



# An Empowered Parent Gives Thanks for [HOME EDITION] Camp

When we first started the journey with Luke it seemed like it was appointment after appointment just hearing over and over again what Luke “has”, what Luke is diagnosed with. I remember just trying to wrap my brain around words like “delay”, “disorder”, “disability”. Once we had this information I spent the better part of a year trying to figure out what to do. We had him in all of the therapies. I just still felt so inadequate to parent him through this journey. I was constantly asking myself “how do I help him through this episode?” “Do I push him through it?” “Do I do it for him?” I would ask his doctors. “How do I help him ?” And they would give me generic answers that would leave me with even more questions.

We started music therapy and I immediately saw how effective it was for Luke. We LOVED it. It definitely began to fill a need for Luke, but I was still searching for help for me. I needed someone to give me real time advice with how to help Luke navigate through some of his tough moments.

I first heard about the “Can Do Camp” from Luke’s music therapist. To be honest, my first thought was - “something for Luke to go do this summer and I can just drop him off- where do I sign him up!” However, with the pandemic, they had to do things a little differently.

The first week of camp, we had a coach come to our house to help us with all of the activities. I was so glad this was an option, because I was scared to death to have to be the one that leads this camp with Luke. I kept thinking “oh my goodness, these people are going to see that I have no idea what I am doing with my own son”. Sure enough, five minutes through the first activity, Luke begins to shut down. I held my breath waiting for someone to call me out.

Instead, what I received was love and support. Love and support - not only from the therapists but also other parents. I would have a therapist give me real time advice and things to try. I would get messages from parents encouraging me. The therapists would see what Luke was doing and immediately give me suggestions on things to try. Each day, there was a time for just the parents. The information that was presented during those parent times was exactly what I had been seeking since the beginning of this journey. I learned the why and the

how to many of Luke's struggles. It was such a safe and supportive group of people, that I never hesitated to ask questions and open up about Luke's struggles and my insecurities. I received the most amazing feedback. I received practical tips and tricks from the therapists and other parents. I received so much love and support from everyone.

I went from feeling inadequate and insecure to be Luke's Momma, to feeling encouraged, and more importantly, I felt empowered to walk with Luke on this journey.

Now let me tell you what this camp did for Luke! He was encouraged to not say "I can't do that" to "I can". I watched him transform throughout the summer. I watched him grow in confidence in himself. He had so much fun. We made crafts, played games, sang songs and so much more. We had so much fun with our coach that came to our house. She was so patient and kind to Luke (and all of us). Luke's sisters were able to participate too and his older sister even made the comment "I love knowing how to help my brother".

The Can Do camp will forever be close to my heart because it was at that camp where I began to understand that it's not about Luke's "delays" and "disabilities" (that's all we focus on with doctors). Instead, I learned all that Luke can do. I saw Luke overcome obstacles. I watched him work through fears. I watched my sweet little boy play games and do experiments and create beautiful crafts all with a smile on his face and full of confidence. I was able for the very first time on this journey to soak up all the things Luke Can Do and at the same time I was able to get feedback and suggestions and tips and tricks to equip me to help Luke through his struggles.

I have had several family members, friends, teachers and even his other therapists talk about how Luke has grown in confidence and how he seems like a different kid. I personally watched Luke navigate the fears of the first day of Kindergarten by utilizing tips he had learned at this camp and at his music therapy. I was able to navigate Luke's IEP meeting. And let me just say, I rocked it! I walked in there feeling so empowered. I had received such helpful advice from other parents at the camp and from the therapists too. The first thing I said to everyone in the room was "I understand we have to discuss Luke's delays and disabilities, but we will also be taking the time to talk about all that Luke CAN DO." I felt like I was heard and that is because of the confidence I gained at the Can Do Camp.

I pray we get to experience this camp again and again, but if not, I will forever be grateful for the Can Do Camp of 2020. It will forever be the summer where I was empowered to be Luke's Momma and I want to thank every single person that worked with Luke and me. Each one of the therapists have such a passion and a heart to serve and it blessed us more than I will ever

be able to put into words.

Thank you, thank you, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Carolyn Wallace  
Luke's Momma.