



### Do you recognise these children?

David is always in motion. He wriggles, slides out of his seat, stands up or lies on top of the table. Although he knows his letters and numbers, he still finds it difficult to read.

Shika runs into walls and bumps against a chair every time she walks past it. She is so clumsy she often knocks other children over. Her schoolwork is messy and untidy.

Nicholas is at primary school and has terrible tantrums and displays aggressive behaviour towards other children. His mother and teacher despair, as they cannot control him. In spite of the fact that his schoolwork is excellent, the school has asked him to leave owing to the disruption caused.

These children could all be at risk of being labelled as having ADHD, ADD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia (the inability to perform certain purposeful actions) – the list of possible disorders goes on...

- *What is really going on with these children?*
- *What is the reason why we are seeing such difficult behaviour in David and Nicholas?*
- *Why can Shika not control her body properly even when she is trying so desperately hard to do so?*

The issues are a manifestation of something that is happening with the children and this may cause them to express themselves in ways that they, and possibly their parents, carers and teachers, cannot understand clearly.

Knowing and understanding the possible root causes of such behaviour is the key to getting to the heart of the problem. Once we

# A Moving Alternative for Developmentally Delayed Children

Children affected by developmental delay may respond to therapies that don't rely on drugs to help rewire the way they think and behave. SMILE (Specific Movement for Integrated Learning Effectiveness) therapist **Rachel Schumacher** describes who may benefit from these therapies and explains the principles behind them.

understand the cause(s) we can then take positive action, because social issues, learning difficulties, explosive behaviours and physical awkwardness can be caused by neuro-development problems.

To find and know the causes we must look at the whole picture for each individual. For learning and social interaction to take place smoothly and efficiently we need to receive information through the senses, process it in the brain and respond to it through movement.

It sounds so simple, but the process of receiving, interpreting and acting on information through movement is actually interrelated and complex. If the process is not working well it can cause the issues seen with David, Nicholas and Shika. It is essential for the brain and body to be integrating efficiently for learning effectiveness and to be able to cope with the demands of everyday life. If for some reason neuro-developmental stages have been missed out, delayed neural processing in the left and right sides of the brain can occur and cause the brain and body to struggle to work together smoothly and effectively. Other possible influences on behaviour may include environmental offenders and problems with sensory and motor systems.

Medication can change our brain chemistry temporarily, but has no power to change neural pathways or associations. The temporary chemical change in our brain lasts only as long as the medication is synthesized to last, but it is never permanent and we always need to take another pill.

An alternative, and lasting, solution is movement.

### How do movement activities and therapies work?

The developmental gaps can be filled in and new neural pathways can be formed in the brain. We can achieve this by carefully selecting specific movement activities to map patterns and develop new neural pathways, thus helping to create more effective brain and body integration.

To get faster results we must try to implement these movements every day until the movement becomes automatic. However, we must also be careful not to overload the child and cause stress. When you learn everyday activities your brain gradually develops the neural pathways to make your actions automatic. What you learn changes the neural associations in the brain and becomes permanent.

If sensory processes are integrated with efficient and effective interpretation in the brain an individual will be given every opportunity to respond to their environment appropriately and realise their own personal potential. That is every human being's absolute right!

An evaluation in a non-threatening, open and friendly environment may allow the root causes of a child's issues to be identified. This can then enable them to be addressed gently by

working on a physical level to successfully integrate and improve the process of receiving, interpreting and acting on information through movement. It can also take into account environmental offenders, reflexes and problems with sensory and motor systems so that a rounded response is developed. While any number of activities (which may include crawling through a hula hoop, clapping games, ball activities, etc.) can be used to help a child, a qualified therapist can assess a child's situation and find the right activity for them and lead them through it. Working on a physical level through movement can also have the added benefit of being fun for the child – so that they want to do it! ■

#### To find out more, please feel free to:

- Attend a SMILE Therapy introductory talk at the YWCA on Thursday, 21 February, 10am-12noon
- Contact Rachel Schumacher at 9810 4207 or Rachel@smiletherapy.net
- Visit [www.smiletherapy.net](http://www.smiletherapy.net)

### Ask Tina

Our children are changing every day and each stage of their development needs care and understanding.

**Tina Stephenson** is a child behaviour management specialist for Edukey. For more details on their innovative services for Hong Kong parents, check out [www.Edukey.net](http://www.Edukey.net). If you have a question concerning any stage of your child's development, please email [editor@parentsjournal.com.hk](mailto:editor@parentsjournal.com.hk) and Tina will be happy to answer your questions.



*My daughter, six, is an only child. I took her to playgroups at a young age so she'd mix well with other children and she has many friends. But lately she's become rather bossy and pushy with her playmates. She used to share very well, but she's started grabbing any toy she wants, whether another child is playing with it or not. I don't understand why she's changed.*

The world of six-year-old girls can be very socially complex with lots of experimentation with rules, conversation and social roles. Developmentally she may be craving more complexity in her play and so rules seem to be particularly important. She is likely to be making up new rules as she goes along, which will make her seem even bossier. Also, solo children tend to be less accustomed to sharing both attention and toys, and tend to be more demanding of both. As an only child she is likely to have more consistency in her environment and a lot more control over her daily activities, as there aren't siblings with competing needs and personalities. Usually she can play with what she wants and generally for as long as she wants, especially compared to children with brothers and sisters with whom they have to share virtually everything. Also, girls tend to be accused of 'bossiness' more frequently than boys. I think this may be because when boys take control of the situation they are more likely to be considered 'leaders'. She is on her way to becoming a leader and there are a few things you can do to help her to make the transition from bossiness to leadership. Try giving her more responsibility (special chores or a pet that she alone must care for) and limited choices about new clothes and meals. Don't respond when she is rude and makes bossy demands. Make sure she waits her turn and makes requests politely. When she is being polite and helpful, make sure you give her some praise.