ADHD linked to Retained Primitive Reflexes

What are primitive reflexes?

According to Sally Goddard Blythe a group of primitive reflexes emerge during fetal development. These primitive reflexes should be present at birth and provide an indication of the status of the Central Nervous System (CNS) when the Apgar test is performed. These primitive reflexes should gradually inhibit during the first year of life through adequate movement experiences. As primitive reflexes are inhibited, postural reflexes, should emerge to help the infant or child cope with demands of a gravity based environment. Many things can disrupt the normal progression of infant reflex development and because these reflexes are not checked before children go to school, many reflexes remain unnoticed. At-risk pregnancy, Caesarean section, fetal distress, birth trauma, illness, aneasthetics, stress or trauma are but a few of the suspected causes. When primitive and/or postural reflexes remain it has a negative impact on the child's overall functioning and ability to learn.

What happens when primitive reflexes remain?

The symptoms depend on which specific primitive reflex failed to integrate with the rest of the CNS. You will notice that many of these symptoms are also among the diagnostic symptoms of ADHD.

- Aggressive or insensitive.
- Fails to give attention to details.
- Does not follow instructions.
- Fidgets or squirms in seat.
- Does not seem to listen.
- Easily distracted.
- Loses things.

- Acts impulsively.

A retained Moro reflex results in the inability to control emotions and being easily distracted by extraneous stimuli.

A retained Asymmetrical Tonic Neck Reflex can lead to inattention and the inability to complete writing tasks.

A retained Spinal Galant Reflex causes hyperactivity, difficulty staying in one place, inattention.

A retained Tonic Labyrinthine Reflex can lead to auditory difficulties and poor organisational skills. A retained

Symmetrical Tonic Neck Reflex causes difficulty to sit still and concentrate.

Although retained primitive reflexes are not the primary cause in all children given these diagnoses, it can be an underlying factor in many.

Guidelines for teachers and parents

For the above symptoms to diminish, primitive reflexes should ideally be inhibited through a movement program like Brain Gym®. Until it is inhibited the following guidelines can be helpful.

Create a non-threatening environment: Keep noise levels to a minimum. Create a quiet learning space at home or to the side of the classroom (not near an open door).

Give one clear instruction at a time: Give directions step-by-step and only one or two steps at a time. Check for understanding by having students repeat what was heard or demonstrate what they will do.

Give well ordered information: Provide information in a well ordered manner. Give a frame of reference for information as well as the personal

relevance of information and how it fits into the “bigger picture.”

Create opportunities for movement: Make use of a standing desk, sit on a T- stool, exercise ball or air cushion and allow “fidgets” to provide extra opportunities for movement. Movement and frequent breaks while studying helps maintain a child’s focus.

Focus on Organisation: Use a daily schedule and refer to it throughout the day for each activity. Organize the physical environment so that there is a specific place designated for everything.

References:

Konicarova, J & Bob, P. (2012) Retained primitive reflexes and ADHD in children.

Activitas Nervosa Superior, 54(3-4), 135 – 138. Blythe, S. (1995) The Role of primitive survival reflexes in the development of the visual system. The journal of behavioural optometry, 6(2), 1-9.

Musgatova, SK (2001) A study on the influence of Brain Gym movements on muscles and on dynamic and postural reflexes. Brain Gym Journal, 12-19
http://unritalinsolution.com/adhdblog/2010/01/04/retained-primitive-reflexes-a-possible-cause-of-adhd/
www.addtitudemag.com/adhd/article/621.html