

A Playdate at Legoland

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Dr. Oliver Saks has set up a playdate for me and this girl named Heidi. She is eight years old. I am nine years old. We are meeting at Legoland. I really like building with legos.

I wonder if Heidi likes Legos as much as I do. Mr. Saks says that Heidi has this disease called William's Syndrome. I don't really know what that means, but I know she is only one year younger than me. We are finally at Legoland! These Legos are so tall! There are people, dragons, and entire castles made out of legos bigger than me! I could build them. The dragon needs many layers of red, orange, yellow, and black legos. I need about five hundred thousand legos to build that, but I could build it.

Josh is a nine year old boy with autism. This obsession with legos and the preciseness of the number of legos he would need to complete the structure are characteristics of his illness.

A girl is walking up to us now. She must be Heidi. Her face looks different than mine. Her nose angles up, and her mouth is different from mine. She hasn't even gotten close to me, and she's already introducing herself. Why is she doing that? Maybe I'll just talk to her about legos. I can talk about legos. Legos are easy to talk about.

Heidi is an eight year old little girl with William's Syndrome. Her illness is characterized by being overly friendly. One may call her a sociable adult in a child's body.

Why is she being so friendly? Should I be talking as much as she is? Well at least she seems to be interested in talking about legos with me. Dr. Saks says he is taking us to a special room where Heidi and I can play with the legos and build whatever we want! I can't wait to start building with legos. I'm really good at building with legos. I can build anything with legos. When you build with legos you just need to know the colors you need to use and the number of legos you need. The number of legos you need to build that exact structure will never change. It will always stay the same. This room is awesome! Large bins filled with legos of every different color line the walls! There are instructions that tell you how to build certain things. I think I could build a dragon just like the one we saw on the way in.

What is Heidi doing? She isn't playing with the legos right. She isn't putting them together like the picture. The blues are completely disconnected from the reds. Heidi isn't even using the right number of the legos. Maybe if I show her how to do it she'll get it right. Legos are easy.

Josh seems to have noticed another key characteristic of William's Syndrome. Although he may not know it, people suffering from William's Syndrome have difficulty with spatial problems. Heidi is struggling to put together a correct structure because she is not aware of its location in space.

She just needs to be shown how it's done. Here, this should go here and this needs to wait until the top. Why does she keep looking away while I'm teaching her? Is Heidi even listening to what I'm saying? She needs twelve more legos to be able to build this. There, she seems to be getting it.

Yet again, a characteristic of William's Syndrome has been

revealed. Heidi does not seem to be listening to Josh because she is having trouble focusing as many people with William's Syndrome often do.

Heidi hasn't stopped talking since we met. I don't know what to say to her. I try to tell her more about legos as we build, but I can't keep up with her constant talking. Maybe she likes talking as much as I like legos. That would make sense to me. Legos are a lot of fun. Heidi must think that talking is a lot of fun. She seems to know a lot of words.

No! She's doing it again! I told her not to mix the red legos with the blue legos. I taught her how to make it, but she is still doing it wrong. She shouldn't play with legos. People who don't know how to play with legos shouldn't play with legos. Legos are easy. Legos should only be used to make perfect buildings or other things. I need to stop her. I need to take her terrible structure apart. She seems scared now that I'm tearing her "building" apart and throwing the pieces around the room. She doesn't understand. No one understands. Legos are fun. Legos need structure. Legos should always be the same. Legos are easy to control.

Josh has shown a characteristic of his own illness. Heidi still continuing to not build with the legos in the "correct" way that he described has triggered him to become angry. In a fit of rage, Josh has torn Heidi's building into bits. He is frustrated with her lack of understanding of how to properly place the legos. It seems that Josh has been successfully calmed down. He is rejoining Heidi in the building room.

I feel bad for yelling at Heidi. Mom says that Heidi cannot build with legos well because of her William's Syndrome. I understand that. There are some things I can't do because of my Autism, but Mom says that is what makes me special. I wonder what Heidi's favorite subject in school is. I think I'm going to ask her. She says her favorite subject is English. I don't like English too much. Heidi says she likes the words. Heidi keeps talking about words and how to use them the right way. I tell her that my favorite subject is math. Heidi says that she isn't that good with numbers, but she is really excited about the new calculator she got! We have something in common. I just got a new calculator too. She is talking about her calculator now. It seems like she never stops talking. She says a lot of words I don't understand. They are too big for me.

Both William's Syndrome and Autism have been characterised in this situation. It makes sense that Heidi would like English because of her large vocabulary and great usage of words. However, due to her illness, Heidi struggles with mathematical problems and numbers. On the other hand, Josh has shown great strength in the field of mathematics. Unfortunately, many things Heidi says are not understood by Josh because he struggles with speech due to his Autism.

There is a baby crying. I don't like loud noises. It hurts my ears. Heidi is covering her ears too. She doesn't like loud noises either. Dr. Saks is saying that it is time for us to go now and that Heidi and I need to say goodbye to each other. Heidi is really nice. She gives me a hug right away. Heidi and I have stuff in common. Heidi and I don't like the same things about school. I'm really good at building with legos but she isn't. She likes to talk. I don't like to talk. We both have things that make us different. We both don't like loud noises and like calculators. Maybe we aren't that different from each other after all.

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