

Episode 4 – Rhythmic Movement Training

Hello and welcome to the Selective Mutism HELP, Home Educational Learning Program, Podcast, my name is Kelly, and I will be your host. This podcast aims to give you the help you need to support the person in your life affected by selective mutism. In this episode I'll be talking about Rhythmic Movement Training and how it may help those with Selective Mutism. I'll be discussing what Rhythmic Movement Training is and how it may be an alternative to medication. Plus, I'll share how Rhythmic Movement Training has been incorporated into helping our SM daughter. Let's get started.

Welcome to episode 4 of the Selective Mutism HELP Home Educational Learning Program podcast. My name is Kelly, and I am a parent of a child with Selective Mutism. Being that I am a parent and not a medical professional, this podcast is for informational purposes only. The topic of Rhythmic Movement Training is a really big topic once you start researching it. I will do my best to give a general overview, but please know that there is a lot you can still learn and I highly recommend learning as much as you can. I'll start off by talking about how we came upon Rhythmic Movement Training. During the first year of getting our daughter diagnosed and treated, we were told time and time again that the reason she has SM is because it is a genetic disorder and that my husband or I had severe anxiety which was passed on to our daughter. This can be the case for a lot of kids with SM, but I always felt like it didn't match up to us. Yes, we were shy kids and slow to warm, but nothing severe to the point of Selective Mutism, social anxiety, or separation anxiety. It seemed like there was another component, I just didn't know what that was. When we had our first Occupational Therapy session, the concept of Integrating Reflexes and Rhythmic Movement Training was brought to my attention. We were given an article written by Sonia Story called "The Importance of Integrating Reflexes." This was the article I was waiting for! This seemed to answer all of my questions and helped me understand where the SM was coming from. I'll attach the link to the article in the podcast notes, and I really hope you take the time to read the two page article. If you can't, I'll summarize it here for you.

Let's dive into what reflexes are, what it means to have integrated reflexes, and what may happen if certain reflexes aren't integrated. Ok, a reflex, more specifically a primitive reflex, is an automatic, instinctual movement controlled from the brain stem that develops during pregnancy. These reflexes are needed for the newborn to survive during the first few months after birth. Generally, they become inactive after the toddler stage. The most common reflexes you may know, without even knowing they were a primitive reflex, would be sucking, grasping, and the startle reflex. I think all you parents can remember your baby throwing their little arms and legs out and gasping when they heard a loud noise, it was so cute! That reflex was controlled by the Moro reflex – which I'll get into later. As the baby moves their body around in various ways, sometimes rhythmically, they start integrating those reflexes. An integrated reflex is a reflex that has either merged into a more sophisticated movement or is a reflex that is no longer active.

If the baby is not given opportunities to move their bodies, they may not have the opportunity to integrate their reflexes and therefore, the reflexes stay active. I want to throw out a quick side note – as you listen to this information, please do not feel guilty or at fault for anything you did as a parent. You did everything right for your situation and for what you knew as a parent when your child was a baby. I have been riddled with guilt for a long time because I could have done things different if only I knew more after she was born. But the guilt has not helped my child, taking action has. With that out the way, I want share with you how we cared for our daughter as a baby and how it may have contributed to retained primitive reflexes. During

pregnancy a mother tends to read a ton material, especially before having their first child. I had read things about letting your child cry it out so they don't become dependent on needing someone to help them calm down or fall asleep, I learned about swaddling them to keep them feeling secure, and being that I can be on the competitive side, I wanted to see our daughter reach milestones quickly so we had her in various jumpy jumps as we called them to get her strong. Here's where understanding rhythmic movement and integrating primitive reflexes could have come in handy at that point in raising our daughter. When a baby cries it signals the mother to pick them up and rock them gently. The rocking movement helps integrate reflexes. When we kept her swaddled it didn't give her the opportunity to move her body in a way to integrate her reflexes. Plus, having her in a jumper actually restricted certain movements she needed to integrate reflexes. Now, again, I'm not saying that these things caused my daughter's SM, but it may have been enough to push the predisposition of anxiety further into a more severe anxiety situation that we are now seeing.

Another important component for a baby to have an opportunity to integrate their primitive reflexes is to allow them time to spend on their tummies. I remember going to those first checkups and the pediatrician saying tummy time was needed to help strengthen the neck. Well, typically, when you put a baby on their tummy, they start to cry so you pick them up and hold them. I figured she'll get her neck strength another way so I didn't have to see her so upset when laying on her tummy. Again, little did I know, that tummy time is so much for than strengthening their neck. It gives them the opportunity to move their bodies in a way to help integrate their reflexes. Integrated reflexes are the foundation for brain development. When building a tower, you need to have a strong foundation in order for the tower to stand tall and strong, if the base is weak, the tower may sway, or have cracks, or only get so far along. Same is true for the integrated reflexes – if they aren't integrated or still active, the foundation is weak and problems may arise.

Now that we have an understanding of what primitive reflexes are and how they become integrated. Let's talk about what may happen if certain reflexes are not integrated. I'll start with the Moro Reflex, the startle reflex that I mentioned earlier. The moro reflex creates an instant arousal in a baby's survival system – again this in information taking from Sonia Story's article. The moro reflex trains the nervous system to develop the fight/flight survival response. They will develop an increased and shallow breathing rate, their heart rate and blood pressure will increase, and they will have a release of adrenaline and cortisol which are stress hormones. When this happens and a caregiver is close by to give the baby an opportunity to hug and cling, this helps integrate the reflex and by four months of age, the reflex should be integrated. Instead of the fight/flight response, their shoulders will rise and they will look for the source of what startled them. They may pay attention to whatever it was or simply ignore it. By ignoring it, their nervous system matures and learns to filter out unwanted stimuli. So what happens if the baby doesn't integrate their Moro Reflex? In Harald Blomberg's book "The Rhythmic Movement Method, he states that constant inner stress causes withdrawn behavior, the baby may be afraid of unfamiliar situations and exploring, it may cause Selective Mutism, it may cause poor adaptability, inflexibility, OCD, negativism, opposition, and aggression. In Sonia's article, she mentions that a retained moro reflex may cause poor balance and coordination, hypersensitivity to sound, difficulty filtering out extraneous stimuli, and difficulty catching a ball – all of which our SM daughter had.

Another reflex I wanted to talk about is the Fear Paralysis Reflex, this goes along closely with the moro reflex because when this reflex is integrated, it will help the moro reflex integrate. The fear paralysis reflex protects a baby by triggering the "freeze" reaction. During the freeze reaction, they will tighten the jaw and eye muscles, hold their breath, and there may be a drop

in heart rate. Generally, the fear paralysis reflex is triggered as a response to a perceived threat. I bet you can guess what a possible long-term effect of an active Fear paralysis reflex is. Yup, Selective Mutism. As well as insecurity, depression, fear of separation from loved ones, clinging behavior, controlling behavior, and fear of failure to name a few. This reflex is generally integrated before birth even occurs. If it hasn't been integrated, a baby may be sensitive to rocking and may not want to be held. Rocking and being held is what helps integrate the moro reflex, so you can see how these two can go hand in hand.

Those were the two main reflexes I wanted to talk about in this podcast, because it seems that those two are the closest link to Selective Mutism. In Sonia's article, she talks about a few other reflexes – the Tonic Labyrinthine Reflex or TLR, the Asymmetrical Tonic Neck Reflex or ATNR and the Spinal Galant reflex. TLR has to do with muscle tone, balance and coordination, "W" leg sitting, difficulty alternating legs going up and down stairs, and stiff, jerky movements to name a few there. The ATNR can cause poor sense of direction, focus and balance issues, dyslexia, and reading issues. Finally, the Spinal Galant Reflex may cause bedwetting (which we are still dealing with for our daughter), scoliosis, poor posture, difficulty standing still, and poor concentration to name a few.

You may be asking yourself, now what? My child has retained primitive reflexes, what do I do? My suggestion would be to find someone that is trained in Rhythmic Movement and have an evaluation done. I have been so fortunate to have an OT evaluate our daughter and teach me how to do the movements to start integrating her reflexes. Plus, I had the absolute privilege to interview two women who are well versed in Rhythmic Movement Training in past Selective Mutism HELP Summits. One of the women I interviewed during the first Selective Mutism HELP summit was a name that you may now know – Sonia Story. She was able to break down a lot of this information during our interview which was extremely beneficial. Another woman I interviewed for the second Selective Mutism HELP summit was Charlotte Davies from the UK. In our interview we talked about primitive reflexes as well as sound processing. Both are wonderful interviews and at the end of this podcast, I'll share a code to gain access to those interviews at a reduced price. If you find that you don't have someone in your area trained in RMT – Rhythmic Movement Training – check out the amazing YouTube videos that Charlotte put together. She has videos of each of the reflexes I mentioned, as well as others, that go into details about testing for retained reflexes as well as exercises on how to start integrating those reflexes. She was so kind as to watch slowed down video of our daughter running, walking, and skipping, to help us determine exactly what we needed to be focusing on.

Now, this isn't a one and done exercise program. It takes months, if not years to see results. During the exercises, the brain is beginning to form neuropathways. Remember in the last podcast how we talked about medication and how increasing the serotonin levels can increase the ability to form more neuropathways. So this could be a way to get some of the same effects of medicating without medication. My guess is there are not specific research articles published on the effects of medicating versus the effects of RMT on Selective Mutism, so I can't say for certain that RMT can be used in lieu of medication. But, from my experience and understanding of RMT, there is a possibility. We started doing RMT daily with my daughter this spring. She started exhibiting more issues with separating anxiety and worry and I didn't feel that increasing her medication was what we needed at that point. So, after talking with Charlotte and reading her book and watching her videos, we got a game plan together and started doing exercises daily. To be honest, it was really hard to watch my daughter try to do the exercises. One of them was for her to crawl from one side of the room to the other. Seems simple enough, but due to her lack of core strength, she couldn't keep her hands parallel to each other when crawling, they would splay or point backwards. Another exercise was sitting in a chair and

slowing putting arms and legs out at the same time while looking up and every time she would tip backwards and start falling. Even though she struggled, we could not give up. I would become very overwhelmed watching her and it would create an unhealthy environment for the two of us. So, I ended up recording myself doing the exercises and then every day she would take the laptop and follow along with the video. She did the exercises for at least 3 months almost every single day. I would say by the second month we could really see a difference in her mood. She wasn't so uptight and controlling, she was more flexible in her thinking, and more pleasant to be around. I know we still have a lot of work ahead of us, but at least now we are able to support her brain and body in a different way that medication and therapy may not be able to support. I'm a firm believer that a child with SM needs a whole body treatment program and using RMT could be a way to do that.

I hope this episode has given you a different way of looking at how your child could have potentially developed their SM. It might answer those questions that you couldn't find the answer to. I'll leave some links in the episode notes for you to learn more about Rhythmic Movement Training if you would like to learn more, which I hope you do. And, if you'd like to check out my interviews with Sonia Story or Charlotte Davies, head over to smhelp.org and visit the awareness merchandise tab. Sonia's interview is in Day 3 of the Fall 2020 Summit and Charlotte's is in Day 3 of the Spring 2021 Summit. There you will be able to purchase lifetime access to the interviews and, if you use the code `podcast4`, all lowercase letters with the number 4 after, you will save 25% off those interviews. Thanks for joining me and the next episode will be available in two weeks. Until then, feel free to email me with any questions at smhelp2020@gmail.com, learn more from my website smhelp.org, and follow me on Facebook and Instagram by searching for Selective Mutism H.E.L.P. Take care everyone!

Links discussed in Podcast

["The Importance of Integrated Reflexes"](#) article by Sonia Story

["The Rhythmic Movement Method: A Revolutionary Approach to Improved Health and Well Being"](#) book by Harald Blomberg MD

[Fit 2 Learn YouTube Channel](#) - videos by Charlotte Davies

[Free Chart](#) of the 22 infant reflexes and possible long-term effects if unintegrated by Brain and Sensory Foundations

Interested in being trained in Rhythmic Movement to help your child or a child you work with? Click [HERE](#) to check out an amazing course by Move Play Thrive/Brain and Sensory Foundations.