



Helping Our Children Learn with Neurodevelopmental Movement

By Sonia Story

As parents we continually seek ways to help our children succeed in learning and life. **One of the best, but least known ways we can support our children is to help them build their foundation for learning through neurodevelopmental movement.**

Neurodevelopmental movements are innate, automatic movements all healthy babies do in womb life and infancy as long as they are unimpeded and not stressed. These movements, called reflexes and rhythmic movements, fuel the tremendous rate of brain growth that occurs in infancy. The stimulation from these infant movements is responsible for maturing and calming the brain and sensory-motor systems so that future learning is accessible, easy, and enjoyable.

For many reasons, children in modern society are not receiving their full measure of neurodevelopmental movements in their first year or two of life. When this happens, our children are left with an incomplete foundation for learning. In other words, their brains may lack proper maturity and connectivity for easy learning, even though there is no lack of intelligence.

The great news is that we can help our children complete this foundation by doing these special neurodevelopmental movements with them on a regular basis. The movements are easy to learn and both live and on-line classes are available for parents and professionals. The movement protocols vary as parents work through numerous reflexes and rhythmic movements. For most children doing a 15 to 20 minute daily routine of neurodevelopmental movement provides noticeable benefits not only in learning, but in other skills as well.

There are excellent books and websites about reflexes and rhythmic movements that parents can read. See below.

How does all of this work? The brain recognizes and responds to these reflex and rhythmic movements—they are the same brain-building movements we are designed with in infancy to develop the brain. Best of all, we can use these movements at any age to mature and connect brain and sensory systems, thereby taking the stress out of learning and helping children with their social-emotional and language learning as well. Children also become physically stronger, with better posture and balance after doing their neurodevelopmental movements. Children begin to feel calm and comfortable in their own skin for the first time.

Most parents and educators assume that if a child is struggling to read, the remedy is to give more reading and hope that the skills involved in reading 'kick in' and become automatic.

For some children, extra practice doesn't work and can be a source of greater stress. Here's why: If the neuro-sensory-motor system and infant reflexes are lacking in maturity, children who are bright and want to learn, may still struggle even after doing a lot of practice to improve their cognitive skills. These children will benefit greatly from a neurodevelopmental movement program. Once the foundation for learning is in place, the brain "wakes up", focuses, and learning becomes stress-free and effective.

When learning is stressful and difficult, it is almost always linked to challenges with the neuro-sensory-motor foundation and the reflexes that have remained un-integrated since infancy. There are several research studies showing a link between un-integrated

reflexes and learning challenges, as well as challenges like ADHD. Harald Blomberg, MD, a psychiatrist and co-author of the book, ***Movements That Heal***, has had tremendous success with children using reflex integration and rhythmic movements. Dr. Blomberg states that in over 20 years he's never seen a child with dyslexia that didn't also have un-integrated reflexes. Developmental optometrists have also shown in research studies that the lack of mature eye movements goes hand-in-hand with un-integrated reflexes and reading difficulties. Most promising are the research studies, like the one in the Lancet medical journal, showing that children who were previously struggling, score significantly higher on academic tests after doing neurodevelopmental movement. * See related research and links below.

There is no substitute for a calm and effective brain and sensory system. Doing neurodevelopmental movement is the most natural and effective way to establish brain maturity and the foundation for learning as well as emotional maturity. With a commitment to do enjoyable movement with our children daily, we can give them a gift that will last a lifetime.

Parents who would like to learn more can read the following books and websites:

Books:

Movements That Heal, by Harald Blomberg, MD and Moira Dempsey

The Well Balanced Child, by Sally Goddard Blythe

Websites:

www.moveplaythrive.com

www.rhythmicmovement.com

www.superiortherapyconnections.com

<http://www.inpp.org.uk>

To learn more about reflex integration, go to the links here:

<http://www.moveplaythrive.com/Learn-More/what-is-reflex-integration.html>

http://www.moveplaythrive.com/images/pdf/integrating_reflexes.pdf

To learn about Rhythmic Movement Training go to the link here:

<http://www.moveplaythrive.com/Learn-More/what-is-rhythmic-movement-training.html>

*To view research summaries go to:

<http://www.moveplaythrive.com/images/pdf/ResearchonReflexes.pdf>

Also see the following references:

- Goddard, S. (1995). The Role of Reflexes in the Development of the Visual System. The Journal of Behavioural Optometry Vol. 6: 2.
- [Gonzales, S.R., Ciuffreda, K., Hernandez, L.C., & Escalante, J.B. \(2008\). The correlation between primitive reflexes and saccadic eye movements in 5th grade children with teacher-reported reading problems. Optometry and Vision Development : 39\(3\):140.](#)
- [INPP](#) - Includes a full list of articles and books related to work with reflexes and movement that Sally Goddard-Blythe and Peter Blythe have done as a part of their work in the UK.
- McPhillips, M., Hepper, P.G., & Mulhern, G. (2000). Effects of replicating primary-reflex movements on specific reading difficulties in children: a randomised, double-blind, controlled trial. The Lancet. Vol 355: February 12, 2000.
- McPhillips, M. & Sheehy, N. (2004). Prevalence of Persistent Primary Reflexes and Motor Problems in Children with Reading Difficulties. DYSLEXIA 10: 316-338.
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- Taylor, M., Houghton, S. & Chapman, E. (2004). Primitive reflexes and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder: Developmental origins of classroom dysfunction. International Journal of Special Education, Vol 19:1.
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