

CranioSacral Therapy: An empowering gift to our children

By MeriJayd O'Connor, CST-D, LMT, MTI, CLC

Every CranioSacral Therapy (CST) session begins with an invitation to be and to listen. Before the first touch, there is grounding, breath and presence with the moment, and my own inner wisdom, inner healer, inner physician. The person on my massage table, or floor, or parent's arm, depending on the age, has ended up here, in this moment to be listened to in deep and superficial layers, through auditory, energetic and touch ways.

It is the practice of a craniosacral therapist to be present and neutral, offering unconditional positive regard. This sets the tone for a person's inner self-balancing mechanism, a.k.a; Inner Physician, to do its work. The *Art* of CranioSacral Therapy is to blend, meld and listen to this inner mechanism. The *Science* is revealed, as light touch provides just enough input into the nervous system to make changes.

Parents often ask "What can CST do for my child? How can it help?" There is great momentum around CST as more and more people have experienced the profound effects that happen when attention and space is given to the inner physician. Many lactation consultants, pediatric dentists, neurologists, psychologists, occupational and speech therapists, and educators refer parents to seek out this kind of therapy for their children. These professionals see changes and they see that their therapies and interventions start to work better. A child's system can find itself and become more regulated and respond appropriately to sensory stimuli.

CranioSacral Therapy can very well be explained in terms of physiology and biomechanics. The therapist uses a light touch to detect and release restrictions or imbalances within the fascial, nervous, and energetic systems. Movement is health and when all structures have the space and movement needed, well-being flourishes.

Dr. John Upledger, the developer of CranioSacral Therapy was an osteopathic physician trained in manual manipulation and used core concepts from Osteopathy to develop the modality. He was working with autistic children at the time. He needed more non-osteopaths to be able to do the work to fulfil the greater need for this therapy. As we CST therapists train in this modality, we refine our understanding of anatomy and physiology. We tune our palpation skills to be able to feel and recognize deeper and more subtle structures like cranial nerves, glia cells and cerebrospinal fluid flow. Dr. Upledger was always using science to study the techniques and further understand how the body functions. However, CranioSacral Therapy goes beyond this study into the realm of the inner biological wisdom that knows how to heal or achieve balance. Connecting to this inner force requires the grounded environment I described in my opening paragraphs. It requires trusting that when given the right environment and resources, people can heal and thrive.

So, what can CST do for my child? A session offers an opportunity to connect wherever connection is needed. This could be connecting with the environment, the nervous system, the inner realm of the imagination, the emotional body, or a parent or primary caregiver. It offers an environment to explore the whole person on all levels and discover how stress reactions can change or downshift into a more regulated way. The simple act of being present with a person and following the tissues of the body results in improvements in function, proprioception, sensory and reflex integration, and overall ability to adapt or recover from stress. I encourage parents to receive CranioSacral Therapy so they can feel and

understand this same kind of connection and self-awareness. Children co-regulate with the people around them and one of the best gifts we can give to our children is doing our own work to be stable and fairly well regulated!

This modality is not something “done” to someone. Rather the therapist follows the path that the inner physician presents. It might sound rather ephemeral, but a skilled practitioner has tuned their palpation skills to a very fine level to sense the nuanced shifts and pulls and softening of gross and subtle structures.

For children who have a history of medical interventions, birth trauma, or ongoing medical tests and procedures, the safe, grounded environment a CranioSacral session offers can help a child experience positive touch and autonomy over their own body. There is care to ask permission to touch and check in to make sure that the touch is still acceptable. Children, when given the chance, will often direct my hands to the exact area that needs attention. They learn about interoception, the ability to sense the body inside and out. With practice, a person is able to pay attention to the first signs that their body needs something.

This way of being and touching can be easily learned. Parents and caregivers can take a ShareCare class from an Upledger certified presenter. The class teaches how to connect with the inner physician and how to do some basic techniques to help relieve stress and restore balance at home or in-between professional sessions.

Children will often use their “helping hands” on their parents or siblings after receiving CST. A nine-year old boy who is on the autistic spectrum said to me in the middle of his session, “CranioSacral Therapy is the heart chakra of the world.” A parent said to me after getting into a minor fender bender, that her 5-year-old said, “Mommy, first we call the police and then we go get CranioSacral Therapy.” Teenagers will inform their parents when it is time to come in for a tune-up. CranioSacral Therapy truly facilitates empowered living for our young ones. It is a gift to the world.