



CHANGING MINDS

It took time for Tyler's parents Shana and James (left) and siblings Adam and Caitlin (above) to adjust to his autism. They're now hoping to spread awareness of the disorder with the Sexy Backs campaign.

WEEKLY PEOPLE

FIGHTING BACK

FOR AUTISM

Photographer James Price is bringing sexy back in support of his son Tyler

When people turn their backs on little Tyler Price because of his autism, it's not a bad thing. They've volunteered to bare their backs and be snapped

by Tyler's photographer dad, James, to highlight the heartbreaking condition.

For four years, James (36) and Tyler's mum Shana (31) struggled with Tyler's

tantrums, difficult behaviour and inability to cope with change. They were told his delayed speech development and lack of social skills were nothing to worry about. But when Tyler was still struggling with words at the age of four, a pediatrician finally made the diagnosis.

Adjusting to Tyler's needs hasn't been easy for James and Shana, and their two other children, Caitlin (11) and Adam (9).

But they're learning to cope better each day and the Sexy Backs campaign, also called I Am Me, is the family's way of helping other people to accept autism.

More than 100 people have offered to bare their backs and so far James has photographed 16 of them. The stunning results can be viewed on James' website (www.jamesprice.co.nz/iamme).

"Sexy Backs is about not turning your

back on others," says James. Shana adds, "We're not just looking for sexy backs – we're saying everybody has a sexy back!"

James came up with the idea in response to a lack of public knowledge about autism. "A mate said to me, 'I'm sorry, but I don't know anything about autism,' and before Tyler was diagnosed, I didn't know anything about it either," James explains.

Looking back, the couple can see that Tyler showed obvious signs. "But we just thought he was headstrong," says Shana. "Now we know he has autism, we can see why he finds eye contact hard and doesn't always like to be cuddled. We get lovely cuddles, but only when he decides."

Tyler is five-and-a-half now and has made such good progress in his speech and social skills at crèche that he's starting school on a part-time trial basis this week.

Tyler's diagnosis helped James realise that he too was born with an autism spectrum disorder – a milder kind called Asperger's syndrome. "I had difficulties with eye contact and change too," he says.

For now, James is working on his photos. He hopes they'll help more people to see things from a different angle.

Vicky Tyler

PHOTOS: KIRSTY HEAD

James' wife Shana (right) was one of the first to back the campaign

