

Craniosacral Therapy for Kids

By Judith Gusky, LPC

WHAT IF YOU COULD SEE SIGNIFICANT AND LASTING IMPROVEMENTS IN YOUR CHILD'S SYMPTOMOLOGY FOR AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS, ADHD, TRAUMATIC BIRTH, LEARNING DISORDERS, BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS OR A HOST OF OTHER CHILD DEVELOPMENT ISSUES... WITHOUT MEDICATION AND ITS SIDE EFFECTS?

Traditional medicine will not be supplanted by alternative therapies any time soon. But some effective treatments that have been around for decades are only recently gaining notice in more integrated medical models of pediatric health care.

Craniosacral therapy (CST) is one of those treatments. Developed in the mid-1970s by Dr. John Upledger, an osteopathic physician, CST is a gentle, light-touch therapy that can produce profoundly positive effects upon brain and spinal cord function. It may look like massage therapy to the observer, but it is much more.

CST focuses on the body's central nervous system (CNS) by way of the craniosacral system (skull and spinal bones, cerebrospinal fluid, and the membranes that protect the

brain and spinal cord). The benefit of craniosacral therapy is greater balance, mobility, and improved functioning of the CNS. As the "control center" of the body, the CNS influences every major body system and function. That's why problems in the nervous system can cause a wide range of sensory, motor, or neurological disabilities. And that is why CST is so effective in treating an equally wide range of disabilities.

The Nervous System is Key for Kids

According to Texas-based pediatric expert, Dr. Amber Brooks, nervous system imbalance is the key to why craniosacral therapy helps so many children with autism and ADHD. Almost all these kids, says Brooks, are "ramped up." They can-

not seem to relax. The part of the nervous system that allows us to respond in a "fight or flight" manner is in perpetual overdrive for these kids.

There are many neurological, genetic, and environmental factors that are thought to cause hyperactivity and nervous system dysfunction in children. But, there are also structural causes, particularly within the craniosacral system.

When cranial (skull) bones are not in the right place, for instance, restrictions can occur and remain fixed in the meninges or membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord. These restrictions can interfere with the normal movement of fluids (blood and cerebrospinal fluid) that carry vital nutrients such as oxygen, anti-bodies, hormones, and electrochemical transmitters to the brain and that flush toxins and inflammation out of the brain. The greater the restrictions the greater the nervous system dysfunction.

How do such restrictions arise? Many restrictions occur at birth in difficult labor, forceps delivery, vacuum extraction, or breech. Or as children grow and experience falls or infections, surgeries, or trauma.

Balancing the Nervous System with CST

How does craniosacral therapy work? Practitioners who perform CST first look for the craniosacral rhythm (much like the rhythm of a beating heart). Within the craniosacral system, cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) contracts and pumps normally at a rate of 6-12 cycles per minute. By detecting the rhythm, the therapist can determine where restrictions may be slowing or blocking the flow of CSF. Then, using the cranial and spinal bones as handles of sorts, they gently smooth or remove those restrictions from the membranes to help restore proper flow and function.

By releasing restrictions and restoring fluid motion to naturally enhance brain function, CST has had positive, sometimes dramatic, outcomes for a wide range of chil-

dren's issues. And because it is so gentle, non-invasive and virtually risk-free, children of all ages can benefit from this essential therapy. CST has been used to help children with a wide variety of developmental issues, including: colic, digestive issues, feeding problems, sensory processing disorders, sleep problems, Autism, ADHD, emotional instability, hyperactivity, learning disabilities, behavioral problems, poor social skills and more.

Dr. Brooks notes that helping kids with developmental problems of all kinds is about calming the nervous system and balancing it out. CST is not voodoo. It's all about function. When the body's systems are functioning at 100%, the potential for the body to do its job is really amazing. CST balances and normalizes the nervous system. It elevates the body's inherent ability to heal itself.

What CST Can and Cannot Do

Craniosacral therapy alone may resolve many childhood developmental problems, but it is not a cure-all. CST is often applied in conjunction with other bio-medical approaches and behavioral therapies. However, rather than being the last line of defense or an adjunct therapy, CST can prove beneficial as a first or early line of defense against many childhood disorders. The emotional and financial cost of searching for causes and remedies elsewhere without first looking at underlying structural causes can be great.

It is never too late to consider craniosacral therapy. It can be administered from birth through old age. It has no side effects. It is not intrusive. It is generally a short-term therapy, sometimes with maintenance intervals, depending on the disorder. Kids who undergo treatment are calmer. They sleep better. They are much better able to enter situations of change. They are happier. Once they understand the therapy, they look forward to it. On some level, they seem to understand CST's ability to help them heal themselves.



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Raising a Child with Autism

By Nancy Kennedy

Raising a child with autism is sometimes exhausting, sometimes exasperating and sometimes exhilarating. Patti McCloud experiences all of that, and much more, with her son Jordan, age 18, who was diagnosed at 2 1/2 years of age and is severely autistic and non-verbal. She was a first-time mother when Jordan was born, the first baby in a year that brought her large, extended family a total of four new babies. "Although Jordan was the oldest of the four babies, he was behind developmentally. It was obvious that he was developing differently. He was an easygoing, content baby; he never cried and tried to get his needs met. He was too perfect," she recalls.

When he was still not saying words by eighteen months, McCloud and her husband thought that perhaps Jordan had a hearing problem. Their pediatrician referred them to Children's Hospital for an evaluation – and the diagnosis was devastating. "We had no idea what it meant; autism was unknown to us.

We were presented with a long list of 'nevers' – Jordan will never do this, Jordan will never do that. I remember thinking, 'How do you know? How can you predict that?'"

There was more to Jordan than that initial evaluation suggested – and there was a lot more to Patti McCloud, as she would soon discover. Being Jordan's mother meant that she had to change, in order to meet his needs and act as his advocate. She had to learn how to effectively deal with the healthcare system and the education system. And so she stepped up – and she's been knocking it out of the park ever since. McCloud has gone to Harrisburg and Washington D.C. to lobby for autism funding; she has chaired a walk for autism, with thousands of people; she became a public speaker – something she feared and never imagined doing – and shared her story. She now works for Pressley Ridge as a business development specialist and parent advocate, providing a parents perspective as she helps the organization identify gaps in services and opportunities for improvement.

Throughout her journey with Jordan, McCloud has benefitted from a nexus of support, thanks to her family, her church, her ex-husband, other parents and autism organizations. She has another child, her daughter Nicole, age 14, who is four years younger than Jordan but is a loving, kind "Big Sister" who sings to her brother and has a special way with him. It's not easy – the McCloud home is organized to protect and accommodate Jordan's special needs, but McCloud feels that their experiences with Jordan have made them all more patient and compassionate people.

And Jordan? Jordan is a joy. He loves music, especially gospel; he enjoys watching music videos on youtube. He was thrilled to attend the special autism-friendly performance of The Lion King last year. He loves going to PNC Park to watch the Pirates play. And he loves his school, Clarence Brown Education Center in Butler. He is in the Life Skills program, where he takes academic classes as well as Community Based Vocational Training, which for



Jordan McCloud with his sister, Nicole McCloud

Jordan means a job helping out at Pizza Hut, with a job coach. He will finish school in three years, and planning for his future beyond that is in progress.

"Jordan is happy," his mother says. "There's a purity in the things he does. He may be non-verbal, but he comprehends so much. I think there is a lot inside of him that we don't know about, an inner richness. He's happy with simple things, and has a loving, sweet side. He loves our family so much. I wish that people would understand this: that he can hear you, and he understands the things you say, and he has feelings just like anyone else. He just expresses his feelings differently. I think people could learn a lot from Jordan; I know that I have."

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