Today’s piece was prepared by Jennie Collins, MD, based on a story featured in the Canadian news magazine, Macleans, entitled, “Boy Genius”.

<http://www2.macleans.ca/2013/09/01/jacob-barnett-boy-genius/>

The story discusses a 15-year-old diagnosed with severe autism as a toddler described in the blog now to be “one of the world’s most promising physicists.” Amidst intensive specialized standard therapy services directed to autism, his mother discontinued these services at age 3 ½ years, opting instead to work with him herself according to her “philosophy of muchness,” providing him with opportunities to “explore the world and do the things he loved,” even if his chosen activity or behavior seemed abnormal to others. The story informs that her son ultimately excelled academically, auditing university courses at age 8 and leaving elementary school to attend university fulltime at age 11. This year he was accepted into a competitive master’s-level program in theoretical physics, and his mother recently published an international bestseller entitled “The Spark: A Mother’s Story of Nurturing Genius.”

Though the narrative of the article is compelling, the journalist’s treatment of autism through the telling of this adolescent’s story is through the subjective eyes of his mother rather than through objective, validated data, and conclusions drawn may mislead. For example, autism as a spectrum is neglected, important functional features such as social/communication difficulties are only briefly or indirectly mentioned, and there is no discussion of common comorbidities such as intellectual disability. Most important, there is confusion between *association* and *causality*. The author’s narrative style implies an adversarial relationship between families and healthcare providers. For example, mother “broke a bunch of rules” and emphasizes encouraging children’s interests as a “rallying cry.” Parent opinions may differ from those of providers, and clinicians can empower families by communicating with respect and sensitivity and by sharing evidence-based sources of information.

**AUTISM RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES:**

Association for Science in Autism Treatment <http://asatonline.org/> *Provides brief summaries on the evidence basis behind popular treatment approaches that may or may not have yet undergone rigorous well-designed research*

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention *Autism Spectrum Disorders* *consumer information*

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/index.html>

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!