



SenseAbility

A newsletter of applications of the *Feldenkrais Method*® of somatic education

STRESS

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Stress at an Early Age



We have created and now live in a fast paced technological world. Our children are taught about computers as early as elementary school, and the speed of computers doubles every 18 months.

More and more children are being diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and other learning difficulties. They have short attention spans and are easily distracted. Often they run into behavioral difficulties and are on medication or have tried different types of behavioral modification.

But neither of these address the “physical feeling” of anxiety. Neither can alter the “hunched over” body posture of anger, depression or fear. Nor can they address children who have no sense of their bodies, but are, instead, “warp speed” mind and action, with no functional purpose. The *Feldenkrais Method* can address these issues.

Terry is a nine-year-old boy. He has three psychiatric diagnoses and is on several medications. He aimlessly goes from activity to activity, cannot read or write, cannot go with his family to indoor events and has been violent to his siblings and teachers. His own anxiety level is very high; he is afraid of most things and has trouble sleeping.

He was originally reluctant to be touched at all, but finally agreed it was OK “for his feet.” Since *Feldenkrais* lessons work through the muscular/skeletal system, this did not create a problem. Through his feet, it was possible to connect with his entire skeleton and make changes in his habitual muscular patterns of anxiety. Since lessons began, he is relaxed enough to sleep through the night and often falls asleep during a lesson. Now that much of his anxiety has lessened, he has been able to focus enough on his school-work that his learning disabilities have now been recognized

Brian is a 16 year old. He has been on probation since he was 10 and currently will not get off until he is 18. He is usually agitated and has an instantaneous anger response. He becomes violent quickly. His habitual muscular patterns include hunched up shoulders and clenched fists. He was willing to lie on a table for lessons, but he agreed only to having his hands touched.

Again, by working through the hands, the *Feldenkrais Method* allows for a connection with the entire skeleton. Moving his body, through his hand, allowed ease in his breathing, his shoulders to lower and his hands to unclench. When he stood up, his posture was noticeably different and he felt the change in his anxiety level. The first time he did not like the feeling. He felt vulnerable. But by the second lesson, Brian easily noticed differences and liked the new way he felt. **His anxiety level decreased and his behavior at school and home has changed dramatically for the better.** His behavior outbursts are less often, not as severe and he recovers from them faster.

Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais said, “**Movement is life.**” Awareness of how we move and flexibility in the ways we move creates the foundation for a less stress-filled life. *Awareness Through Movement*® lessons are one of the fastest ways to build this foundation.

– *Linda Flanders* has been a *Feldenkrais*® Practitioner for 10 years. She works primarily with children who have atypical behavior and complex learning difficulties. She is the Educational Director of *Taproot Inc.*, in Bay City, Wisconsin, and an independent producer of videotapes about alternative children’s programs in learning and behavior. She can be reached at 715-594-3880 or e-mail: taproot@redwing.net; also at www.thematrixmodel.com.

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NYPD Blue – Through with Stress

As a community service, I have been teaching *Awareness Through Movement*® lessons at several New York City precinct houses. My theme is "stress reduction and sounder sleep." The idea is to provide a helpful service to these dedicated people who serve and protect us night and day. This is the story of my first visit with the officers of the NYPD.

The officers assemble in the muster room, about 25 in all, and the sergeant calls them to order. They stand in formation: quite a contrast to my civilian ATM groups, in which students lounge about on soft mats or blankets on the floor! This group is in full battle dress—hats and coats, duty belts, pistols, and night sticks—ready to hit the streets.

The sergeant introduces me, and I plunge right in. "How many of you ever feel like stress and tension are accumulating in your neck and shoulders?" A few raise their hands vigorously. Others nod in silent resignation. "Alright, this is a simple exercise you can do anytime to relieve it." We do a test movemen—slowly turning the head right and left. Then we spend the next couple of minutes slowly lifting and lowering the right shoulder in several different ways.

I say to make the movements smooth, easy, and light. "It's kind of hard," says one cop, wincing, "with... the gear." He touches something under his sweater. Suddenly I realize that most of them are wearing bulletproof vests! "Do the best you can," I advise. They do.

We try the test movement again. General agreement, and delight, to find that turning the head to the right is now easier. "I can see behind my back," says one officer. "That could be a big advantage in your line of work," I remark. "True," he admits. Everyone laughs.

We do a few moves with the other shoulder, then the test movement again. Now it's easier to look to the left, too. Some of the officers express surprise. They did not expect this to be so easy!

I find it very gratifying to see a group of battle-weary street cops slip into a state of profound repose, right there in the muster room. I let them savor it for several minutes, then do a wake up call. We do a little breathing exercise to enhance their alertness, and review the techniques they learned. I take extra care with the sleep technique so they'll be able to practice at home, in their own beds.

As the group disperses, a couple of officers come over to thank me. One tells me he had a stiff neck when he came in for work. "I feel better already," he says, fingering his shirt collar. Zing go the strings of my *Feldenkrais* teacher's heart! Another officer assures me that my services are much appreciated and sorely needed.

I say "You're welcome," but it is I who am grateful. Very grateful to be doing this work.

– **Michael Krugman, MA, GCFT** is a movement educator specializing in stress reduction, sleep enhancement, and corporate/institutional wellness consulting. He is the author of *Feel Better Already: Fast-acting MINI-MOVES™* for relaxation, stress reduction, and inner peace. Contact him at www.soundersleep.com or email michael@soundersleep.com.

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Life is Problems: Stress Relief in a Stressed-Out Society

Life is, in essence, a series of problems. Our earliest problems are “Where’s food? I’m hungry” or “I’m tired and need to sleep.” We graduate to bigger problems: “How can I reach that cookie jar, way up there on the counter?” Pretty soon, we are solving problems like: “Do I ask him out on a date?”

Then we have problems like buying and maintaining a house, relating to another person in a long-term, committed relationship (or not!) and all of the wonderful problems of parenting. The more we mature, the bigger and better our problems get.

When problem-solving is no fun, it causes stress. We all know when stress gets to be too much—and the damage it can cause. But our problems aren’t going to go away. So how can we learn to handle them?

When I first took a weekly *Awareness Through Movement* class, it was an island of sanity and relaxation in my insanely stressed-out life. I spent at least 20 minutes of every class fast asleep. Learning to respect and identify my limits has been gradual, but the quality of my life is now so improved, I can’t imagine how I lived like that. **I now listen to my body to tell me where my limits are.** I still accomplish a lot, but only if I take the nonlinear approach I learned in those *Feldenkrais* classes.

Awareness Through Movement classes are a down-to-earth approach to dealing with the problems of life. In an ATM class, participants explore solutions to various movement challenges. This transforms “problem-solving” into fun, as it was when we were children. ATM helps us learn to handle stress in two ways simultaneously: physically and mentally. On the physical side, it releases us from our habits of hunching the shoulders, holding or restricting the breath, locking the chest and rib cage, tensing the belly, and otherwise preparing to fight or flee. **ATM provides ways to notice those signs of stress and de-stress ourselves throughout the day.**

On the mental side, ATM presents an opportunity to identify and respect our limits, and to focus on the process, instead of chasing one goal after another with nothing but stress in between. Moshe Feldenkrais insisted everyone should have at least three distinct options for doing every action. The more options available, the more chances of drawing upon one of the previously “superfluous”

options in handling an unexpected problem. Respecting our limits is often a new experience, as there is little cultural support for it. If you begin to identify and respect your limits, be prepared for resistance—respecting your limits is a revolutionary thing to do. But it is an idea whose time has come, and you will be a role model for others when they see you at peace, with plenty of time to spare.

Mini-ATM: Where is your limit?

1. Turn your head to look, look as far as you can, really strain to see. Notice the feeling you have when you reach that extreme limit. Is there any pain? Strain? Holding your breath?
2. Now turn a little less. Now turn still less. And less. Make the turn so small, it feels like floating through air or oil.
3. Now increase the turn slightly, and notice if you feel more resistance, like moving through peanut butter or honey. Maybe there is a wall there. Or maybe something clicks. Do you hold your breath?
4. Increase the turn a little more, and notice if your neck jumps like you are moving over the teeth of a gear, or if there is any sensation of strain or pain.
5. Now go back to that movement that feels like air or oil. This is your TRUE LIMIT. Is it in the same place as it was when you started? Anything that doesn’t feel light and smooth is PAST YOUR LIMIT. Is your area of true ease bigger or smaller than you expected?
6. Turn several times staying ONLY within your limit. Keep relaxing any and all effort in yourself. Notice how that light, smooth area grows until you can easily turn your head as far as you wish, with no pain or strain.

How can you apply this to your everyday life?

– *Miriam Levenson, GCFP, has a widely varied Feldenkrais practice in Madison, Wisconsin. A recovering stress-aholic, she now aspires to be rich and famous with no sensation of effort.*



Articles of Interest



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*For a limited time the article can be found on the "Tacoma Tribune" website.

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