



Complex Child E-Magazine

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Neurodevelopmental Treatment (NDT)

by D'Anne White

Neurodevelopmental Treatment, also known as Neurodevelopmental Therapy or NDT, is a philosophy of treatment that was developed to help children and adults with neuromotor disorders like Cerebral Palsy or traumatic brain injuries. It is a theory that can be integrated into the practice of physical therapy, occupational therapy, or speech therapy to assist in achieving therapeutic goals. The basic philosophy is to inhibit abnormal movement patterns and to facilitate normal patterns.

Specific handling techniques are used to help the brain and body create normal movement patterns, which then allow the brain to build upon those pathways and start to integrate these patterns. Similarly, handling techniques that inhibit abnormal reflexes and movements are used to move the client towards new and more beneficial patterns.

To give a brief example of the handling, we can look at facilitating an arm movement towards midline. Rather than pulling the arm by the hand or giving support at the elbow, an NDT therapist would place her hands on the client's back muscles--where the movement would typically originate from--and use pressure moving from the back and down the arm to "show" the body how the correct movement would work and feel.

Our personal experience with NDT has consisted of two physical therapists and two occupational therapists who utilized NDT as a part of their overall therapy style. My son Jackson has complex tone issues and very limited functional movement, and many therapists find him challenging to work with. The ability of these four therapists to understand my son's neuromotor issues and to help him achieve his therapy goals was unsurpassed.

The NDT-trained therapists seemed to have an innate knowledge and understanding of Jackson's body and how to elicit the movements they desired, and did so in a way that made him feel totally supported and comfortable. He was able to make faster gains, had better carry-over between sessions, and enjoyed working with them more than any other therapists we have had. NDT may not have such outstanding outcomes on all clients, but for my son the effect has been amazing. We now seek out NDT-trained therapists whenever we can.

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