, or even attempting to understand what is radically foreign to us, requires a considerable effort of imagination, often approaching literary creation »

- Martin Hébert,

« Ethno-fiction: the self as another » Solaris 134

What follows is therefore merely a point of view based on a lived experience with a resident of a Medicalized Reception Home (FAM). We have named him Paul (anonymity is an essential element of our approach), and his story aims to give voice to and speak as 'I,' an 'I' at the intersection of keen observation of this man and imagination.

Let's try to understand Paul, Lou, Suzy, Léo...
Let's try to enter their world.

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In Paul's WORLD

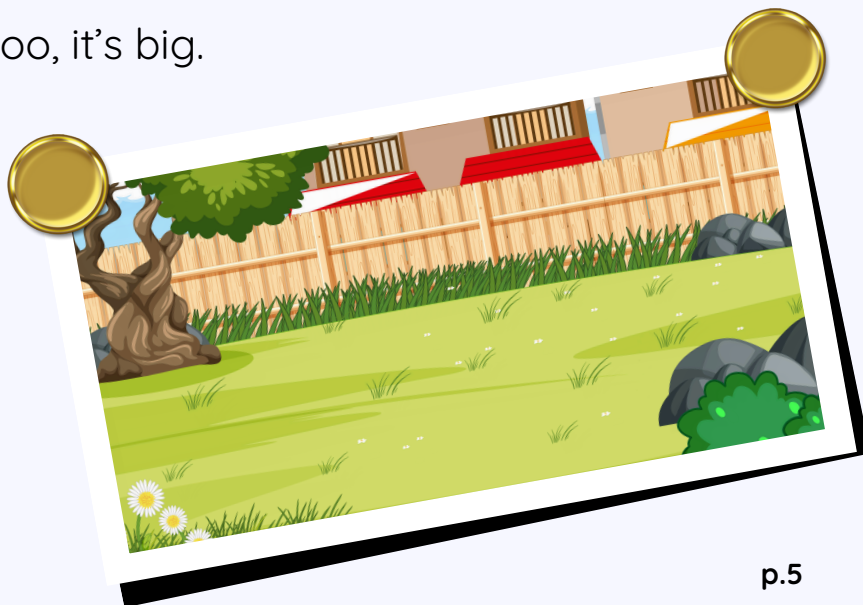


Here, this is my house.



It's big, my house.

And there's a garden too, it's big.



And then, there are people in my house, a lot of people.

There's Boris, Élodie, Germain, Jacques, André, Anne... and then others, but I've forgotten their names.



We each have our own room, alone.

It's nice, I like being alone.

I like to play, walk, look...

What's a bit annoying is that there's not a day without Alain... or Sophie...

or even Matthias,
Marie, and sometimes others, but I've forgotten their names,

coming to ask me to go to the dining hall to eat
when I don't want to eat,

to go to the activity room
when I've started my puzzle,

to go out
when I want to stay lying down,

to go to my appointment with the nurse,

the psychologist,

the psychomotrician

when I don't want to!



My house is nice, but what I don't like is that they always ask me to do something when what I want to do is exactly what I want, when I want...

Even the puzzle...

I love the puzzle!

It never ends. There's always a little piece to find! That's what I like: putting the pieces together... Sometimes it doesn't work, it gets stuck... often even, but when suddenly a little piece of cardboard, strangely cut, fits perfectly into the other, then... That's happiness!!

I love the puzzle!

But even the puzzle, if Alain asks me to take the puzzle when it's not the right moment, I refuse!

And if he insists, I can even get really angry!!

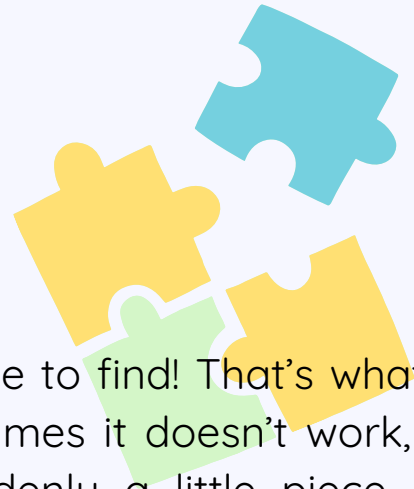
No, what I like is doing things when it's the right moment.

Some people think I don't talk, but that's not true! What does Sophie say again? ... She says I am... neoverbal, noperval... or something like that...

But in reality, I talk, a lot even, but others don't know because it's often in my room.

Because it's the moment!

When it's the moment, then I want to!



In my house, there are also people who come, people who pass by.

I like that, seeing new people I don't know. I walk around the garden, I see them from afar, I keep walking, walking, but I see them.

Sometimes, I have to do things with them... painting, dancing, music... lots of things.

Of course, when it's the right moment, I like it.

But if it's not the right moment, I stay here but do nothing, or I leave.

The annoying thing about the moment is that I never know when it's going to come.

One day, there were people singing.

The moment didn't come, I looked for it, but no, it wasn't there.

I heard them sing, even Jacques, Anne, and Boris, it was nice!

But I stayed outside, just watching them and then hearing them behind the door.



When Jacques, Anne, and Boris left, I went to get my puzzle because it was where they had been singing, and it was puzzle time.

The people passing by who were singing, not those from the house, the ones I didn't know, were there.

They were talking, talking, and I was trying to fit my puzzle pieces.

I heard the voices of the people passing by, they mixed with the echoes of Boris, Anne, and Jacques, it resonated in my head, it was nice, it was great!!

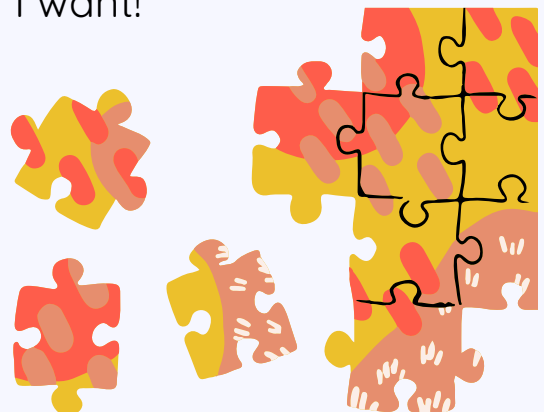
Suddenly, the moment came, I sang with Boris, Anne, and Jacques who were singing in my head.

It surprised those who were there, next to me.

They stopped talking for a moment, then they started again.

What surprised me was that a lot of pieces fit together on their own! It's nice when it's the moment!

What I like is doing what I want, when I want!



Analysis

Here are the key traits of Paul's personality :

- He is solitary
- He struggles with constraints*
- He prefers informal activities
- He is calm and gentle
- He is non-verbal**

* avoiding them at an inappropriate time for him carries risks, ranging from discomfort to anger or a crisis.

** although he sometimes uses speech, it is rarely in accordance with the situation.

What this allows us to understand about Paul :

- Imposing an activity on him when he refuses is not only ineffective, but can also have negative consequences (which is contrary to the objective of any activity undertaken in this setting).
- Group activities are not the most suitable for him.
- Planned activities represent a challenge.
- Paul prefers to **be** with the caregivers rather than engage in activities **with** them.

Better understanding Paul does not necessarily mean abandoning any idea of a regular group activity with him. It's more about adapting to Paul's rhythm, at least in the beginning, and being attentive to the emergence – albeit unpredictable – of opportune moments for him. Later, once a relationship of trust is established, it might – perhaps – be possible to gradually introduce Paul to an activity that initially didn't seem suited to him.

It seems that a “hovering” presence, without direct engagement and thus without expectation, alongside a temporal structure that aligns with Paul’s rhythm, would be much more coherent for him than a pre-established, rigid schedule.

This could even be a central element in Paul’s world.

Therefore, careful observation followed by a speculative study allows us to identify elements that can serve as a way to establish a meaningful relationship with Paul. This is, at least, one approach to explore, confirm or refute, and never to be turned into a fixed principle – which would become a constraint – but rather a possibility, among others, always fluid and dynamic.

In Surzy's WORLD



Suzy is a young woman of barely twenty. She lives alone with her mother.

Suzy likes to sing, her mother tells me, and she dreams of becoming a singer!



When Suzy arrives at the music workshop, she hesitates to cross the threshold. She prefers to start by staying in the hallway, which also allows her not to stray too far from her mother.

After long minutes of complete stillness, she steps slightly away from her mother and takes a step toward the door. But only her feet want to move forward; the rest of her body seems to be held back by an invisible – or perhaps imaginary – cable...



During the first session, we do not hear Suzy's voice. A brief exchange of glances and a single step forward are the only two signs Suzy gives us of her presence.

Yet, a few days later, her mother calls me again because Suzy wants to come back...

It will take several workshops before Suzy enters the room with the others.

A few more sessions will pass before she expresses her presence among us with a prolonged gaze.

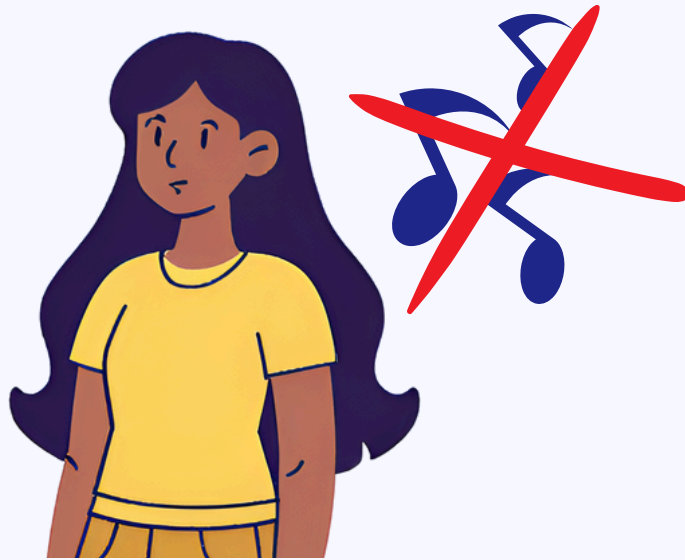
It takes even more time for her to “offer” us her voice, to allow herself to make sound with us.



What happened for her to finally accept opening her mouth and making sounds – and not just any sounds, because Suzy’s voice is soft and harmonious?

It seems the key is in a song...

One day, as usual, I asked Suzy to sing with us. Nothing in her behavior suggested any discomfort, yet her silence puzzled us, the facilitators.



I can say that it disturbed us, worried us, and even made us anxious.

We did our best to mask it, but it represented a difficulty. We shared an uncomfortable feeling of not being able to solve the enigma of Suzy and her silence.



It was probably a larger-than-usual amount of this emotion that momentarily overwhelmed me, so much so that it took over, and I had no other response than to sing. The process was so quick that there was no time for reflection.

Driven by an unknown impulse, I began to sing a Serbian song, which was most likely meant to soothe me, giving a sound body to my confusion, to my helplessness..



**This song is actually sung in several Slavic countries, but it was passed down to me as being Serbian.*

It is a love song that praises a tree rather than a loved one, thus adhering to the rules of conduct a young woman must follow to preserve her respectability.

This song was ultimately more directed at me than at Suzy.

Yet, this time, Suzy heard it.

Our gazes were magnetized throughout the song.

Suzy intensely locked her eyes on mine, without blinking.

Then she began to sway, gently...
To hum...

Gradually stretching the vowels I was elongating more and more...

Finally, she sang with me... This timeless moment marked the beginning of Suzy's voice joining our workshop.

Since then, Suzy sings, and she even speaks from time to time...



Analysis

Suzy lives alone with her mother.

For several years, her outside activities, especially group activities, have been reduced to a strict minimum. Therefore, the workshop is a source of anxiety for her, as it involves integrating into an already-formed group (composed only of people with ASD).

I do not know whether it was her request or her mother's, but from the first contact, Suzy showed no refusal. Her attitude demonstrated difficulty in integrating the group but not opposition.

Therefore, the approach here is:

- To give **as much** importance to what her non-verbal communication – her body, her movements – conveys as to what she does not say.
- To be attentive to every detail. The smallest things can hold so much!

Once these prerequisites were established, things were relatively simple in Suzy's case since she was willing to return. From that point, the only things we needed to do were to find a balance between respecting her timing, offering regular but not overly insistent invitations, and most importantly, to accept Suzy as she was, with her progress and her silence.

This silence had its place among us. The challenge was to give it a place without allowing it to overflow.

The danger would have been that the silence would impose itself and take over the entire space – both ours and Suzy's.

Perhaps this is the very danger of the silence that I felt when I began to sing, which became the “last chance,” even though I was unaware of it at the time.

Perhaps it was the “urgency” to end this silence that manifested with such force that it turned into song – a song that became a bridge for Suzy.

This is how I like to understand this exceptional and groundbreaking moment!

In Lou's WORLD



Lou is an adult woman. It is difficult to determine her age.

Her gait, her voice, and her overall demeanor are those of a little girl, but her face and white hair belong to a mature woman.

Lou arrives at the workshop very enthusiastic.

She is happy because she likes singing and especially dancing, she says.



Lou expresses her joy by clowning around, which greatly amuses the other participants who know her well since they share the same medicalized reception facility.



Lou has a specialty: she imitates animal sounds perfectly!

The precision with which she engages in this game is impressive. Without even realizing it, she uses a highly skilled vocal technique to produce these sounds.



We are all quite impressed by the animal concert Lou gives us, which makes her very proud!

She effortlessly switches from one sound to another, sometimes punctuating her interjections with loud bursts of laughter.

Lou has fun,
Lou plays,
Lou laughs,
Lou cries... but Lou also takes up a lot of space,

so much so that there is little room left for others.



Their first reaction – the shared excitement – quickly gives way to their withdrawal, as they are no longer surprised by Lou's unique abilities.

We try as much as possible to engage the other group members, but this is much more complicated than it seems because, on the one hand, Lou is not at all willing to stop her vocal explorations.

To divert attention, the only solution is to radically change activities.

We suggest dancing to a song we know they like, as the educator had previously shared a playlist with us.

Fatigue seems to take hold of the entire group, including Lou, who suddenly becomes distant, her gaze lost in space.

Nevertheless, we invite each person to stand up, take their hands, and begin a duet dance.



A few minutes with one, then with another...

Gradually, the bodies start moving again.

Everyone adds their own little choreography, and smiles begin to appear once more.

But we feel that the energy is no longer there. So, we shorten the activity and move on to a rest period, an opportunity to drink, nibble on a cookie, and chat with the participants, the educator, and among ourselves.



We decide to end the session with a two-voice song, which we dedicate to each of them, eye to eye.

Calm returns, and the activity ends. "When are we coming back?" asks Damien, who has stayed on the sidelines throughout the session...

Analysis

Emotions

Lou is immediately very enthusiastic.

Such pronounced emotional expressions always require particular attention.

Indeed, emotions are a source of fatigue. Fatigue is an important factor that impacts the management of emotions.

Regulating emotions is often a difficulty for people with ASD. The influx of sensations can lead to overwhelm. This is what happened to Lou.

Caught up in her pleasure of playing with her voice, coupled with the effects it had on the group, her emotions took over, much like her occupation of space. The group itself was overwhelmed.

The other participants gradually disengaged. It was urgent to find an exit strategy for everyone, including Lou. The immense fatigue that then took over her was a sign that a crisis was not far off.

Adapting Objectives to the Situation

For us, it was important to guide the group toward a calm ending to the workshop, which was a different objective from the one we had prepared for the session, but one that became necessary during the process.

While it's important to maintain long-term learning objectives, it's even more essential to know when to step back from them if the situation requires it.

The onset of a crisis can be decisive and may call for ending the workshop. The central goal, in this case, became de-escalating tension, restoring a calm atmosphere, and re-engaging everyone.

This goal was achieved by:

- Completely changing the activity to dancing
- Introducing a quiet, informal time
- Focusing on receptivity through listening rather than physical action

Building on Participants' Proposals

Lou did, however, offer a highly engaging vocal game, which was then developed in subsequent workshop sessions.

Lou was no longer the only one producing sounds, and she better managed her enjoyment of playing with her voice, while others successfully joined in.

Several sessions later, Lou even became the leader of this type of game. The pride she felt was evident, but it did not lead to emotional outbursts.

Lou's story highlights the delicate balance on which a workshop with people with ASD rests.

We are truly walking a tightrope – the scenario of a session can change very quickly. Like an acrobat, one must have the ability to restore a potentially delicate situation in a few minutes, even when nothing beforehand suggested it would occur.

The ability to adapt quickly and a sensitive, fine-tuned listening to events are two qualities that must be developed when working with people with ASD.

In Leo's WORLD



My mom often says that I'm very anxious.

I'm not really sure what that means...

What I know is that I'm often scared.

It makes me shake inside, I feel hot and cold at the same time.

It happens a lot:

- when I don't recognize anything around me,
- when people shout at me – they often talk too loudly!

Why do they talk so loudly?



when there's too much noise – there's always too much noise! –
and when things move too fast, too fast around me – it makes
me dizzy, I don't know how to stop all that!

And then, the questions... I'm scared of questions.

People keep asking questions, they look at me for a long time,
and they start again...

I don't know if I should do something, so I do nothing...

It's a strange habit...

It annoys me!



One day, mom took me to a big room.
There were people I didn't know.

A big boy who shouted loudly, a girl who kept walking around,
and two women.

Mom told me that they were nice and that we were going to
make music and sing.

It's true that I like music, I like singing too...

But there are too many people here, and I don't know anyone...

I'm scared!



Mom stays with me.
We sit in a corner.

I look around...

I don't know, but it looks a bit like school.
I like the music I hear.
I want to go with them, but I'm too scared to move.

I see something I like!
It's made of wood, there are black and white keys.

I saw this in The Aristocats!

The cats walked on it, and it sounded pretty.

I want to try it!



I'm there!

I go up and down on the black and white keys, like the cats,
without stopping...

I like it!



One of the two ladies who's singing is next to me. She says something to me, but I don't want to listen, or even look at her!

I don't know her!

I want to keep going up and down on the black and white keys, that's all!

Since she keeps talking, I run back to find mom and sit next to her.



Analysis

Fear

Like many people with ASD, Léo is overwhelmed by a sense of fear whenever he is confronted with a new situation. An unfamiliar environment, overwhelming sensory input, or simultaneous overload of information are just a few examples of what can generate anxiety and distress.

The risk of a crisis is high in such situations. For Léo, this manifests as a retreat into himself, almost like a state of freeze. This is his way of protecting himself, his way of disappearing.

It is useless to try to engage him during this time; on the contrary, it's important to respect his defense mechanisms. Léo needs to find anchors in details that remind him of a familiar situation (in this case, the room that looks a bit like a classroom).

Observation becomes a key step in understanding. It is important to note that this can be done even without visual contact. Léo has poor vision, so he doesn't observe with his eyes – in fact, this is common even for people without vision problems – but with other senses. He needs to feel the environment as a whole to begin interacting with it.

Specific Interests

It was the piano that caught Léo's attention. An object is often easier to access than a person. Indeed, a person's face constantly changes expression, their voice carries both verbal and non-verbal information, which is often indecipherable for someone with ASD, and their body carries smells, etc.

These are all separate elements that get processed individually and therefore overwhelm the person. This is why using objects as intermediaries can be extremely helpful. In Léo's case – and this is common in music workshops – he himself chose the object.

The challenge is to find the gap to weave a connection. Every specific interest can turn into a confining ritual, each repetition locking him into it a little more. In Léo's case, the solution we found was to engage with the game he initiated, but to do it quickly. Since what Léo enjoys is traveling up and down the keyboard, we started by doing the opposite route, creating "traffic jams" on the keyboard.

At first, Léo ignored us, simply bypassing the foreign hand. Later, he accepted the physical contact, interrupting his action and forcing him to find strategies to either multiply these encounters or avoid them altogether. This is how our relationship gradually formed.

Making Contact

It is essential to try in every possible way to make contact. Neurotypical people are used to visual contact, but this is often disturbing for someone with ASD for the reasons mentioned earlier.

Therefore, we need to learn to broaden our field of possibilities and be attentive to what the situation offers. Every detail, no matter how subtle, can potentially be used. With patience and vigilance, we can gather information and turn it into a proposal, a hand extended.

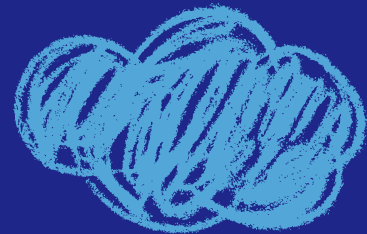
If it's not taken, no matter; we've tried. If our desire to meet the person in front of us is great, we will inevitably find a solution to make the door open, and the extended hand will finally be accepted!

The next two stories, written from the perspective of the facilitators, focus on a different viewpoint. This time, the shared focus is not on successes, but rather on the doubts, vulnerabilities, and moments when things didn't work out. Sometimes, these vulnerabilities and fragilities can become the meeting point with people with ASD. These moments are also what they teach us – they are not shameful and therefore don't need to be hidden. This process makes us all human beings on a journey, enriching ourselves through our "failures," learning to recognize what works and what doesn't, or at least what works less well. Shifting the focus places the human adventure at the heart of the action. And suddenly, the trophies lose their shine... We leave it to you to make your own analyses, using the previous four stories as a guide.

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One Day Yes,
One Day No...



I arrive in front of this new group—children aged 3 to 10, some with ASD, others without—feeling confident.

I have been leading these kinds of music workshops for years, with very different people. I've prepared the session while leaving room for flexibility, so I can embrace the suggestions that come from the children themselves.

We've worked thoroughly on the 8-week project with the team of educators, who are enthusiastic. All the circumstances are set for the session to go well.

Yet, from the moment I arrive, I feel that the situation is not as ideal as it seemed.

The children are scattered, they don't want to stop their activities to do music, and they're not keen on welcoming a new person.



Those who do pay attention express their displeasure, while the others ignore me completely.



After about ten minutes, the educators manage to gather the younger children in the reception room, and the activity finally begins.

A bit disoriented, I quickly introduce myself because I sense the group's energy is fragile and could fall apart at any moment.

I suggest a name game that usually works very well, but it's a total disaster!

Most of the children don't participate—some are silent, others turn their backs, and a few, lying on the floor, prefer playing dead worms to engaging with my suggestion...

One of the educators raises their voice and begins scolding the children.



However, this effort is ineffective and doesn't last more than a minute. The children slip through our fingers—impossible to capture even one!

I try everything: I sing a song, propose vocal games, body games, rhythmic games, listening games... Nothing works.

After about twenty minutes, exhausted, the educators and I decide to stop the activity. The relief expressed by the children, far from improving my state, only intensifies my growing discomfort.

I think it will surely be different with the older children...

But, on the contrary, it was worse!

The activity was not only poorly received, but three of them had to be excluded for violent behavior toward their peers!

By the time I leave, one of the older children even tried to strangle a younger one... But apparently, "music soothes the soul!"

It was the first time I couldn't find a single positive aspect of the workshop! I had to accept that it was a failure—that I couldn't carry out any of the planned activities and hadn't improved the morning, which was clearly a "bad day."

The educators didn't blame me, but—was it my own guilt or reality?—I could feel their disappointment.



I suggested that we organize a crisis meeting to try to salvage the situation.



A few days later, we met as professionals to review the workshop and, most importantly, try to reorient our goals.

The first point raised helped ease the sense of guilt shared by the team. We didn't have to take full responsibility, as the day had been difficult.

The children weren't in good form.

Fatigue and bad moods spread like wildfire, overtaking the entire group, and we weren't spared. It's rare for things to go so badly across the board, but it does happen!

The fact that we articulated this and verbalized it helped us all relax. We now recognized that we had aimed too high and needed to review our objectives—not by lowering them, but by adjusting them to the reality of the group.

We revisited the project, going back to when it was first planned, and listed what we hoped to accomplish with the children.

That's when we realized that at no point had we explained the project to the children!

Gradually, we could identify all the missed opportunities, caught up in the rush to "do" and "produce." The meeting was short but very productive.

With the anxiety over our failure more manageable, we were able to identify areas for improvement without guilt.



The next workshop was radically different.

All the children engaged with us, each in their own way, and small "miracles" even occurred, like Capucine, the 4-year-old girl, who broke the silence she had been in since arriving at the facility..



We valued this gift for what it was, but didn't forget that just a week before, we had been holding back tears of frustration, feeling like we had failed completely.

Analysis

This is yours! Just like in our previous analyses of the stories, now you will analyze this story yourself.

When the Encounter Doesn't Happen



He refuses to look at me, hides behind his father's legs, covers his ears when I speak to him, and screams when I sing.

Marius clearly shows his opposition.



The father doesn't understand: "Marius loves music so much! He was really looking forward to coming... Well, it's true, not this morning... But just yesterday evening, when I told him we were coming to see you, he was clapping his hands and laughing..."

Without pretending to be calm, because I feel perfectly serene, I explain gently that this happens regularly.

Marius might have been so eager to come that this morning, the emotion became overwhelming for him.

But maybe there's another reason.

It's best to give him time, to take note of his refusal without dramatizing it.

As Marius grows increasingly nervous, even during our conversation, we decide to end the session and try again the following week.

The situation isn't pleasant, but it's frequent enough that I don't feel deeply worried.

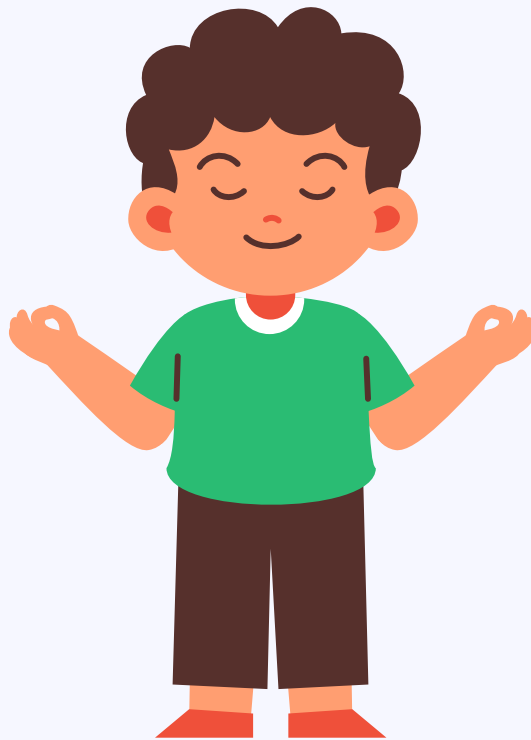
I feel ready to welcome Marius, to walk with him, one small step at a time, until I find the right opening where I can connect with him and create space between us.



The following week, Marius doesn't want to leave his father's arms.

Every attempt to put him down on the floor is met with loud, high-pitched screams.

I reassure the father, telling him we just need to keep trying.



By the third week, Marius is calmer.

He holds his father's hand.

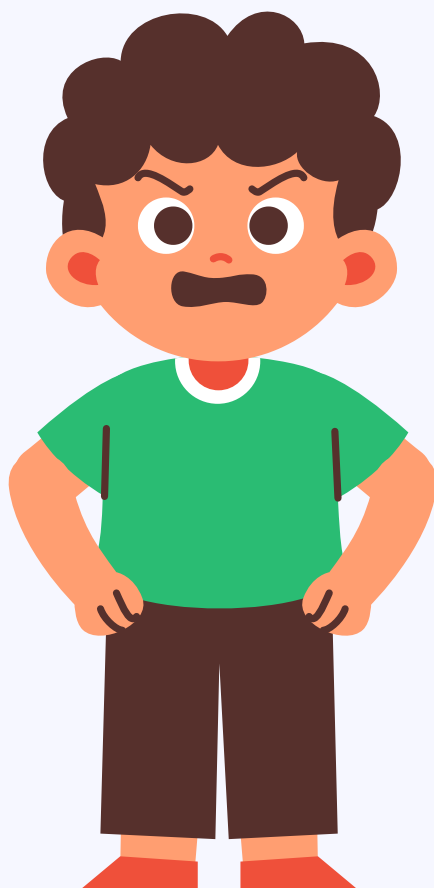
After several minutes, he lets go of his father's hand, and after a while, he approaches a box filled with percussion instruments. His father and I stop talking.

We exchange a knowing glance and share a smile of satisfaction: we've succeeded!

The father gestures toward the door, and I understand he's going to slip away quietly. I nod, too busy to follow Marius, indicating I've understood.

With gentleness, I approach Marius, who is completely absorbed in the instruments. I take a maraca in my hand and enter his line of sight. Without turning his head towards me, Marius violently pushes my hand away.

After a few moments, I ask if I can play with him, but all I get in response is a loud, unmistakable cry that expresses a firm "no."



I remain silent next to him, but little by little, even my presence seems to bother him.

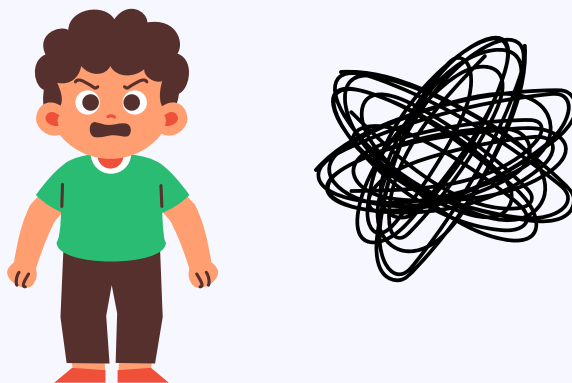
He pushes me harder and harder, until I have to abandon the instruments.

I softly tell him that I understand, that I'm going to step away, and that he doesn't need to worry anymore. I remind him that I'll stay close, and if he wants me to approach, all he has to do is look at me.

It's then that Marius realizes:
his father?

Where is his father?

He leaps up, knocking over the instrument box, searching the room with his eyes, but he can't find his father.



Marius suddenly bursts into a fit of rage, mixed with terrible anxiety. He screams louder, runs around in all directions, hits himself, bangs his fists on the walls...

I try to manage him so that he doesn't hurt himself or another child.

The father, who must have been near the door, reappears very quickly. It must have been no more than two or three minutes between the moment Marius noticed his father was missing and his return—but, I have to admit, for both him and me, the time seemed to stretch on forever.

The father fails to calm him, and he has to leave, struggling to contain Marius.

Amid the screaming, I tell the father that I will call him the next day.

This time, I am not optimistic, and I sense that I won't see Marius again.



He feels betrayed, and how can I not understand that?

His father shouldn't have left, and I shouldn't have let him go without warning Marius.

The next day, I call the father, but he doesn't answer. I leave a message, but it goes unanswered.

I try two more times, but the scenario remains the same.

The encounter with Marius never took place. It happens, but I can't tell myself that I'm blameless either.

Some encounters just don't happen, but in this case, the mistake was critical.



In my final message, I tell Marius' father that just because it didn't work with me, it doesn't mean it won't work with someone else.

Analysis

This is yours! Just like in our previous analyses of the stories, now you will analyze this story yourself.

