

THE CENTER FOR AUTISM & NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS

Patient Testimonial, August 2017

“I noticed something was wrong. I’m his mother.”



For years, Rosie has been doing all she can to help her eight-year old son Habibi succeed in school and get the help he needs. Around the age of three, Habibi was diagnosed with high-functioning autism and has struggled with speech and comprehension delays. After Habibi’s initial diagnosis, Rosie was able to successfully enroll him in a Special- Ed Preschool. However, right after he turned four, Rosie was informed that her son no longer qualified for Special- Ed Preschool and would not be able to attend the school within a week’s time.

Rosie remembers that this particular transition period was very difficult for Isaiah. In spite of the struggles and anxiety that Habibi suffered during this time; he was receiving very good reports from his new Kindergarten teacher. Much to

Rosie’s surprise, Habibi’s teacher asserted that he was doing very well in the class; he was keeping up with his classmates and successfully making friends. With such reports, Rosie wondered if their struggles were finally over and if Habibi would continue to meet educational milestones in stride with his peers.

First grade, however, brought with it a new wave of challenges. For the next academic year, Rosie persistently fought to get her son another IEP from the school. Finally, her effort paid off. Habibi was acknowledged once again as needing assistance at school and began receiving weekly 15-30 minutes of speech therapy. In spite of the new help he was receiving, Rosie says, “I noticed something was wrong. I’m his mother.”

After a check up at their Dr.’s office, Rosie was informed that Habibi who was diagnosed with autism also struggled with anxiety. Part of what had been aggravating his anxiety was increasing awareness that he was starting to fall behind in his classes. Like all cyclical problems, it seemed that the more anxious Habibi became about falling behind, his ability to focus dwindled and he would fall behind further. Their Dr. was aware that Rosie wanted to pursue treatment options, aside from medication. At this point, Rosie was referred to The Center for Autism to try out their controlled study of anxiety intervention therapy that was geared towards helping children combat their anxiety and other social communication problems. Rosie signed Habibi up for a controlled therapy trial comparing a physical exercise program with a sedentary therapy program. Fortunately, Habibi and Rosie were selected to be one of the families in The Center’s free intervention study.

The sedentary therapy sessions are generally intended to help children become more social, learn the value of teamwork, improve communication skills, and feel a sense of accomplishment through the use of cognitive behavioral therapy techniques leaning on Legos as a communication



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and motivational tool. The sessions achieve these socialization goals by placing the children into pairs with trained coaches who facilitate activities that allow that child to shift between being the Lego instructor and builder. Through alternating roles, children like Habibi learn how to better express themselves and actively follow verbal instructions. Rosie soon noticed that the Lego therapy was a hit! Habibi couldn't wait to go to his weekly sessions. In fact, he was enjoying the Lego therapy so much, that Rosie bought him his own Legos to play with at home. Encouraged by the progress Habibi was making with the first trial round of therapy, they both eagerly awaited the next program of Physical Exercise therapy.

Physical Exercise therapy brought with it a different kind of treatment. The short-term goal of this program is to encourage physical fitness and teach children with ASD about strength and cardio exercises as a way to manage their stress and anxiety levels. Throughout the study, trained coaches would check the children's salivary cortisol levels, anxiety levels, BMI and heart rate to track improvement the exercise was having on the children's anxiety. During this second trial, Rosie noticed that Habibi was enjoying his time at therapy; however, he was always worn out at the end of his sessions. This "burning of energy" helped Habibi to be calmer throughout the week. Through the program, Rosie says that Habibi developed a love for push-ups. No matter if they are at home or out on the town, Habibi reminds his mom with a smile, "Oh, I have to do my push-ups!"

Each of The Center's therapy programs gave Habibi fun and practical ways to work through his anxiety and develop successful social behaviors. Rosie affirmed that even today, long after the therapy sessions have concluded, Habibi is still using and benefitting from the activities he learned at The Center.



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