

Getting to the Core of Sensory Issues: The Moro Reflex

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Moro Reflex, the Body's First Alarm System and Key to Sensory Integration

The Moro Reflex develops in the womb and is immensely important for sensory integration. What is the Moro reflex and why is it important? The Moro Reflex is an automatic movement reaction of babies when they are startled by sensory stimulus. It is beneficial for our survival, protection and growth in infancy and is ideally integrated, that is, dormant, at 4 to 6 months of age.

When startled by a loud noise, bright light, sudden movement, touch or strong smell, the Moro reflex is triggered and the baby flings the arms and legs out. This can occur with a gasp and then the limbs return to the center of the body. Along with this movement pattern, the baby's alarm system or "fight or flight" mechanism is activated. The heart pounds, breath becomes shallow, adrenaline and cortisol are secreted. This physiological stress response makes the baby MORE sensitive to incoming sensory stimulus because in a true "fight or flight" situation, it is beneficial to be sensitive and aware of a possible approaching threat.

However, for many children and adults, this Moro response was never fully integrated or "turned off" in infancy, so they are continually triggered by incoming sensory stimulus. This can cause daily stress and increases in sensitivity over time. Instead of gearing up for full learning and growth, the nervous system tends to mobilize in a protective, 'survival mode'.

An un-integrated Moro response can range from mild to severe. It can also become reactivated through illness or trauma. The Moro reflex is often especially severe

in cases of autism. Harald Blomberg, MD, co-developer of Rhythmic Movement Training says: "Most children with autism are oversensitive to various sensory stimulation...Hypersensitivity to sensory stimulation is above all caused by an active [un-integrated] Moro reflex."



The great part is that when we integrate the Moro reflex through specific movement protocols, hypersensitivities diminish.

By integrating the Moro reflex children and adults become more calm, less reactive, and more happy. They have a much greater ability to comfortably process incoming sensory stimuli and to learn with ease.

For more information contact Sonia Story at sonia@moveplaythrive.com

Recommended reading

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

Reflexes, Learning and Behavior, by Sally Goddard