

Retained Primitive Reflexes- The Basics

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I have several children on my caseload that are smart, sweet kids, but have so many challenges with sensory processing, behavior and attention. They hate writing, can't sit still, and attempt to control situations whenever possible. If this sounds like your child, the answer to these challenges may be found in his or her brain-stem, where primitive reflexes reside.

What is a primitive reflex?

A primitive reflex is an automatic response to a stimulus that is formed in utero or shortly after birth. Throughout the first year of life, reflexes repeat until the response to the stimulus is eliminated. These reflexes are necessary for development, and facilitate brain and sensory maturity, allowing us to learn to hold our head up, crawl, sit, stand, and walk. Once reflexes are integrated, they merge into more complex, differentiated movements.

What is a retained reflex?

A retained reflex is a reflex that is not integrated or is still present following a specific stimulus. The child or adult who is retaining reflexes will learn to compensate for the reflex and its associated movement patterns, and will be presented with several other academic, social, behavioral, and movement challenges.

Why do retained reflexes matter?

Reflexes originate in the brainstem or the 'survival brain.' When reflexes are present, the higher level brain structures must compensate to overcome the stimulus of the brain-stem, which puts us in a 'fight or flight' state. This

constant state of stress causes people with retained reflexes to attempt to control situations and results in behavior challenges. In addition, retained reflexes result in learning, social-emotional, and behavior challenges. Retained reflexes are very common for children with ADHD, dyslexia, and other academic challenges.

What causes retained reflexes?

While there is no definitive cause of primitive reflexes, it is believed that reflexes may be caused by a lack of movement in infancy (ie too long in car seats, carriers, etc.), stressful pregnancies, physical injury or trauma (reflexes often show up after strokes, car accidents, etc.), environmental frequencies (microwaves, Wifi, cell phones), and dietary imbalances.

What can be done to integrate reflexes?

Reflexes can be integrated using rhythmic movement, which mimics movement in early infancy, isometric exercises, and other play-based activities and exercises used to elicit each reflex until it is integrated or dormant. Occupational therapists can help to determine which reflexes (if any) have not integrated and can develop a home program to help integrate reflexes.

Source:

Story S., (2007-2011). *The Importance of Integrating Reflexes*. Retrieved from

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