

TOTAL COMMUNICATION THERAPY

CENTRE NEWS

Dear Parents and Colleagues,

Thank you for joining us for another issue of our Total Communication Therapy newsletter. Our first half of the year has been fruitful, with new collaborations with different schools and organizations. We're excited by the opportunities to work with other like-minded and passionate professionals.

We are excited to share the news that our team has expanded! We welcome our newest team members, Kerensa Chew, our new Speech and Language Therapist, Kalpana Mannepalli who joins us as our Shadow Coordinator, and Michelle Loo, who is our new Educational Therapist. Kerensa has experience working with young children with developmental needs, language disorders, ASD, and multiple disabilities. Kalpana has a postgraduate degree in Special Education with a specialization in ADHD, ASD and learning disabilities. She started her career as a paraprofessional in the USA. Michelle studied at the National University of Singapore and graduated with an honours degree in Psychology. Michelle was a Teaching Support at Pathlight School previously, where she supported school-aged children on the Autism spectrum on their educational journey. We warmly welcome them to our team and we are certain their experience and knowledge will enrich the team.



This quarter, we have been focusing on creating new group programmes. One of them is the School Readiness Programme, which is specially designed to prepare children for formal schooling by supporting core developmental abilities such as social skills, literacy, numeracy, sensory-motor skills and executive functioning skills. We also have other group programmes running concurrently this school holiday, such as our Holiday Programme, Social Skills Programme and Handwriting Programme.

We are excited to finally be able to host Learn To Play workshops in person this year. Pretend play skills are integral to a child's development. In Total Communication Therapy, all therapists are trained in Karen Stagnitti's Learn To Play and use them frequently in language, numeracy or literacy intervention. We look forward to hosting Learn To Play 2022. Registration opens soon! Keep a look out for our announcement on social media.

Wishing you a wonderful second half of the year.



Janice Fong
Educational Therapist



Fostering Resilience in a child on Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Parenting a child with autism spectrum disorder is likely to bring on a whole new different adventure altogether. For many parents, it would mean that conventional ways of learning need to be tweaked to effectively deal with the unique challenges that a child with autism may face. However, that doesn't mean that we compromise on the principles of Guided Participation.



Math difficulties - when extra classes doesn't seem to help...

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"She failed again, should I sign my child up for more remedial classes?" a parent once asked me. "I don't understand, she should have gotten this correct. We already went through it", said another. When extra classes and support does not seem to be enough, I often get asked the same question - why is this not working?



Math struggles and how poor spatial awareness could inevitably cause this

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Mathematics is not just about numbers, counting or understanding geometry. There is another major factor that plays an integral role in early math success: visual perceptual skills. In order for children to solve math problems, they use strategies that involve mental number lines, geometric figures, and information about locations in space.



Fostering Resilience for Learning - Toy Review

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Resilience is vital to the process of learning, as learning something new is inherently challenging. It requires a child to face their weaknesses again and again, in order to acquire a new skill or knowledge that they did not previously possess. There are many different ways to build up resilience in everyday life, starting with one that all children love - games.



Overcomer's Story - You Juin

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You Juin was born prematurely at 34 weeks, it was observed that his development was slower than other babies. Prudence diagnosed him with severe speech and language delay and put him on a program. You Juin slowly gained confidence as he reached his primary school years; at secondary school, we got over the initial frustration of having tutors quit on us. Post-secondary, he went on to pursue a 3-year Diploma in Information Security. Looking back, I am glad as parents we have done all we could for You Juin.



Fostering Resilience in a child on Autism Spectrum Disorder

Prudence Low
 Speech-Language Pathologist

Parenting a child with autism spectrum disorder is likely to bring on a whole new different adventure altogether. For many parents, it would mean that conventional ways of learning need to be tweaked to effectively deal with the unique challenges that a child with autism may face. However, that doesn't mean that we compromise on the principles of Guided Participation. Barbara Rogoff, a clinical psychologist coined the term "Guided Participation" in child psychology, observing that a child learns best from an adult guide, who would carefully organize and mete out their goals (In this case – the tasks) in achievable steps.



For example, to help a child to achieve competency in tying his shoelace, one would have to guide the child to put on their shoes on the correct foot. The act of tying shoelaces or putting on one's own shirt can be further broken down into smaller steps so that eventually the child learns to do the task on his own.

Barriers to Guided Participation in Modern Days

Modern-day living can hinder opportunities for Guided Participation. It could mean that our hurried lifestyles leave us with little patience to go through the entire process of a specific task that our daily living requires. In an ordinary situation, one wouldn't even have to think about daily tasks such as brushing our teeth or putting on our clothes. We've also simplified our lives in some ways – i.e., buying shoes with Velcro fasteners or slip-on like Crocs, and with this, in the interest of saving time, our helpers or we as parents, intervene too soon to resolve a situation. The next time when that happens, understand that the child with processing difficulty may be deprived of hundreds of those small steps of accomplishment that would cumulatively have helped him/her encounter success.



The child's episodic memory bank could have been filled with successful memories of having done up one's own shoes, worn one's own shirt, finished the whole toileting process etc. They would also have the pleasure of seeing delighted faces of the accomplishment. Those tiny, seemingly insignificant moments are important in building the child's sense of competency, his sense of self and, of course, resilience.

Slowing Down to Speed Up



It sounds paradoxical. When you recognize that autism affects processing, it makes sense that we slow down our actions and reduce speech for the child to process things around them. Slowing down also means that our activities are reduced and that we pay more attention to the quality of the specific activity to ensure the Guide and the Child remain connected. It also means that we intentionally reduce our speech and ask fewer questions, instead, we could selectively and economically Think Aloud – to share our thoughts. Many other times, we would want to put more weightage on emotional communication of facial expressions and non-verbal. This is one of the keys to getting the child to be attuned to our emotions. With autism, we celebrate seemingly small but significant moments of emotional connectedness. The point at which the child looks at you and gets it. Truly gets it! And you know it!

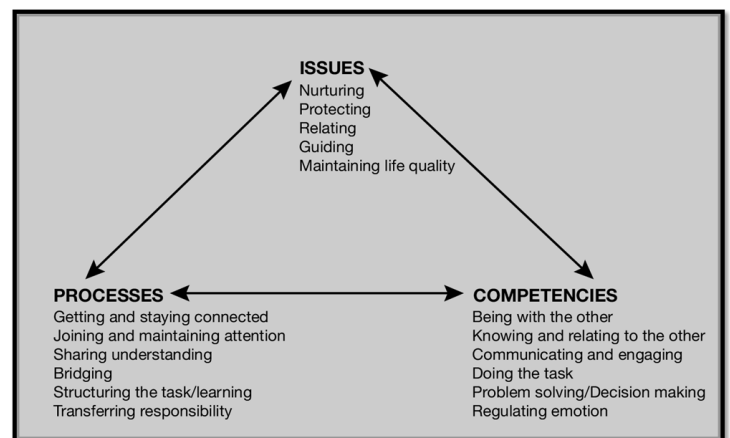
Build the pathways for connectedness and the learning will follow

When you have a child on the spectrum, you will discover you'd have to go with a timeline that is non-conventional and entirely unique to you and your child.

This would sometimes mean that you'd need to toss out man-made rules such as when to send your child to school, when to take national exams, when to perform the national duty, etc. Start by prioritizing the building of neural pathways that connect you to your child. The learning will follow – in its own way and on the child's own unique timeline.

The figure below is extracted from the article Guided Participation Theory for teaching and learning in clinical practice (www.springerpub.com/pridham).

It shows guided participation issues, processes, and competencies and their relationships with one another.



Math difficulties - when extra classes doesn't seem to help...

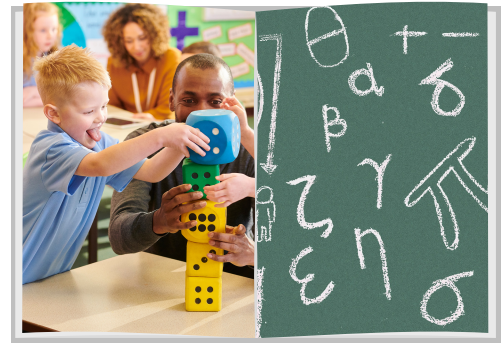
Diana Mendiola
 Educational Therapist

"She failed again, should I sign my child up for more remedial classes?" a parent once asked me. "I don't understand, she should have gotten this correct. We already went through it", said another.

When extra classes and support does not seem to be enough, I often get asked the same question - **why is this not working?**

Extra classes are a good help for children to improve grades as they work on specific subjects such as Math or English. Skills that have been taught in class are emphasized based on what the child may have missed out on, or to address specific questions a child needs clarification in. In comparison, classes and therapy work on separate and different areas of learning. Therapists go deeper into coping techniques that go beyond learning challenges.

More often than we realize, children and teens are motivated and want to excel in the work that they do, but might not know how to or what it is that is hindering them from doing so. Perhaps foundational gaps that are unaddressed are hindering a child to engage in higher-order thinking. Does a child struggle in integrating visual and auditory elements, which may overall impede the processing of information? Socio-emotional learning is also addressed in therapy, alongside non-academic skills such as organization, self-management, and problem-solving, which may include how a child is not only in school but at home and in other environments as well. In addition, specific and individualized plans also help therapists provide targeted intervention, monitor progress and communicate the needs of a child beyond academics.



Does that mean that your child has to drop all classes and attend therapy altogether? Not necessarily! Our therapists work best when parents and educators are involved in the conversation- does the child get enough rest? Perhaps the child is highly distractible in a specific class, but not all. How can we help the child break down big tasks by 'chunking' them? Which schedule works best in supporting a child's work-life balance?

To find out more about how educational therapists can support your child, speak to us and book a consultation today!



Math struggles and how poor spatial awareness could inevitably cause this

Merrin Phillip
 Developmental Therapist

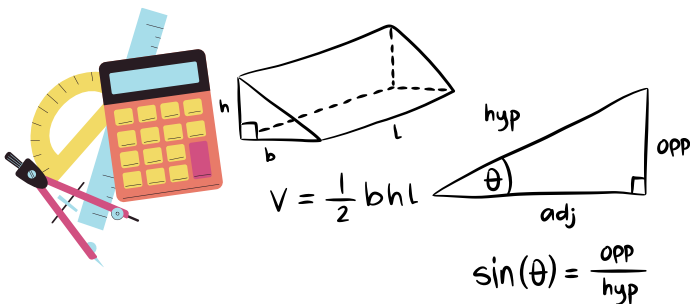
What is Visual Perception?

Visual perception is the ability of the child to interpret and make sense of what they are seeing. Visual perceptual ability is completely different from the vision test we usually go for, which assesses how clear we can see things and is called 'visual acuity'.

Visual perception includes sub-skills such as:

- The ability to tell where objects are in space (spatial-processing)
- How long you can focus on visual information (visual attention)
- How well you can spot similarities and differences in objects (visual discrimination)
- The ability to recall what you've seen before (visual memory)
- How well you can remember sequences (visual sequential memory)
- Ability to locate something in a clustered background (visual figure ground)
- How to write legibly (visual closure)

Math and Visual Perception



Mathematics is not just about numbers, counting or understanding geometry. There is another major factor that plays an integral role in early math success: visual perceptual skills. In order for children to solve math problems, they use strategies that involve mental number lines, geometric figures, and information about locations in space. Research studies prove that visual-spatial working memory is a foundational cognitive skill for supporting early numeracy knowledge, which then supports later math achievement.

Math related spatial processing can include some of the following skills:

1. Understanding how positions of objects relate to each other: car is 'inside' the garage or the basket of fruits is 'next' to the microwave
2. Understanding how simple and abstract shapes look
3. Understanding how 2 parts form another shape: If 2 triangles are put together, they would make a rectangle
4. Writing numbers or letters without reversals
5. Understanding left and right (directionality)
6. Sequencing numbers in math problems
7. Copying numbers from whiteboard onto the paper
8. Picking out important clues from a math problem

How you can support your child to develop visual spatial skills at home?



- Using spatial talk: use descriptive language to explain spatial concepts and dimensions. E.g. - "You climbed up the ladder, went over the bridge and now you are under the monkey bars".
- Talk about space while you are reading a book: E.g. - "that elephant is really tall and is standing behind the tree."

- Encourage your child to use gesture while he/she is using spatial words: E.g. - finger pointing to show a “straight pillar”
- Encourage your child to do visual-motor tasks such as maze drawing, spot the shape or connecting dots
- Ask follow up questions such as, “how do you know it’s a triangle?”

Fostering Resilience for Learning Toy Review

Resilience is vital to the process of learning, as learning something new is inherently challenging. It requires a child to face their weaknesses again and again, in order to acquire a new skill or knowledge that they did not previously possess. Without resilience, a child would give up as soon as they encounter difficulties, instead of persevering through challenges and overcoming those weaknesses. This is why building up resilience is so important, and it doesn’t have to be boring either. There are many different ways to build up resilience in everyday life, starting with one that all children love - games.

Almost all board games can be used to foster resilience, especially ones that have the component of winning and losing. A lot of children we work with who lack resilience will have meltdowns over losing, or when the game does not proceed the way they expect it to. By learning to lose, children learn to accept that they cannot always be good at everything they do, but that they can always try again even when things go wrong. In the section below,

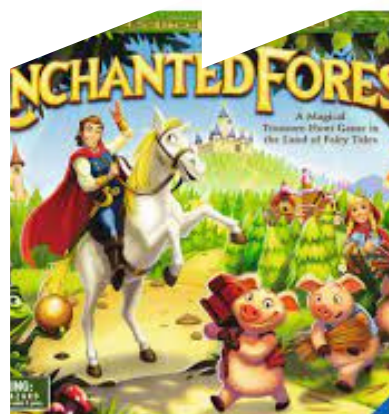
our therapists will share how they use games to help children practice resilience.



Enchanted Forest

Ivy Huang
Educational Therapist

One game I like to use is called Enchanted Forest. This is a memory and strategy game, where the players have to explore the board while uncovering and memorizing the locations of various treasures. As soon as a player discovers the correct treasure, they have to rush to the castle to get the key to guess where the treasure is. If they guess correctly, they get to keep the treasure. If they don’t they have to go back to the beginning.





The memory aspect of the game helps children to practice resilience, as they have to systematically search for the treasure, and it might take a number of failed attempts before they manage to find the correct treasure. Many can become frustrated in the process, especially if other players are finding the treasures before they do. This is when a therapist can step in and help model how to overcome frustrations and loss, as well as spotlight productive vs. unproductive ways of coping with these frustrations. Through therapist modelling and guidance, children learn to think about losing and challenges as something they can overcome, rather than something that defeats them.



Snakes and Ladders

Kerensa Chew
Speech and Language Therapist

Snakes and Ladders have always been one of my go-to games with the kiddos, even with 4-year-olds! It is a game that can be played with simple rules, such as rolling the dice and moving the spaces shown, going up the ladders and sliding down the snakes. The adult may guide the child during his/her turn to get used to the rules as well, without interrupting the overall gameplay. The rules can also be modified to make it more challenging, such as rolling the specific number of spaces to reach the goal.

This game builds resilience throughout the game through the experiences of highs (going up the ladders) and lows (sliding down the snakes). Through the adult's responses during gameplay (going up the ladder, sliding down the snakes, rolling a big number, rolling a small number), the child can observe how the adult responds to winning and losing appropriately.

I like to remind myself that the overall objective in all games is: "Having fun, and making sure everyone is also having a good time with each other, whether one wins or loses!"



Overcomer You Juin

This year we will be devoting our final column to some of our previous students who have, against odds, overcome their difficulties and thrived. We celebrate personal victories in all forms. Our contributor this month is You Juin.

You Juin was born prematurely at 34 weeks. During his first 18 months of periodic review with his pediatrician, it was observed that his development was slower than other babies at each milestone such as walking, drinking

from cup etc. He was also very scared of loud noises and would squint to look at things in a line such as toy cars. The most worrying issue for us was that he wasn't meeting his speech milestones at the same rate as his peers.

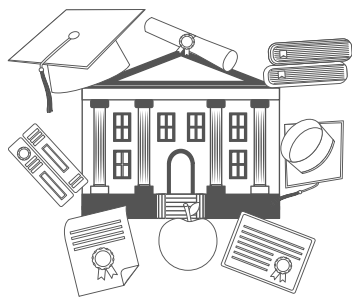
We brought him for an early childhood assessment at a government hospital around 3 years old and the initial assessment was that developmentally, he was "delayed" and he needed to start on an early intervention programme. During that time, there weren't many private centers that provided such programmes. We got connected with a Special Needs pre-school near our place where You Juin spent some hours in the centre on weekday afternoons. As I was aiming for You Juin to later receive his education in the mainstream school, I enrolled him in a normal childcare centre on weekdays morning with established syllabus (Montessori). The small student to teacher ratio was a plus point for me. We also looked extensively for a speech therapist and finally found Prudence at a private therapy center. Prudence diagnosed him with severe speech and language delay and put him on a program that worked on correcting his articulation errors.



It was a struggle as You Juin was often not very cooperative and protested to avoid the activities. His motor skills were also observed to be lacking and we had to separately put him on an Occupation Therapy program. In the initial years, a lot of work was required to get You Juin's basics right. He had low confidence in himself, making him shy away from others due to his speech deficiency in communicating. Thus, he hardly had any friends in his preschool days.

You Juin slowly gained confidence as he reached his primary school years. I remember that we had to go through an assessment at the government hospital to determine if he was suitable for mainstream education. We were overjoyed when he was assessed to be eligible for primary one. Throughout primary school years, You Juin continued to struggle academically with both languages. We were comforted however, that he was able to do cope well with his Math and Science, as we had understood that most language impaired students usually struggle with all academic subjects. We attribute it to the therapies and the extra lessons we were providing for You Juin.

Being in a Singapore school would mean many decisions along the way – such as, whether he should be giving up Chinese language when it comes to the crunch of national exams. We made the difficult decision of dropping Chinese as a second language. We were heartened that he achieved a very decent score at PSLE that allowed him to enter into Express stream.



In secondary school, we got over the initial frustration of having tutors quit on us. We found suitable tutors after this initial hurdle. You Juin was also lucky

to have very supportive teachers who were ready to render help that he needed at school. From 14 years of age, he showed independence at planning his homework and revision schedule. He was also able to excel in his math and science subjects with A grades. At upper secondary level, his school-teachers closely monitored his progress and put him on additional classes to coach him on his weak subjects as he reaches 'O' level. At this point, You Juin mainly relied on home tuition for English.

Besides his academic, he was also joined Scouts where he was appointed as a Assistant Petrol leader when he was a senior student. He was showing independence, going for camps on his own, and was able to mingle well with his peers.



Post-secondary, he went on to pursue a 3-year Diploma in Information Security where he was admitted via Early Admission Program. In his first two years, he excelled in his studies without the need for further intervention. He showed lots of self motivation – such as setting up time with his lecturers to clarify on his work. Amidst his free time, he also took up skating and attended regular activities with his school mates. During school break, he also took initiative to learn more courses related to his studies in preparation for upcoming semesters, adding on certifications to his credentials. With his good grades and the right attitude, he was offered a one-year internship at an organization that deliver digital services.

He is showing great resilience. We have observed that at work, when there are issues, he shows persistence in solving a problem at work and found satisfaction at having done that. He was also sought by other interns to give advice to resolve their issues encountered. At home, he has become our chief of IT support!



Recently he was accepted into a local university to pursue a Degree in Information Technology where he will start in 2 years' time after serving his National Service.

Looking back, I am glad as parents we have done all we could for You Juin. From a severely language impaired child to an independent young man. This is something we could not imagine when he was first diagnosed, we are incredibly relieved and gratified with his achievement.

***Parents of You Juin,
How Cheen & Wei In***



**Prudence's
Testimonial**

What an absolute pleasure to be hearing back from You Juin's parents! I absolutely remember You Juin as an adorable three-year-old who resisted my effort to help him from the beginning. He gradually settled down and we worked on both goals for his speech (to gain clarity) and language (for increasing vocabulary and sentence structures). You Juin made gradual improvement every week – hats off to very involved parents who never missed a session of therapy without a good reason. I saw You Juin at 3 years old and we went through with weekly therapy till he was 12 years of age.

By the time You Juin was in a primary school, he had a developed a nice ability to interact with his peers. He was also a very diligent student and he continued to make sustained gains throughout his primary school. Our local primary school system can unfortunately

be an onerous environment for students with different learning needs.

The competitive setting, coupled with the national exam that one must sit at Primary 6 with consequences of different streaming provided added pressure at a systemic level that leave little breathing space.

I am heartened therefore to hear of You Juin's secondary teachers who are so supportive of him. We have precious human resources in our little country and we should count on great teachers who are supportive of students with different learning needs.

Wei In's testimony on her journey should lend useful insight of the possibility of a great outcome no matter how one has started out.



YOU JUIN AT HIS GRADUATION WITH HIS DIPLOMA

These are some of my takeaways:

- Developmental language disorder, or specific language disorder, is a very treatable condition if the student receives the right level of intervention. The disorder can sometimes slip through the cracks if the child doesn't have any other obvious accompanying symptoms.
- Development language disorder does not resolve on its own, nor can one outgrow this condition. Intervention is needed for the student to cope and thrive in all subjects – such as math and science.
- In the midst of providing intervention, You Juin's parents have played a pivotal role in determining, despite the lack of information and options for therapy, the type and level of support he needed. This helped optimize his outcome.
- You Juin's parents and his secondary school has also done an amazing job to create a conducive environment that is encouraging and has successfully nurtured his resilience.
- Since resilience is key to success of outcome, we only say that we say that You Juin is enroute to greater success in time to come.

TOTAL COMMUNICATION THERAPY

Total Communication Therapy centre is located in the leafy 10 Winstedt Rd complex. Speech and language therapists, educational psychologists, occupational therapists, and educational therapists work closely with families and schools. Contact us using the information below to learn more.



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