

QIGONG MASSAGE BRINGS TOUCH TO AUTISTIC CHILDREN

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It looks more like a game, with its patting and jiggling movements, but the qigong massage treatment for children on the autism spectrum provides healing for a serious ailment.

Autism spectrum disorder is a leading cause of communication and behavior problems and the most prevalent childhood disorder in the U.S., afflicting an estimated one in every 100 children and one in 58 boys.

Based on a new application of ancient principals and techniques from traditional Chinese medicine, the qigong treatment program also offers relief for families struggling with the developmental delays and behavioral challenges faced by children on the autism spectrum.

The program was developed by Louisa Silva, M.D., M.P.H., and validated in randomized clinical trials at Western Oregon University's Teaching Research Institute.

The 15-minute massage involves a series of 13 patting, pressing and shaking movements performed in conjunction with certain acupuncture channels and points by which a child's blocked energy channels are opened.

According to Silva, the training has been available for five years and has been given to more than 50 trainers and 130 families. The families who participated in the research studies were recruited from state-sponsored early intervention programs where they were enrolled and receiving services for autism.

Honoring the unique power of the parent-child bond, the massage is given twice daily by a parent. But therapists can play an important role, Dr. Silva says, providing support and training for parents, as they get comfortable with the massage, and helping children through the initial difficulties and resistance.

Families who participated in the research reported tremendous results. The children had far fewer tantrums, were more calm and relaxed, slept better and were able to better communicate and show affection.

The documentary film, "Helping Families with Autism: Qigong Massage," chronicles the progress of families who took part in the five-month research program.

"To me, this is the missing link," said the mother of one child in the film. "It unlocks the kids and it is just an amazing thing to see."

For more information, visit www.qsti.org.

Snapshot

—Mary Alice Milham

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