

The Spark Special

Here we are coming to the end of what has been a tumultuous year! And we find ourselves in a new phase COVID-19 safe summer! A collaborative and shared community effort to reach this point. Thank you to everyone for their patience, openness and flexibility during the year.

We have all learned new skills and adapted with each transition. Whilst we are through the hard stretch of the journey, the cumulative stress load can take its toll. You may find you feel worn out, exhausted or stressed. Remember to be self-compassionate, nurture yourself and take the time to replenish your battery over the summer break.

The team and I are having our first staff wellbeing day on the 11th December – called Brighten your Spark! A day for us to re-charge, reflect, connect and play together.

Wishing everyone a safe and happy summer holidays and we look forward to connecting with your child and family in the new year.

Tina and The Spark Team XXX

Reminders

- A Spark wide Christmas shutdown will take place between Wednesday, 23rd of December—> Wednesday, 6th of January. During this time communication between the Spark and our wonderful families will be delayed. Please check in with your therapist to determine their leave dates for the holiday period.
- We have updated our privacy policy – you can review this here.
- We have added a fact sheet page to our website – which you can find here
- We offer parent coaching sessions – find out more here.
- Your OT will arrange appointments with you for 2021.

This Month's Topics:

- End of Year Transitions
- Primitive Reflexes
- Misbehaviour vs. Stress Behaviour

End of Year Transitions

- Giselle Bautista

End of Year Transition It is that time of the year again! Our kids have gone through a very different year – moving from home-schooling to on-site learning, and now, 2020 is almost over and we have to prepare for another change.

End of year transitions can be exciting and nerve wracking not just for kids, but for parents as well. Here are some tips to prepare children for transition to the new year.

Don't forget the power of thank you – help cement some of your child's positive experiences with their teachers by:

- Making their own postcards
- Writing fun memories with the teacher
- Creating artwork

Write a letter to your new teacher - You can help your kids introduce themselves to their new teachers. Simple words or drawings will do.

It would be nice to let your kids share bits of themselves through things like:

- About me and my family
- At school I like
- Over the summer holiday
- Next year I am looking forward to

Give as much information as possible – Talk about what is going to happen, what fun things are waiting for them next year, who they're meeting (teachers, friends, new people).

This can be done in different ways:

- Casual conversations
- Story telling
- Drawing
- Writing

Let your child see your emotions about transitions – let them know how you're feeling – excited, nervous, happy, sad. They will feel understood and comforted knowing that having different emotions about it is okay.



Primitive Reflexes

- Angela McCosker

What are Primitive Reflexes?

Primitive reflexes emerge in utero, they are responses to sensory stimulus such as touch or smell. Their purpose is to generate involuntary movements (reflexes) that help a baby emerge from the birth canal and to engage in survival behaviours such as breathing, swallowing, crying, blinking and grasping items. These reflexes also lay the foundations for the development of later milestones such as crawling, rolling, walking and playing.

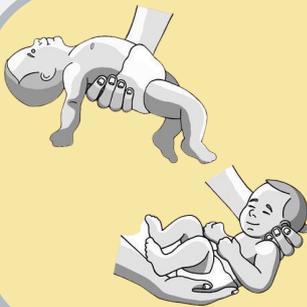
As the brain and nervous system matures and grows, these involuntary movements (or reflexes) become voluntary and purposeful actions that can be controlled. This often occurs between 3 months to 3 years - dependent on the specific primitive reflex.

There are five main primitive reflexes that can influence the development of motor skills:



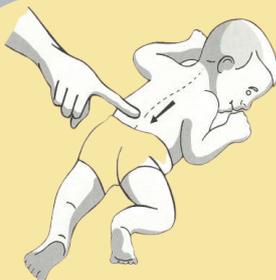
MORO Reflex

This is the “startle” reflex, otherwise known as fight/flight. It helps a baby take their first breath and release a loud cry when they need attention from a caregiver. You see this when the baby moves their head back and extends their arms out.



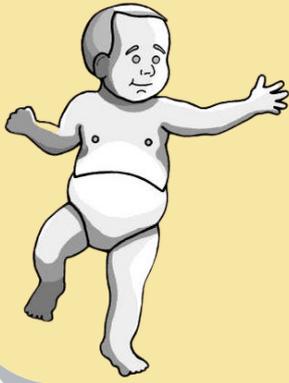
Tonic Labyrinthine Reflex (TLR)

This reflex is responsible for the position of the head in space and allows for the development of rolling over, crawling, standing and walking. When an infant's head is extended back, their legs will straighten and toes point. The elbows will flex and hands fisted. This reflex will typically integrate around 3-3.5 years.



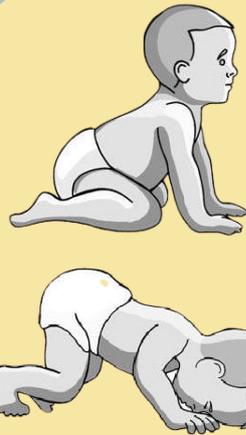
Spinal Galant

This is important for helping the baby “wiggle” out of the birth canal. This reflex helps with bladder control and feeling comfortable with sitting still. When one side of the lower spine is touched or stroked, the muscle will contract causing the hips to move towards the side being touched.



Asymmetrical Tonic Neck Reflex (ATNR)

This reflex helps the baby “corkscrew” out of the birth canal and plays an important role in breastfeeding. It is also responsible for the development of hand eye coordination and depth perception. As the baby turns their head to one side the arm and leg of the same side straightens whilst the opposite side bends.



Symmetrical Tonic Neck Reflex (STNR)

Also known as the “crawling” reflex, this supports the body to be divided down the midline to allow for symmetrical movements on both sides of the body. If retained, this reflex can impact posture (often W sitting) and tracking objects with the eyes. This can be observed when a baby rocks back and forth when on all fours as their head moves from having their chin on chest to an extended position looking up.

Retained Primitive Reflexes

Primitive reflexes can be retained for a number of reasons related to the birthing process; sensory processing differences; environmental factors and delays in developmental milestones. Both children and adults can have retained reflexes which impact their coordination, balance, posture, sleep, energy levels and daily living skills.

Each of the primitive reflexes outlined above can be screened by your OT to assess if they are retained and to what degree they are retained. If they are not retained (still present) they are referred to as being integrated. There is a range between retained and integrated reflexes which shows the level of impact that the retained reflex has on everyday function. Your OT can discuss this with your further or look at checklists for your child to establish if a screening for primitive reflexes is appropriate.

Integrating Primitive Reflexes

Each of the five primitive reflexes above have their own screening activities and exercises to integrate if they are shown to be retained. These are often simple exercises such as cat stretches, being a starfish or crawling games. It is best practice that these exercises are completed on a daily basis for a period of 2-4 weeks depending on the level of retention. A home program can be established for your child to help integrate the necessary reflexes.

For more information please refer to [Brain Balance Centres website](#).
Images sourced from: [Bloomberg Rhythmic Movement Training](#)

Misbehaviour vs. Stress Behaviour

- The Spark Therapy Services

When we see a child's behaviours, we see the tip of the iceberg which we refer to as "unexpected behaviours". What we don't see, lies beneath the surface of these behaviours; a multi-layered stress load with many factors contributing to behaviour. There are five domains that can contribute to a person's stress load.

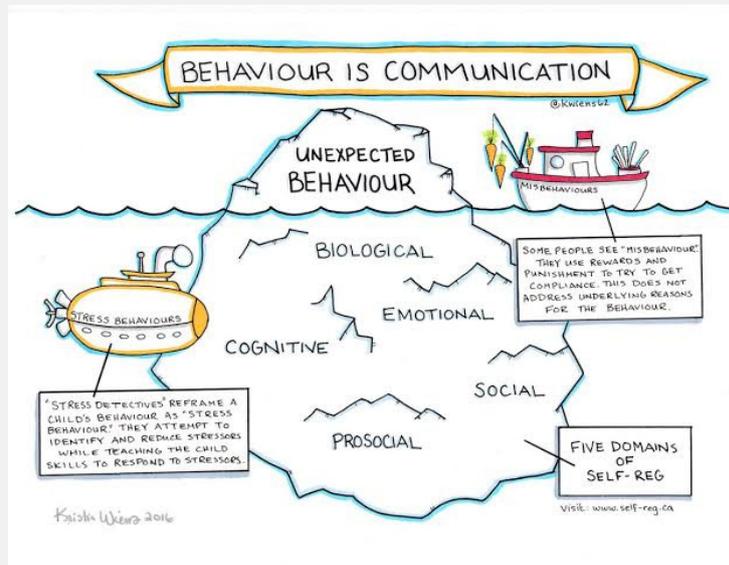


Image sourced from: [Stuart Shankar's Self-Reg Framework](#)

Cognitive: This refers to attention, thinking, memory and problem solving.

Biological: Refers to factors related to our body such as sleep, nutrition, sensory processing differences, coordination difficulties and allergies.

Social: Refers to how we read, interpret and respond to social cues.

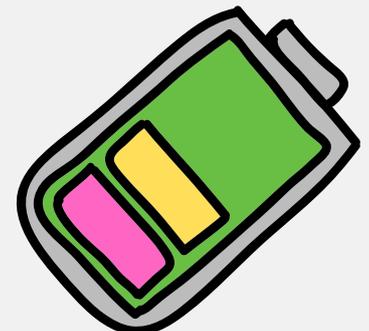
Prosocial: This is how we respond to others' behaviour and events in the world. For example, children may experience stress when others break the rules.

Emotional: Our ability to "monitor, evaluate and manage" our emotions.

The good news is, there are many ways you are able to support your child to cope with this stress and grow their emotional understanding. We have collated some of the main strategies we use below;

Battery Check in

During our OT sessions we often refer to "checking our battery". This is a visual representation of how our internal energy level is at that current moment. It is a way of checking in with our emotional state, physical energy and mental wellbeing. We may be fully charged, half full or nearly empty. Checking our battery levels on a daily basis helps us to tune into how we are feeling at any given time and to develop tools to help us recharge.



Emotion Coaching: Connect & Redirect

Information sourced and adapted from: [Dr. Daniel Siegel](#)

When young people display big emotions, we often focus on the behaviour that we see. It is important to also think about why the young person is behaving this way and what they are trying to communicate. In this moment, they need to feel safe, seen, soothed and secure. We need to "keep calm and connect" and lend them our calm, so they can learn to calm down. We can do this by listening, validating their experience and reflecting back what we hear. This helps them move from a reactive state to a receptive state. When they have regulated themselves, you can work to problem solve, set boundaries and reflect on how the young person can approach the situation differently next time.

There are 5 main steps to emotion coaching which we have listed for you here →

[You can also seek out further information here.](#)

- 1 Understand how you deal with feelings.
- 2 Believe that your child's negative emotions are an opportunity for closeness and teaching.
- 3 Listen with empathy and understanding, then validate your child's feelings.
- 4 Label your child's emotions.
- 5 Set limits while exploring possible solutions to the problem that caused the negative emotion.

Collaborative and Proactive Approach (CPS)

Information sourced and adapted from: [Dr. Ross Greene](#)

The CPS approach to problem solving is based on the premise that challenging behavior occurs when the demands and expectations being placed on a kid exceed their current skill level. This means that the emphasis of the approach isn't on kids' challenging behaviour, which is just the manner in which they're expressing their skill deficit. The model instead focuses on identifying the skills a person is lacking and the expectations they're having difficulty meeting. In other words:

KIDS DO WELL IF THEY CAN

Following this, the goal is then to help them solve those problems, rather than trying to modify their behavior through application of rewards and punishments. The problem solving methodology is of the collaborative and proactive variety. The goal is to work together with your child to foster a problem-solving, collaborative partnership and to engage kids in solving the problems that affect their lives.

As such, the CPS approach is non-punitive and non-adversarial, decreases the likelihood of conflict, enhances relationships, improves communication, and helps kids and adults learn and display the skills on the more positive side of human nature: empathy, appreciating how one's behavior is affecting others, resolving disagreements in ways that do not involve conflict, taking another's perspective, and honesty.

Ideas for the Holidays

Click on the picture within each box to discover new resources and ideas

EXPLORE



Nature Activities

PLAY



Silly Drawing

Fun with Maths & Science



DISCOVER

Family Fun Night!



CONNECT