

Craniosacral and Babies

Children are incarnating beings. That is they are becoming flesh and blood, they are coming into a body. Have you ever watched a tiny baby and had the feeling “she’s wondering where she is?” How they move their limbs, as if trying to explore the body in which they find themselves. Touching lovingly, gently massaging their tiny bodies is a natural thing to do, as if by helping them feel the boundaries of that body, they can become more aware of where they are. There is a beautiful book by Frederick Leboyer: “Loving Hands: The Traditional Art of Baby Massage” which we ardently recommend to all new parents.

Today, as on many other days of my life, I am writing about a type of bodywork, which is very different from traditional massage and can help children connect to this existence while maintaining the connection from whence they came.

Craniosacral is a very gentle hands-on bodywork technique that affects the membranes and fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord. Working with this system is an experience that puts us in touch with the mystery of existence. The brain and spinal cord are one, (the brain filling the space inside the head and the spinal cord inside the vertebral column, a form resembling a tadpole with a vertically hanging tail) known as the Central Nervous System, CNS for short. The CNS lives in a virtually weightless environment surrounded and supported by the cerebrospinal fluid, contained in a series of membranes.

Cerebrospinal fluid is a clear liquid, chemically similar to the water of the oceans surrounding us, from where our life form came and seems to have “tides.” This liquid is created from fresh arterial blood by a mysterious filtration process in spaces in the centre of the brain, then circulates around it and the cord. Protecting the brain by acting like a shock absorber, the cerebrospinal fluid also provides nutrients and takes away waste products.(#1)

There are three different membranes surrounding the CNS, the outermost known as the Dura Mater (Strong Mother) adheres to the inside of the cranial bones, passes through the vertebral canal and attaches inside the Sacrum, the big bone at the base of the spine. This same membrane divides the brain into left and right hemispheres and separates the upper brain, the Cerebrum from the lower Cerebellum.(#2) A subtle physiological movement, similar to and slower than normal respiration exists in this system. This movement, generally called the craniosacral rhythm was discovered about a hundred years ago by a man named William Garner Sutherland.

Sutherland was a mystic and a very original thinker. His discovery of the craniosacral system came about while gazing at a disarticulated skull. Observing how the different bones fitted together, the changing form and bevels of their articular surfaces (known as sutures) he was struck by an amazing insight “this was meant to move.” He spent 30 years experimenting largely on himself and came to an understanding of what he called the Primary Respiratory Mechanism i.e.: the cerebrospinal fluid, the membranes and bones to which they attach. The movement which he perceived in this system he felt to be the Breath of Life moving through the body.(#3)

There have been attempts to demystify Sutherland’s hypothesis, to make it seem more scientific. At best they may be functional models, however the force that drives the system remains mysterious and seems to come from beyond.(#4)

The craniosacral rhythm is present in the womb. The skull develops from a membrane bag. Each suture has a shape and bevel which allows ossification to take place within the preexisting motion pattern. At the time of birth the skull is what Sutherland referred to as a “soft shelled egg.” The individual bones are malleable and the cranial vault moulds and changes shape to allow passage through the birth canal. After delivery, the baby’s suckling and cries help the system to expand and restore the head to its previous shape. The visible part of the cranium, the vault, is formed from membrane and quite accommodating of the stresses of passage through the canal. However the cranial base, the underneath of the skull, is formed from cartilage and not designed to remould. If labour forces exceed the accommodating ability of the vault, distortion may remain, unless treated.(#5)

At birth the brain is about a quarter its adult weight. The majority of growth occurs after birth and the brain shape is determined by the form of the surrounding membranes and bones. Sutherland used to say “as the twig is bent, so is the tree inclined.” The final formation of the articular gears at the sutures occurs between 7 and 9 years.(#6)

Symptoms which may be helped by craniosacral treatments include feeding difficulties, colic, irritability, poor sleep, developmental difficulties, emotional distress, ear and sinus problems. In older children craniosacral can help with hyperactivity, reading difficulties, strabismus, autism, upper and lower jaw problems, excessive falls and accidents. The origin of these symptoms is often a dysfunction which may have many possible causes during pregnancy and labour or early childhood. Sometimes there is pressure on particular cranial nerves or poor nourishment to parts of the brain.(#7)

Working with babies and young children can be a beautiful experience. Craniosacral is well known for the use of a very light touch and with young ones it is more delicate. For babies a session would last between 20 and 30 minutes, 40 minutes to an hour for older children. Sometimes 2 therapists work together facilitating response from both poles of the

system and energetic support that is more balanced between male and female figures. Children often display an acceptance of the work and participate fully. Sometimes a baby will move the head to show the area that needs to be touched, or even place the therapist's hand in just the right place. Other times an infant will remain perfectly still while something is relaxing in the system and smile in gratitude when the process is complete. Involvement of the parents is welcomed in what may seem the therapeutic dance.

The therapist is really just a facilitator for a healing force that is easily called upon when working with this system at the core of the body and motivated by the breath of life itself. Often, as well as recovering from apparent symptoms children seem to become more solid, to have moved into the body. As if that contact with the beyond helps to be more here.

Footnotes

- #1. Hugh Milne, *The Heart of Listening*, North Atlantic Books, 1995, pp. 183-185.
- #2. Ibid., pp. 178-182.
- #3. Ibid., p. 55.
- #4. Nicholas Handoll, *Anatomy of Potency*, Osteopathic Supplies Ltd., 2000.
- #5. Ibid., pp. 18-22.
- #6. W. G. Sutherland, *Teachings in the Science of Osteopathy*, Rudra Press, 1990, p108.
- #7. Michael Kern, *Wisdom in the Body*, Thorsons, 2001, pp. 238- 263.

Suggested Reading

- Frederick Leboyer, *Loving Hands: The Traditional Art of Baby Massage*, Newmarket Press, 1997.
- Michael Kern, *Wisdom in the Body*, Thorsons, 2001.
A good introduction to craniosacral, comprehensive and comprehensible.
- Nicholas Handoll, *Anatomy of Potency*, Osteopathic Supplies Ltd., 2000.
Well written consideration of the motive force in the craniosacral system, drawing on the work of thinkers like Einstein, Stephen Hawking and David Bohm.

About the author

Dhyan Trevor is director of Craniosacral Australia, a training organisation offering courses in craniosacral techniques. Born in Sydney in 1947, attending university in the late 60's caught the wave of flower power and went back to the land. For 20 years he lived in North Queensland, raising a family and becoming a beekeeper. In 1989 he began travelling and turning a longtime massage hobby into a new career, participated in a massage training in the Osho Commune Pune, India where he was introduced to craniosacral. He dedicated his life to this new work, selling his bees and studying in India and Europe. By the early 90's he began teaching in various European countries, India and Australia, living mostly in

Italy and India. Since 1999 Trevor has been settled in Suffolk Park and teaches craniosacral courses in Sydney, Perth and Byron.

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