

The Neurodevelopmental Approach to Learning Difficulties

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Labels represent a group of symptoms exhibited by an individual with learning difficulties. Many approaches target those symptoms. On the other hand, the Neurodevelopmental approach seeks to find the underlining neurodevelopmental causes and prepares an Individual Neurodevelopmental Plan. The Neurodevelopmentalist designs this INP with a list of activities that develop the areas of deficiency. Most often, labels limit expectations rather than lead to a solution. Then the Neurodevelopmentalist looks at the five sensory ways of sensory input: tactile (taste and smell), auditory and visual as well as the three areas of motor output: fine motor, expressive language and gross motor. All of these areas are necessary in the process of neurological organization.

One specific area that is evaluated is the individual's ability to crawl, creep and walk in a cross pattern. This ability represents brain organization. In the normal progression, the infant first crawls (on tummy like an army soldier) then creeps (on hand and knees) and then walks. All of these are necessary steps in the neurodevelopmental process.

Another area that the neurodevelopmentalist evaluates is short-term memory. The same activities can be used to test and develop the short-term memory. For instance, to test and develop auditory short-term-memory, a person can read off a list of digits, at one-second intervals, in a monotone. The individual listens to the whole list before repeating those digits back to the other. The average one-year-old can remember one piece of information, a two-year-old, two pieces, a three-year-old three pieces etc. until the age of seven-years-old. Unfortunately, our society has become very visual and has lost its auditory memory or processing ability. In our society today, the average for an individual seven and older is seven. The good news is that this same activity done two to three times a day for two to three minutes provides intensive and frequent short-term memory/processing training. This skill makes use of phonics, attention and social maturity possible.

Another very important area is that of dominance. A person who is right handed should also be right footed, right eyed and right eared. If a child naturally and without external pressure is right-handed, he should be right side dominant. Likewise, a person who is left hand should also be dominant in the left eye, ear and foot. Parents can observe all of this, and in some cases, determine which side

should be dominant. Other times it is wise to have a trained neurodevelopmentalist evaluate this area. Dominance relates to long-term memory and emotional control.

These and other areas make up a neurodevelopmental evaluation. Neurodevelopmentalists evaluate and write an individual neurodevelopmental plan.

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