

# ClearMinds



Issue 2

**MAGAZINE**

JUNE, 2025

## Peek Inside

Support Groups, Professional Learning  
& a Special Book Release

Sliding Scale & Free Consultations

Why That Chewing Noise Drives You  
Crazy

Panic, Stress, and Anxiety — Facing  
the Giant Praying Mantis

From the Ahi Brotherhood to  
Attachment-Based Mentoring

# What Have We Been Up To?

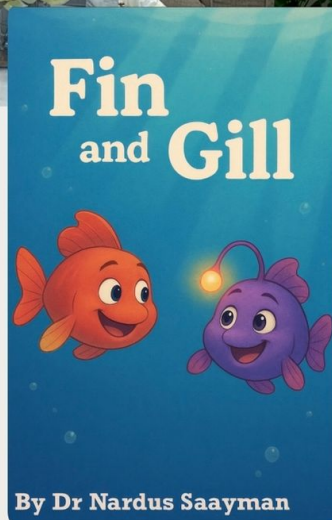
It's been a meaningful season of learning and connection here at ClearMinds, and we're excited to share some recent highlights from our growing community.

## Celebrating a New Release: FIN AND GILL

We're thrilled to announce that Dr. Nardus Saayman, our Clinical Psychologist, has just released his new children's book titled "Fin and Gill". This beautifully illustrated story gently introduces young readers to the concept of neurodiversity through the friendship of two sea creatures who see the world in very different ways.

With warmth, empathy, and a touch of humour, Fin and Gill helps children (and the adults who read with them) to better understand the richness of different ways of thinking, feeling, and being.

We are incredibly proud of Dr. Saayman for this important and timely contribution to children's mental health and emotional literacy. The book is perfect for children aged 6-12.



Fin and Gill is now available for purchase on [Amazon!](#)



## TYPE 1 DIABETES SUPPORT GROUP FOR KIDS By Yassine Tayi MSc

Our weekly support group for children aged 6 to 11 living with Type 1 Diabetes is officially underway! Held every Tuesday from 4 to 5pm, this free group offers a welcoming and empowering space for young people to connect with peers who understand their journey. Through play, stories and shared experiences, the group is fostering resilience, confidence and community—one Tuesday at a time



## ADULTS AND UNDIAGNOSED AUTISM By Dr. Nardus Saayman

Professional Training Session On 5 June, we hosted an insightful online event led by Dr. Nardus, exploring the subtle presentations of Autism in adults. The session was a rich blend of theory and practice, guiding professionals on how to better identify and support neurodiverse adults who may have slipped through the diagnostic net. With high engagement and thoughtful discussion, it was a valuable step forward in championing inclusive mental health care.

Let us know if you would like to join, collaborate or learn more. There's always something happening at ClearMinds!



# Why That Chewing Noise Drives You Crazy

Did you know there is actually a name for that strong emotional reaction that you (or someone you know) have to chewing sounds, slurping sounds, or a pen clicking?



By Dalea Alawar, PsyD

It's called misophonia, which literally means "hatred of sound"! It happens when someone experiences a strong emotional reaction like anger, anxiety, or disgust to:

- Mouth sounds (chewing, slurping, lip smacking, heavy breathing)
- Throat sounds (sniffing, coughing)
- Repetitive sounds (clock ticking, foot tapping, pen clicking)

So, why does this happen? Science doesn't have all the answers yet, but there are two main hypotheses that help explain what's going on in the brain:

Brain scans of people with misophonia show extra-strong connections between the part of the brain that hears sound (

auditory cortex) and the part that feels emotions like disgust and anger (anterior insular cortex). Translation: When someone with misophonia hears a trigger sound, their brain fast-tracks it straight to the emotional response center — skipping the logic and reasoning parts altogether. That's why you might find yourself snapping at your partner for chewing too loudly before you even realize you're annoyed. Overall, misophonia is a reaction that truly does feel outside of the control of the person experiencing it. In both theories discussed, what is clear is that the "rational" part of the brain gets bypassed entirely when you hear a triggering sound. Your brain literally does not pause to think about how to react. All of a sudden, you hear yourself snapping at your partner for eating their popcorn too loudly, as if you didn't choose to snap. The good news is that you can do something about this. Once you recognize your trigger sounds, you can prepare for them and decide how you want to respond — before your brain hijacks the situation.

Another hypothesis is that misophonia is the result of a conditioned response. Just like a song can remind you of a breakup, misophonia may develop when the brain starts to associate certain sounds with past stress, tension, or negative experiences. For example, if you were scolded as a child for tapping your foot, your brain may now associate foot-tapping = bad feeling. So even years later, the sound alone can bring on that same stress — without you even realizing why.



So, instead of yelling at your popcorn-munching partner, you might try a little humor: "Hey babe, can we put your snack on mute?" You might still be annoyed — but you'll be in charge of your response.





# Panic, Stress, and Anxiety – Facing the Giant Praying Mantis

What a giant insect can teach us about how we react to life's uncertainties — and how to find our way back to ourselves.



By Yassine Tayi, MSc

We often throw around words like **panic**, **stress**, and **anxiety** as if they were the same. They're not. Each taps into a very different part of how we react to life.

To make this more vivid, let's borrow a symbol from the natural world: the **praying mantis**. You might know this insect for its graceful, prayer-like posture — but there's a darker side too. In some species, **the female praying mantis devours the male during or after mating**. Desire and danger, attraction and death — all tangled together.

Let's dive in.

A perfect creature to help us explore what happens when our emotions take over.

## Panic: When Your Body Takes Over

**Panic** hits when you're faced with an overwhelming external situation — something you weren't ready for, couldn't predict,

and don't have the codes to handle. It's what happens in the heart of a traumatic event: an earthquake, a car accident, sudden violence. Example: You walk into a room, wearing a **male praying mantis mask**. A giant female mantis — three meters tall — appears, moving sharply, making unsettling sounds. Every signal in your body screams danger. **That's panic**. There's no time to think. You don't wonder who you are. You don't wonder how she sees you. Your body takes over: it will either freeze, flee, or fight. A pure, instinctive response to something too overwhelming, too fast.

## Stress: When You Know What You're Up Against

**Stress** is different. It's a response to a pressure you can see, name, and prepare for. It mobilises you for action. Example: You walk into the room, still wearing your **male mantis mask**. You spot a female mantis. You know enough about mantises to know the risk — but you also know what to do. Stay alert. Move carefully. Plan your escape. You're stressed — but you're moving. Stress sharpens you — up to a point. The goal is to get just enough stress to fuel action — not so much that it paralyzes you, like too much coffee tipping into insomnia.

## Anxiety: When the Danger Is Inside You

**Anxiety** is trickier. It doesn't arise from a clear external threat. It comes from the inside — from uncertainty about yourself, your position, your meaning. 🔍 Example: You walk into the room, mask on. Across from you stands the giant mantis — but this time, she's not moving. She just stares.

You can't tell if she's male or female. You don't see any clear signs of danger — yet you know enough about mantises to know it could still cost you your life. And then it hits you: **You don't even know what mask you're wearing.**

You don't know how the mantis sees you:

- Prey?
- Mate?
- Peer?

You're not panicking — there's no sudden move — but you're caught. Caught trying to read the mantis' intention. Caught wondering what you are in her eyes.

**That's anxiety.**

Anxiety grows not because of what the Other does, but because you're trapped trying to guess your own position — stuck between possibilities, with no clear answer. The more you stare at the mantis, hoping for a sign, the more anxiety tightens its grip.

**The Way Out**

The solution isn't to wait for the giant mantis to make the first move — to give you a response. It's to **turn inward**. To ask yourself: *"Before I walked into this room, what mask was I wearing?"*

Reconnecting with who you are — before the gaze of the Other froze you — is what helps anxiety loosen its hold.



State	What Happens	What You Focus On	How It Feels
Panic	Overwhelming external danger	Immediate survival	Pure reaction
Stress	Clear, identifiable challenge	Preparation and action	Activated, alert
Anxiety	Unclear internal threat	How you're perceived	Frozen, uncertain

**Final Thought**

**Panic** pulls you into survival. **Stress** pushes you into action. **Anxiety** freezes you in uncertainty — unless you turn inward, back to who you are.

Because sometimes, the real danger isn't what stands before us. It's forgetting ourselves under the gaze of the world.





# Understanding Autism: A User-Friendly Perspective (Part 2)

When we talk about autism, it helps to start with a definition – but definitions don't always tell the whole story.



**By Nardus Saayman, PhD**

Autism is often described as a “spectrum,” which can be somewhat misleading as it can seem to imply that each autistic individual is different only in terms of degree of severity. The truth is that in most cases of autism, specifically adult-diagnosed autism which frequently falls under the radar until later life, there is profound variation in how autism has shaped the individual's sense of self and approach to life. We are never shaped by just one aspect of life. Each of us are made up of our personality, life experiences, relationships, and the way our brain is wired. Traditional medical definitions of autism are problematic because they are descriptive, rather than explanatory. According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), autism includes ongoing challenges with social interaction

and communication, and a preference for routines or repeated behaviours. It is also stated that people on the spectrum may have strong, focused interests and unique sensory experiences. But this definition, while useful in some ways, mostly describes what others see from the outside. In reality, there's a whole world going on inside an autistic person's mind that often gets overlooked. This inner world can be full of deep thoughts, intense emotions, and rich inner experiences – but they might not always show it in expected or “typical” ways. It's important to remember that behaviors labelled as “deficits” might actually reflect different ways of processing the world, rather than something being missing or broken.

## Shifting the Conversation: Understanding vs Labelling

Over time, the way we understand autism has changed. Today, the neurodiversity-affirming approach invites us to see autism not as a disorder, but as a different kind of brain wiring. It reminds us that differences are natural, and being autistic doesn't mean someone is sick or broken. It means they see, feel, and respond to the world in their own way. However, even with supportive approaches such as neurodiversity-affirming therapies, we need to be mindful of not over-correcting with positive judgment, which is still judgement. Therapy is not about judgement, it is about an exploration that deepens an individual's sense of who they truly are. For therapy to work well, it needs to be based on authenticity, empathy, and curiosity. Therapists should respect and understand neurodivergent ways of thinking, communicating, and feeling. That might mean embracing a different rhythm of conversation, making space for special interests, or being aware of sensory sensitivities.

This approach also challenges old ideas, like the belief that autism is just a lack of social ability. Instead, we're learning to ask better questions:

- Why does someone feel stuck in a conversation?
- Are they unsure what to say because their brain is overwhelmed by too many thoughts—not because they don't have any?
- Are they holding back because they've been misunderstood before?

#### **"How Should We Approach Autism?"**

Autism isn't a puzzle to be solved or a problem to be treated. It's a different way of being human. And when we meet autistic individuals with respect, openness, and genuine interest, we create the kind of space where real understanding can grow.

These questions help us shift from a "what's wrong?" mindset to a "what's going on here?" mindset.

### **"The "Deficit" Trap**

A big part of this shift is rethinking the word "deficit" Instead of assuming something is missing, we should ask: is it really a lack, or is it something different? Maybe the person is processing the conversation in a complex way. Maybe they don't speak up right away because they're weighing many different responses in their mind.

Autistic individuals might not always express themselves in typical ways, but that doesn't mean they don't understand. And it certainly doesn't mean they lack desire for connection, meaning, or self-expression.

### **Why This Matters in Therapy**

Therapists have long used ideas from psychoanalysis to understand people's inner lives. But these tools often fall short when it comes to autism – not because they aren't useful, but because they weren't built with neurodivergent minds in mind.

Rather than trying to "fix" autistic behavior, the aim should be to understand the person's unique experience of their internal world. We need to explore how their mind works *from their perspective*, not just how it appears from the outside.

In therapy, this might mean slowing things down, helping a person untangle their thoughts, or offering support in ways that feel safe and respectful. The therapist's job isn't just to interpret behavior, but to join the patient in exploring what life feels like from *their* position.

It may be useful for individuals seeking treatment to be reminded that it is okay for them to ask questions in therapy. You are allowed to ask a therapist whether they have been trained to work with neurodiversity, and to get their take on how they make sense of autism and neurodiversity.

The more we listen to autistic voices and honor their lived experiences, the better we'll become at offering meaningful, affirming support – both inside and outside the therapy room.





# From the Ahi Brotherhood to Attachment-Based Mentoring: A Legacy of Belonging

As artificial intelligence rapidly takes over the world, it has become more important than ever for children to feel truly connected.



By Hacer Subasi, MSc

In today's fast-paced world, where modern life pressures parents to maximize productivity every minute, many mothers and fathers struggle to give their children the emotional connection they developmentally deserve. Perhaps this is because the parents, as the primary attachment figures, themselves don't feel truly connected either. We may be living in an unprecedented time where the responsibility of parenting falls almost entirely on the biological parents — with fewer support systems than ever before. In this sense, the presence of surrogate attachment figures — or what the literature calls mentors — is becoming more of a necessity than a choice. After all, raising a child is never solely the job of parents. As the saying goes, "It takes a village to raise a child."

Humanity has been aware of this truth since the civilizations of Ancient Greece and Rome. But this awareness took on a structured form in 13th-century Anatolia through the Ahi system during the Seljuk era. After that, structured mentoring practices nearly disappeared — until they reappeared with the founding of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America in 1904, which became the first official modern mentoring program in the U.S., almost 700 years later. Many different types of mentorship systems have been tried since then; however, none have permeated society as systematically as the Ahi system.

The Ahi system aimed to cultivate individuals in the fields of art, trade, and various professions through a master (mentor)-apprentice (mentee) relationship, while also supporting their moral development through a strong bond of brotherhood. The word "Ahi" appears in *Divan-ı Lügati't-Türk* with meanings such as "generous, brave, valiant, noble" and is believed to have been derived from the Turkish word "akı" (meaning pure, virtuous). At the same time, it is also thought to originate from the Arabic word "akhi / أخِي," meaning "my brother." When both meanings are considered together, one can say that, much like in contemporary mentoring models, an "Ahi" in the Ahi relationship played a dual role: like a father figure in terms of experience, reputation, and knowledge, and like a brother or elder sibling in the warm and trust-filled connection they established. In today's increasingly individualistic societies, mentoring systems are becoming essential — to help children who suffer from disconnection reconnect, to share the emotional burden carried by parents, and to raise emotionally healthy individuals who can thrive in society.



This article will explore the Ahi system, considered the first structured mentoring model in history. The Ahi Brotherhood (Ahilik Teşkilatı) was far more than a medieval trade guild in the Ottoman Empire. It was a deeply rooted social and moral system where young apprentices didn't just learn a craft — they were mentored into becoming. At its core, Ahilik was a system of psychosocial guidance that offered not only skill development but also a secure sense of belonging, identity, and values.

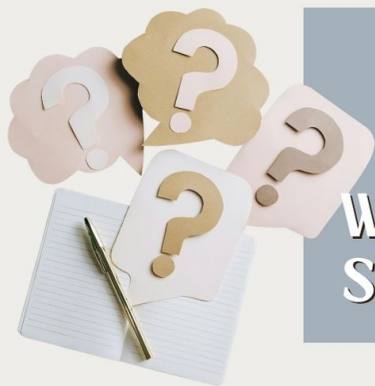
In this structure, the master (usta) was not merely a teacher of technical skills — he was a consistent, reliable figure in the apprentice's life. He modeled patience, ethics, responsibility, and humility.



From a modern psychological lens, particularly through attachment theory (Bowlby, Ainsworth), we could say that this relationship resembled a secure base — someone who provides both safety and encouragement to explore. Attachment theory tells us that children thrive when they experience consistent, emotionally attuned relationships. This early connection — with a caregiver or a mentor — helps them regulate emotions, develop resilience, and build a healthy sense of self. Similarly, in the Ahi tradition, the young apprentice was gradually entrusted with more responsibility as trust deepened — not unlike how we scaffold emotional independence in securely attached children.

Today, when we mentor children — whether in education, therapy, or daily life — the goal isn't just to teach behavior or knowledge. It's to offer the kind of relational container that says: "I see you. I believe in you. I'm here as you grow." The Ahi masters didn't just train hands; they mentored identities. They offered what every child still needs: presence, attunement, and belief.

If we want to raise resilient, morally grounded, and emotionally healthy children, we might look to the Ahi spirit — and remember that growth happens not just through instruction, but through connection.



# What's Your Emotional Superpower?

A quiz to discover the strength of your inner world  
Do you read the room like a pro? Bounce back after setbacks? Know what to do?  
Emotional intelligence isn't one skill but a collection of powerful abilities!

**The Quiz: Choose the letter that sounds most like you**

## **When a friend is upset, I usually:**

- A. Feel it with them and want to help
- B. Stay calm and try to think of a solution
- C. Reflect on what might be going on
- D. Give them space and check in later

## **When I feel stressed, I usually:**

- A. Talk to someone I trust
- B. Make a plan to fix the issue
- C. Write/think about what's really bothering me
- D. Do something that distracts or calms me

## **People often say I:**

- A. Am kind and understanding
- B. Handle tough times really well
- C. Seem to know myself deeply
- D. Stay grounded even when others panic

## **If I make a mistake, I tend to:**

- A. Apologise and try to make it right
- B. Learn from it and move on
- C. Think carefully about why it happened
- D. Keep it in perspective — we all mess up sometimes



**When someone is rude to me, I:**

- A. Wonder if something's going on with them
- B. Stay cool and walk away
- C. Feel hurt, but try to understand my reaction
- D. Try not to take it personally

**If a friend forgets something important, you:**

- A. Feel hurt and might say something sharp
- B. Withdraw or pretend it didn't bother you
- C. Brush it off, even if it stings
- D. Talk to them calmly about how you feel

**When you're overwhelmed, you tend to:**

- A. Talk fast or get teary
- B. Shut down or go quiet
- C. Keep going and act like everything's fine
- D. Take a deep breath and try to slow down





## Mostly A's: Your Superpower is Empathy

You tune in to others' feelings like an emotional radio. You're a natural at offering comfort and understanding. Just remember to protect your own energy too.



## Mostly B's: Your Superpower is Resilience

You're a bouncer-back ! When life throws you down, you get up stronger. Your cool head and can-do attitude are inspiring.

## Mostly C's: Your Superpower is Self-Awareness

You know your inner world well: your thoughts, feelings and triggers. This reflection helps you grow and make wise choices.



## Mostly D's: Your Superpower is Emotion Regulation

You're steady in storms. You don't get swept away by strong emotions, and others feel safe around you.



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