



Think Together Times

A Quarterly Newsletter

WHAT'S NEW?

We are excited to announce several new programs and updates to support our diverse community.

Our new Teen Club offers a safe space for teens to connect, build friendships, and participate in various activities, promoting social skills and personal growth—every Tuesday from 5:00 to 6:30 PM.

The Sibling Workshop supports siblings of neurodivergent individuals by providing a space to share experiences, express feelings, and learn coping strategies.

Our Equity in Education Workshop is available to schools and individuals, focusing on inclusive teaching practices and strategies to support diverse learning needs. Contact us to learn more!



We're excited to welcome Shaima Ali as our new Operations Manager!

Shaima is here to support our clinical team and ensure we're living up to our mission of providing high-quality, evidence-based services to our community. She'll be working behind the scenes to ensure things are running smoothly for everyone—whether it's helping families feel supported or making sure our team has everything they need to focus on our clients and families.

Shaima's background in managing teams, processes, and resources will be a big help in keeping THINK organized and efficient so that we can continue to grow and do better every day.

Please join us in giving Shaima a warm welcome—she's here to make sure we're all at our best for the families we care about most!

UPCOMING EVENTS

- FREE Arabic Virtual Parent Support Group: Every Monday at 4:00 PM via Zoom
- Teen Club: Every Tuesday from 5:00 PM to 6:30 PM
- Sibling Workshop: January 25th 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM at Britus Special Education School
- Think's Got Talent: February 15th 2:00 PM to 6:00 PM
- Youth Club: Every Sunday 4:00 PM-5:00 PM

Join us in these exciting initiatives and help create a more inclusive community. Stay tuned for more updates from Think!



Our team conducted a workshop on Navigating Behavior Challenges in the Classroom in October, 2024!

GAME TIME

Can you guess missing letters to reveal the quote?



"A_o_e_w__a_d_o_l_t_l_e;

_o_e_e__e_c_n_o_s_m_h."

The answer is on the last page.

THE ROLE OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR PARENTS OF NEURODIVERSE CHILDREN



Joshua Rodriguez, MA, LPC
Licensed Professional Counselor
The Well Counseling Center

Wow, that title is a mouthful. If you're like me, when I come across titles like this one, I can't help but get a little skeptical of what someone is trying to sell me.

Believe it or not, counseling done right is when a counselor's goal is work themselves out of the job. It brings me so much joy when a client moves from needing continuous sessions to periodically checking in. As a mental health professional, my passion is to provide clients with support, resources, and encouragement to find health and wholeness. So, let's get down to it, what are some things you should consider as parents of neurodiverse children when it comes to seeking mental health services?

The first thing to know is that you are not alone. Parenting is not for the faint of heart. As a parent of four little ones, I can tell you that each of my children are different and have unique needs. They each see the world differently and seem to hear differently even when the same thing has been said to each one. But really, you are not alone in wanting the best for your child. You are not alone in worrying about how they will be treated by peers and educated at school. Part of not feeling alone is having a safe place to talk about your concerns and worries. This can be done with a parent support group or with a professional counselor.

As parents, we have way more influence than we think at home, even when it seems like all communication efforts are failing. Children can sense when we are stressed, burnt out, overwhelmed, and worried. One of the best things we can do for our family life is to make sure we, as parents, are processing and expressing our emotions in a healthy way. Despite our best efforts, unhealthy patterns of relating to each other can occur.

The first step to getting healthy is recognizing that things need to change. Don't be afraid to seek help and support.

So, I ask you a few simple questions: How are you doing? Are stress and anxiety taking way too much of your time and energy? Have responsibilities and pressures led to feeling burnt out or overwhelmed? Maybe you are in a season where working with a counselor to make some lasting changes can make all the difference.

Be proactive rather than reactive. I can't tell you how many people walk into my office wanting counseling services as a last effort. When this is the case, they are so discouraged that there is very little hope, energy, and motivation to make any changes. This results in a longer road to health and healing. Don't wait until things feel like they are falling apart to seek support. Be proactive in seeking resources and support before things become too much to handle. On the other hand, sometimes crisis and trauma happen as situations occur that we haven't planned or prepared for. Finding and developing a therapeutic relationship early with a mental health professional can safeguard you from reaching a breaking point.

Counseling can empower parents by providing tools and strategies to navigate the complexities of raising a neurodiverse child. Connecting with professionals and other parents can foster a supportive community that enhances the family's overall well-being. My goal is to help families move from surviving to thriving in life and family.

THE BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION FOR MENTAL CLARITY AND WELL-BEING

Yas Ashoor, BA, IBT
International Behavior Technician

In our fast-paced and distracting world, mindfulness and meditation have become essential practices for enhancing mental clarity and overall well-being. Rooted in ancient spiritual traditions, these techniques have gained popularity due to their significant positive effects on cognitive function and emotional health.

THE BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION FOR MENTAL CLARITY AND WELL-BEING

January 2025

Mindfulness involves focusing on the present moment thus increasing imagination and clarity as well as acknowledging thoughts and feelings without judgment. Meditation typically includes techniques like breath focus or affirmations to promote relaxation and heightened awareness. Regular practice of mindfulness and meditation can improve focus, decision-making, and cognitive flexibility. By training the mind to filter distractions, we can achieve greater clarity, allowing for more efficient processing of information and better responses to challenges. This can be especially helpful if you are an employee working in a high-paced environment requiring a lot of patience and focus, a working parent, or a child in a school environment, as it will mostly likely reduce chances of burn-out and physical exhaustion as well as increase motivation.

Mindfulness and meditation effectively reduce stress and anxiety by quieting the mind and addressing negative emotions. Research shows these practices can lower cortisol levels, increase self-awareness, patience, and tolerance, and improve sleep quality leading to improved mental and physical health. These practices help develop emotional resilience, allowing individuals to observe their thoughts and feelings without being overwhelmed. This leads to improved mood, reduced depression, and better coping abilities. Emotional well-being enhances relationships as individuals become more empathetic to themselves as well as others. Mindfulness and meditation can be easily integrated into daily routines through simple practices like mindful breathing, body scans, mindful eating, and daily reflections.

By incorporating mindfulness and meditation into everyday life, individuals can develop a clearer, more focused, and resilient mindset, enabling them to handle life's challenges more effectively and fostering overall well-being. It can truly benefit the individual and the whole community in more ways than we can possibly imagine.

"Neurodiversity is not a challenge to be fixed; it is a perspective to be understood and embraced."



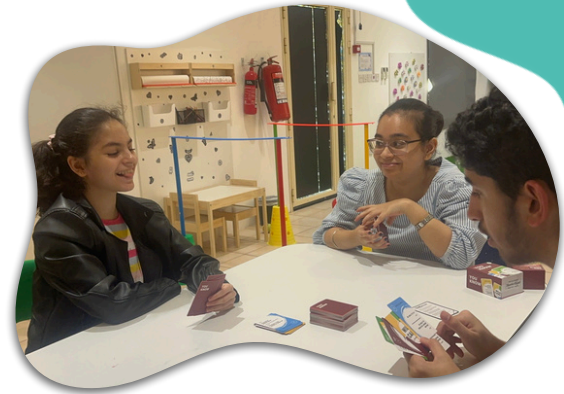


Ahmed Ajjawi
Naseem High School Student

I have been volunteering at Think's Teens Club for the last month, and for starters, I am nothing but grateful for the fact that I was offered and took up the position of being a volunteer.

When I was offered the position of being a volunteer at first, I felt obligated to commit to it. Additionally, it appeared to be nothing but a burden in my eyes, especially given the fact that I had plenty of other activities that I would have preferred to indulge in at the time. However, as time went on, Teen Club grew on me, and I began to genuinely love it, primarily because it has enhanced my social skills by exposing me to challenges such as public speaking and activity coordinating, which has increased my confidence.

Additionally, the whole experience has increased my stress management capabilities as when I would be faced with a frustrating situation involving another teen, I had to act rationally with them due to the setting of the occasion. Slowly but surely, I have adapted to responding sensibly to frustrating and stressful interactions unconsciously, which have developed into habits that expanded and play a role in my everyday life. It has been revolutionary to me to see everything that Teens Club has taught me within the short span of a month and I eagerly anticipate to see what else it has in store.



THE AUTISM SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The latest numbers from the Centers for Disease Control in 2023 indicate that autism affects one in 36 children across all ethnic and racial communities. Early detection is critical in ensuring children receive medically necessary behavioral interventions to learn effective ways to communicate, self-advocate, and find meaning in their chosen relationships.



Tamara Pawich, Ph.D., BCBA-D
Clinical Psychologist
Cocoa Beach Child Psychology

To aid with early identification, pediatricians and primary healthcare providers should conduct universal screenings at well visits for toddlers at 18 months and 24 months old. Standard screeners include the *Ages and Stages and Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers, Revised*. Universal screening is defined as all children receiving ratings from their parents for their development, even if they do not show an obvious developmental delay. These questionnaires, which should be filled out by a parent or caregiver who is closely familiar with the child, are quick to complete and help determine if the child should undergo additional testing with a qualified professional such as a psychologist or developmental pediatrician.

Screenings do not provide a diagnosis but instead identify if the person receives a "high-risk" score, corresponding to the caregiver endorsing a certain number of flags consistent with a social developmental delay.



When a child is referred for additional testing, they complete developmental assessments to measure their social, language, and adaptive skills with a qualified professional. Common autism assessment tools include the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule, Second Edition (“ADOS-2;” Lord, Rutter, et al., 2012), Childhood Autism Rating Scales, Second Edition (“CARS-2;” Schloper et al., 2010), and the Monteiro Interview Guidelines for Diagnosing the Autism Spectrum, Second Edition (“MIGDAS;” Monteiro and Stegall, 2018). These assessments guide the professional in conducting structured and unstructured activities with the child to see their social response. Parents are typically asked to complete questionnaires and interviews about their child’s development and social skills. For older children (e.g., five and older), intellectual testing may also be a part of the process.

At the end of the psychological evaluation process, families should receive verbal results from the provider and a written report with a detailed summary of the child’s developmental history, testing activities, how the child responded across tasks, and recommendations. This is often referred to as a “feedback” meeting, which can be conducted the same day as the testing or a different day with the child’s parents and can last up to an hour. The feedback session is an opportunity for parents to learn about their child’s diagnosis, ask questions, and learn about intervention recommendations.

THE POWER OF PLAY

Play is often seen as a simple and enjoyable pastime, primarily associated with children. Its significance, however, extends far beyond mere entertainment; it is a powerful tool for learning, social development and emotional well-being. The multifaceted nature of play has profound implications for individuals of all ages, shaping cognitive abilities, fostering social connections, and promoting mental health.



Lucas Eckstein
Recreation Program Analyst
Department of US Navy

Understanding the power of play can help us appreciate its essential role in human development and societal cohesion. At its core, play is a fundamental means of learning. For children, engaging in play is crucial for cognitive development. Through imaginative and physical play, children explore their environments, experiment with different roles, and practice problem-solving skills. This hands-on learning process is vital for developing critical thinking and creativity. Research has shown that children who engage in play-based learning demonstrate higher levels of cognitive functioning and better performance in academic settings. Even in adulthood, the principles of play can enhance learning by encouraging exploration, innovation, and adaptability in various fields.

Play serves as a vital socialization tool. It provides a safe space for individuals to interact, share experiences, and develop relationships. For children, playing with peers is essential for learning social skills, such as cooperation, negotiation, and conflict resolution. These interactions help children understand social norms and develop empathy, which are crucial for building healthy relationships throughout life. In adulthood, play continues to foster social bonds, whether through team sports, games, or recreational activities. These shared experiences can strengthen community ties and create a sense of belonging, which is increasingly important in today’s fast-paced, often isolating world.

The emotional benefits of play are equally significant. Engaging in playful activities can reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. For children, play serves as an outlet for expressing emotions and processing experiences, allowing them to cope with challenges and build resilience. Play provides a sense of freedom and spontaneity, enabling individuals to explore their identities and express their creativity. For adults, incorporating play into daily life can be a powerful antidote to the pressures of work and responsibilities. Activities, such as sports, board games, or creative hobbies, can enhance mood and overall well-being, reminding individuals of the joy and spontaneity that life can offer.

The power of play extends beyond individual benefits; it can drive societal change. Playful approaches to problem-solving and community engagement can lead to innovative solutions for complex issues. For instance, play-based initiatives in urban planning encourage community participation and foster creativity in designing public spaces. Additionally, organizations that incorporate play into their culture often see increased collaboration, productivity, and employee satisfaction, highlighting the importance of play in professional settings.

The power of play is a testament to its essential role in human development and societal well-being. By facilitating learning, nurturing social connections, and promoting emotional health, play enriches our lives in countless ways. As we navigate the complexities of modern life, recognizing and embracing the importance of play can lead to a more balanced, fulfilling existence. Whether through engaging in games, sports, or creative pursuits, incorporating play into our daily routines can ultimately enhance our quality of life and strengthen our communities. Embracing the power of play is not just beneficial; it is essential for nurturing a vibrant, resilient society.



NEURODIVERSITY SIBLING WORKSHOP

Our upcoming neurodiversity sibling workshop is an exciting opportunity for brothers and sisters to learn valuable skills in supporting their neurodiverse siblings. This interactive 3-hour workshop will focus on fostering understanding, improving communication, and enhancing relationships within the family. Designed to be engaging and informative, the workshop offers a supportive environment where siblings can share experiences, ask questions, and gain practical tools to build stronger, more empathetic bonds with their neurodiverse loved ones.

In addition to exploring neurodiversity and its impact on family dynamics, the workshop will provide participants with strategies for navigating common challenges, such as understanding their siblings' sensory sensitivities, managing difficult emotions, or handling miscommunication. Through role-playing activities and group discussions, attendees will develop practical problem-solving skills and learn how to create a more inclusive, supportive environment for their neurodiverse siblings. This workshop aims to empower siblings with the confidence and knowledge to strengthen their relationships and embrace neurodiversity with compassion and understanding while creating a safe environment to share their emotions with peers who go through similar experiences.

The workshop will be presented by Zahera Alanfooz, MA(Ed.), BCBA, and IBA. The first session will start on Saturday, the 25th of January at Britus Special Education School and will continue on the last Saturday of each month.





Husain Murad
Exercise Rehab Specialist
In Touch

My name is Husain. I come from a Bahraini family with a total of 4 kids. I'm a Muslim and I'm also autistic. Growing up, I didn't have as many challenges with academics, but some of the bigger challenges as an autistic kid were learning to be socially acceptable and doing things that were acceptable to society. Sometimes growing up, people had to directly tell me social cues to help me better understand what they meant.

Now as an adult, I work as a physical therapist and have been doing that for 12 years. I started off my university studies in medicine and did very well with that academically, but I found that the schedule and routine that a lot of doctors have to keep didn't work well for

me, so I made the transition to physical therapy. Right now, I work in an outpatient department at a private clinic. I think it's the happiest department in medicine because people come to me when they're doing well and in their last few sessions before they are doing better and get to leave.

A normal day for me starts with waking up early and praying. After that, I do a light workout and then do a bit of review and study of physical therapy so I can know my subject better. In primary school, I learned that the early bird catches the worm, so I try to start my day early and get to work early. I like to get to work an hour before it opens and use that time to study a bit more and review my clients' files. Then I see clients for most of the day from 9:00 to 5:00, and I follow this schedule 5 days a week. Sometimes on my days off, I like to go to the office and help out a bit as well. After work, I go home, eat dinner, and enjoy watching and supporting different sports clubs and teams. I also like to play semi-pro ping pong a few nights a week.

In my job, I have had to learn a lot of new skills to be successful. I've had to learn how to put my colleagues first and focus on serving others rather than expecting other people to serve me. My job has also made some changes to support me when I need it. For example, if I get overwhelmed at the end of the day, they let me leave an hour early and go home. But I try not to do this often because it has an effect on my colleagues. They also let me do slightly shorter physiotherapy sessions than some of my colleagues which helps me to focus through the whole session.

If I had to give some advice to other autistic people, I think it's very important to respect your parents and recognize who your real friends are. If you can do that and learn how to talk to people, it can really help you a lot in your life.

**If you would like to submit an article for Autistic Voices,
please contact us at info@thinkinc.me**



**Join our
WhatsApp Channel
for updates and resources!**



The Journey of My Little Fighter: Advocating for Inclusive Schools and Understanding Autism

Fatema Abdulnoor

The difficulties of autism vary with its different spectrums in each and every stage of life, starting from early childhood and continuing until adulthood. The paradox is that these difficulties are not only experienced by the autistic person himself, but also extend to people surrounding him, primarily the family, and specifically the mother. I often consider this phrase in my journey with Adam, which I call the little fighter.

Adam was diagnosed with Autism and has been in therapy since age of two. This year, my little fighter started his first year in school at grade one. According to his condition and the challenges he is facing in terms of communication, fine motor skills, language, attention... etc., I can tell that without proper support, which is customized for his needs and the set of skills he has, the school would be a difficult environment for Adam and definitely other autistic children.

Autistic kids needs to spend a lot of time in school trying to cope with this environment that is mostly out of sync with their capabilities and abilities; these limitations may lead the autistic child to be isolated or seen as introverted, which does not serve them at all.

In these lines, I would like to emphasize the importance of understanding autistics needs. Given that they exist and they are an integral part of the society, autistic kids should not be ridiculed, bullied, or ignored by others who don't understand their differences. In order to achieve it, it is important to design schools that are universally accessible by providing facilities that turn special children, including autistics, to be self-advocates and independent individuals.

**If you would like to submit an article for the Parent Corner,
please contact us at info@thinkinc.me**

THINK'S GOT TALENT

Think's Got Talent is back for its third year on February 15th, and we're so excited to see how this inspiring event continues to grow! It all started with a young autistic boy's passion for magic and his idea to put on a magic show for his peers at the center. While the magic show never happened, the idea grew— first into a vision for a performance for the clients and their parents, and then into something even bigger. That vision became the very first Think's Got Talent, a full-scale talent show celebrating creativity, inclusion, and confidence.

Over the years, we've seen incredible performances— from singing the alphabet backwards and naming the locations of mosques around the world to dancing, singing, identifying countries by their flags, and even making a human disappear! Each performance highlights the unique talents and strengths of our participants, leaving the audience amazed and inspired.

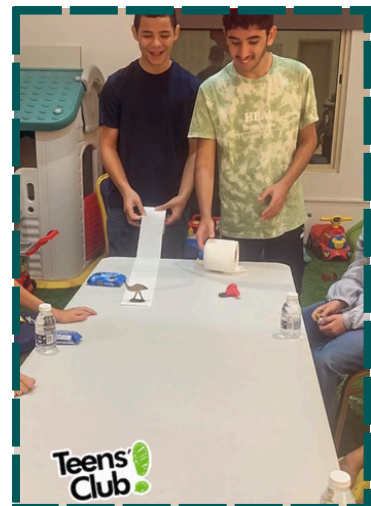
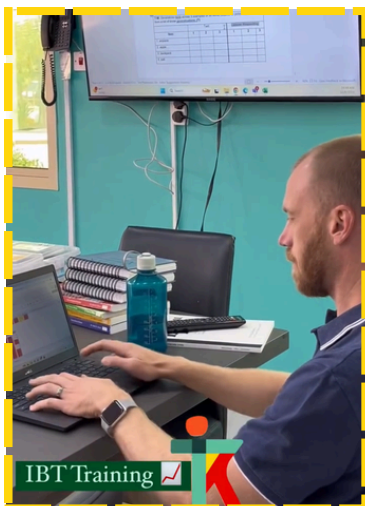
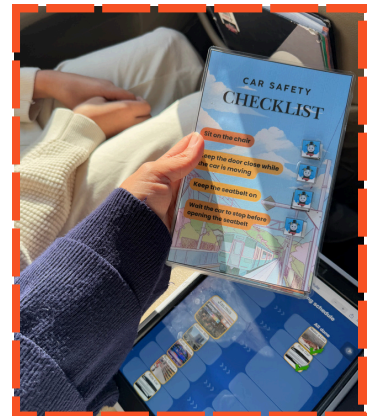
This year's event will also feature fun activities like bouncy houses, pony rides, and face painting. We're looking for sponsors and volunteers; contact us at info@thinkinc.me to support this amazing event! If you or your child would like to perform, reach out to us for a registration form. Don't miss this exciting day of talent, creativity, and fun!



2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Expanded Services:** Introduced Teen Club, Sibling Workshop, and Equity in Education Workshops for schools and individuals.
- **New Training Programs:** Launched IBT Training and School Coach Training with hands-on sessions for interns pursuing certifications and those supporting individuals in school.
- **Community Engagement:** Organized free workshops for nurseries and schools on early intervention and identifying developmental delays. Additionally, trained local supermarket staff on inclusive practices.
- **Staff Development:** Hosted weekly clinical training on evidence-based practice, safety (Fire Safety, First Aid), and physiotherapy training on injury prevention and workplace wellness.
- **Parent Education:** Delivered webinars, including 'Teaching Daily Living Skills' and 'Puberty and Relationships for Neurodiverse Adolescents', tailored to cultural values.
- **Parent Support Groups:** Hosted in-person and virtual sessions featuring guest speakers like autistic adults to share personal insights and experiences.
- **Advocacy Initiatives:** Continued advocating for inclusive education practices, collaborating with the Ministry of Education to improve laws, standards, and training.
- **Events and Celebrations:** Planned interactive events, including Think's Got Talent and Think and Sip gatherings.

These milestones reflect our ongoing commitment to growth, inclusion, and community support!





FAREWELL & GOOD LUCK, MANSOOR!

As we say goodbye to Mansoor, we want to take a moment to recognize and appreciate the impact he has had on Think over the past two years.

His dedication, hard work, and commitment have been instrumental in supporting the growth and development of our organization.

Together, we've faced challenges and climbed mountains, navigating obstacles that ultimately strengthened Think and allowed us to better serve clients and families who rely on us. Mansoor's contributions have left a lasting legacy that we will continue to build upon.

Though this chapter may be closing, Mansoor will always be a part of Think. His efforts and the relationships he's fostered here ensure that he remains an integral member of our family, now and in the future.

Mansoor, thank you for your support and the role you've played in Think's journey. We wish you the very best in the next stage of your career and look forward to seeing all that you achieve. Remember, you'll always have a place with us.



**Answer: "Alone we can do so little;
together we can do so much."**