

Primitive reflexes

What are primitive reflexes?



Primitive (or infant) reflexes are automatic, stereotypical (the same for all) reactions to specific stimuli - either a reaction to sensory input or to a change in position. These reflexes emerge and gradually develop in-utero and are active for the first few months after birth. As the brain matures and connections to higher levels develop, these reflexes gradually diminish and their influence on movement decreases.

What is the importance of primitive reflexes?



Rooting reflex

- If we did not have primitive reflexes we would have no way to develop the ability to become upright and eventually gain control of our movements.
- **Most of these reflexes are meant to be integrated (or inhibited) by six to twelve months.**
- However, if for some reason, they are still active after this time then they act as a barrier to learning, sensory processing and emotional maturity.

Lifelong postural reflexes



- These reflexes are life-long and develop on the basis of the integration of primitive reflexes.
- The better the primitive reflexes have laid the foundation, the more resources the postural reactions have to sustain balance, stability and flexibility throughout the body as a response to changes in the environment and sensory input.

What is the impact of retained primitive reflexes?



- Difficulty to maintain postural control when standing, sitting or moving - child will lean all the time
- Poor balance
- Poor sitting tolerance
- Poor gross and fine motor and coordination skills
- Difficulty copying from board and reading
- Poor eye-hand coordination
- Keeps running and moving in big open spaces
- Frequent infections and allergies
- Frequent meltdowns and tantrums
- Poor concentration and focus

Reasons for retained primitive reflexes?

Before Birth

- Toxic uterine environment – smoking, alcohol, drugs
- Exposure to high level of electro-magnetic stress
- Mother had to have extended periods of bed rest
- Poor maternal nutrition
- Mother has emotional stress e.g. relationship breakdown; parent dying

Reasons for retained primitive reflexes?

During Birth

- Caesarean birth
- Forceps delivery
- Vacuum delivery
- Very long, slow delivery
- cord around the neck

Reasons for retained primitive reflexes?

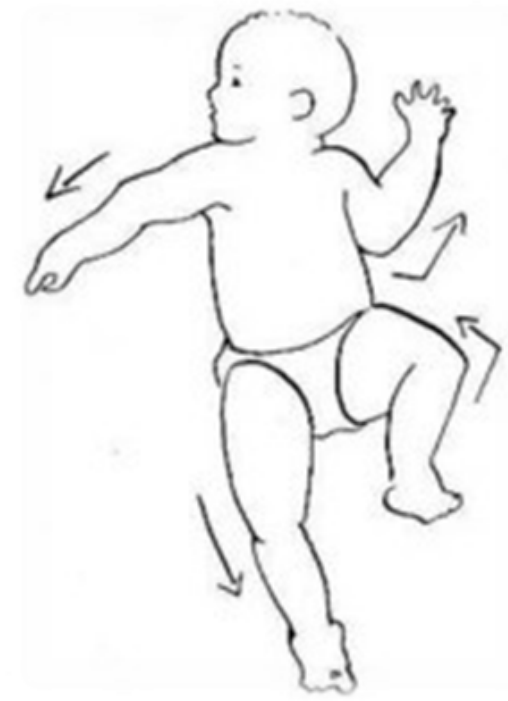
After birth

- Long periods of time in equipment – e.g. baby walkers (Baby upright for long periods before gaining control of their body)
- Swaddled tightly for long periods of time
- Insufficient nurturing touch from parent
- Screen use as baby sitters (TV, Ipad etc.)
- Not enough floor time or tummy time
- No enough time being carried, rocked and hugged
- Relationship stress between parents

some primitive reflexes

E.g.

1. Moro reflex
2. Palmar reflex
3. Babinski
4. Spinal Galant reflex
5. Sucking reflex
6. Tonic labyrinthine reflex (TLR)
7. Asymmetrical Tonic neck Reflex (ATNR)
8. Symmetrical Tonic neck Reflex (STNR)
9. Spinal perez reflex



Postural reflexes



The lifelong and postural reflexes have different aspects.

- **The Righting Reflexes** – these begin to emerge at about 2 months of age, and allow us to keep our head and eyes in position when we lean in any direction. They should be well established by 12 months.
- **The Equilibrium Reactions** – begin appearing at about 6 months of age and activate when we lose balance. They provide an automatic protective response if we fall

Postural reflexes



- **Protective Reflexes** – Reflexes that activate when we go under stress, such as the adult (Startle) reflex and Tendon Guard.
- **Grouping Reflexes** – these are groups of muscles that work together so that we can do things such as reach out, grasp and bring something to the mouth.

Primitive and Postural reflexes Interactions



It is important that **the primitive reflexes have been suppressed and the postural ones well established** so that a child can establish a foundation for learning.

Primitive and Postural reflexes Interactions



Following development of the postural reflexes; fine motor skills i.e.

- movements of eyes,
- mouth and
- fingers are refined.

Then coordination of both sides of body evolve and mature.

Moro reflex



- The Moro Reflex (sometimes called the infant-startle reflex) is an important survival reflex and is the next phase of the journey of the defensive reflexes.
- The Moro has sometimes been referred to as a **gatekeeper reflex**, as it appears to perform the role of being the link to many other reflexes.
- If the Moro does not integrate well it seems to impede the ability of many other reflexes to also be able to integrate well.

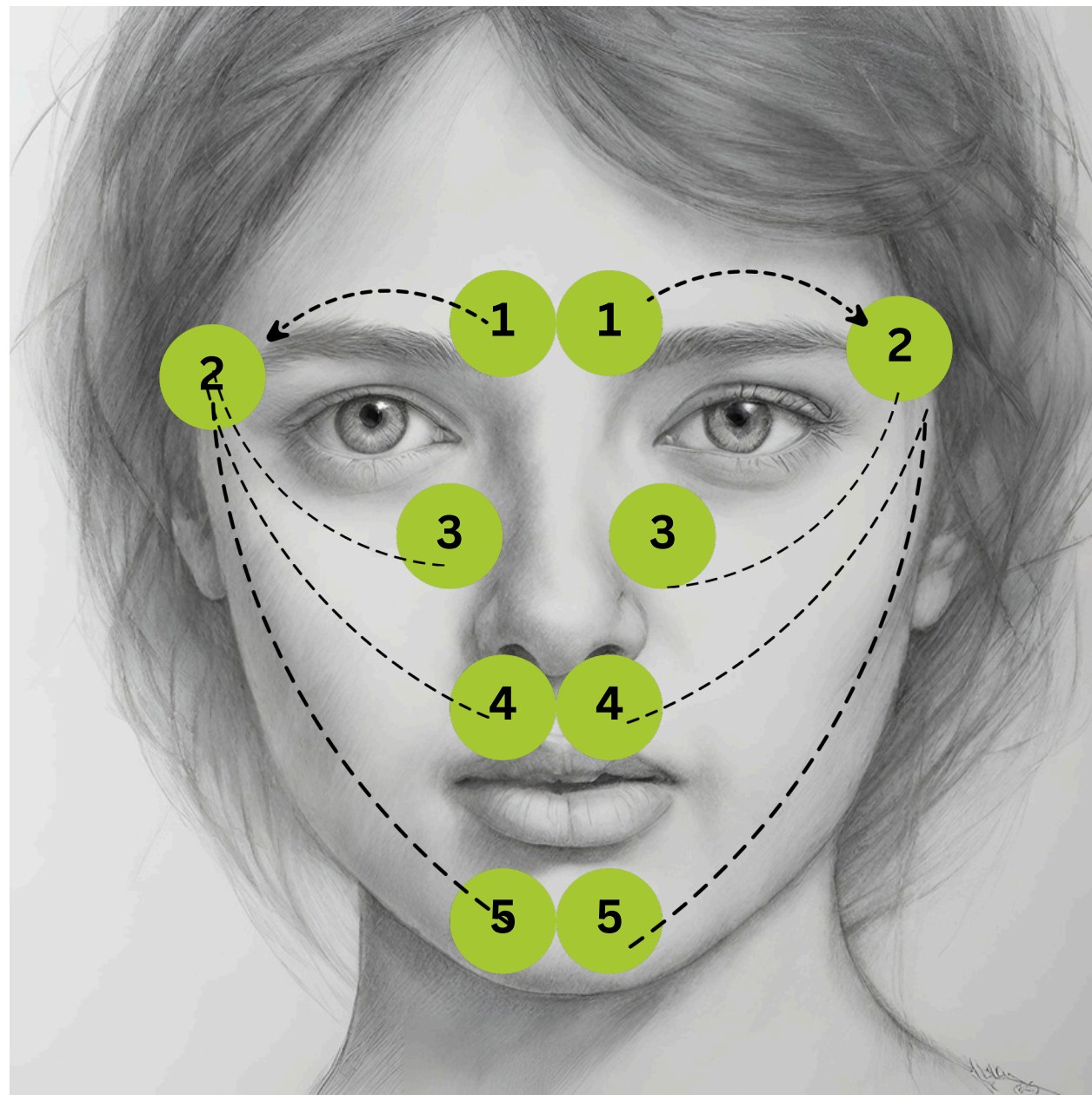
What happens if Moro is unintegrated?



1. Easily distracted
2. Poor endurance
3. Motion sickness
4. Poor digestion and gut issues
5. Child gets easily tired
6. Child struggles with sleep challenges
7. Sound sensitivity
8. Poor impulse control
9. Uncontrollable urge to eat sugar
10. Frequent infections and allergies
11. Difficulties copying from board
12. Hypersensitivity to light, sound, touch

Sharing one exercises that helps

Trigeminal face massage



- Helps relieve stress; calms and organizes.
- To be done as follows:
 - Using all fingers, move along the lines shown in pic with firm pressure.
 - Start from 1 to 2, from 2 to 3 and back, then 2 to 4 and back, then 2 to 5 and back.
 - Repeat 2 or more times depending upon child's needs.
- **Do not force the input.**

Fear Paralysis reflex



- The FPR is the earliest stage of the defensive primitive reflexes that lay the foundations of learning to be safe in the world.
- It is an intrauterine reflex, in that it goes through all its phases of development before birth.
- **The FPR slowly transforms and becomes part of the Moro.**

Challenges when Fear Paralysis reflex is present



- Shallow breathing
- Always on the go - hyperactive and very distracted / anxious all the time
- Stays in his/her own space/zone
- Sleep challenges
- Does not like changes in routine
- Touch sensitivity
- Feels overwhelmed most of the times
- Separation anxiety
- Finds it difficult to make eye contact
- Perfectionistic tendency
- Gut issues
- Lost in his own space

Sharing one more exercises that helps

Fear Paralysis reflex tapping



- Tap gently on the sternum bone as shown in pic alongside in a pattern 1- 2, 1-2-3 (1- 2 cha -cha - cha)
- Let the child breath out
- Repeat for 2 more times
- Do once a week for 45 days
- **Do not force the input.**

Integration of primitive reflexes



- Integrating primitive reflexes may take weeks to months and requires repetitions of particular movement sequences.
- Furthermore, they may get regain dominance if neurological development is not actively supported.
- Evaluation is needed
- I do not work on all reflexes together.

Disorganization before re-organization

LESS
IS MORE

- It is very common for people to experience some temporary physical and/or emotional responses when you start integrating primitive reflexes.
- However, these temporary reactions are in fact positive.
- Its best to do these exercises under the guidance of a therapist who can help you to manage the disorganizations in your child.

Physical signs of disorganization

these are some signs that kids may experience

- Flatulence
- Nausea
- Diarrhoea
- Skin rashes
- Itching
- Fever
- Colds
- Swollen eyes
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Coughing up phlegm

Emotional signs of disorganization

these are some signs that kids may experience

- Child may experience periods of defiance and regression
- Child becomes demanding and very babyish
- Child can have nightmares and sometimes have difficulties falling asleep
- In some cases, the fits of emotions will initially get worse before they settle down- so frequent meltdowns.
- Child may have vivid dreams – especially about reptiles and/or mammals

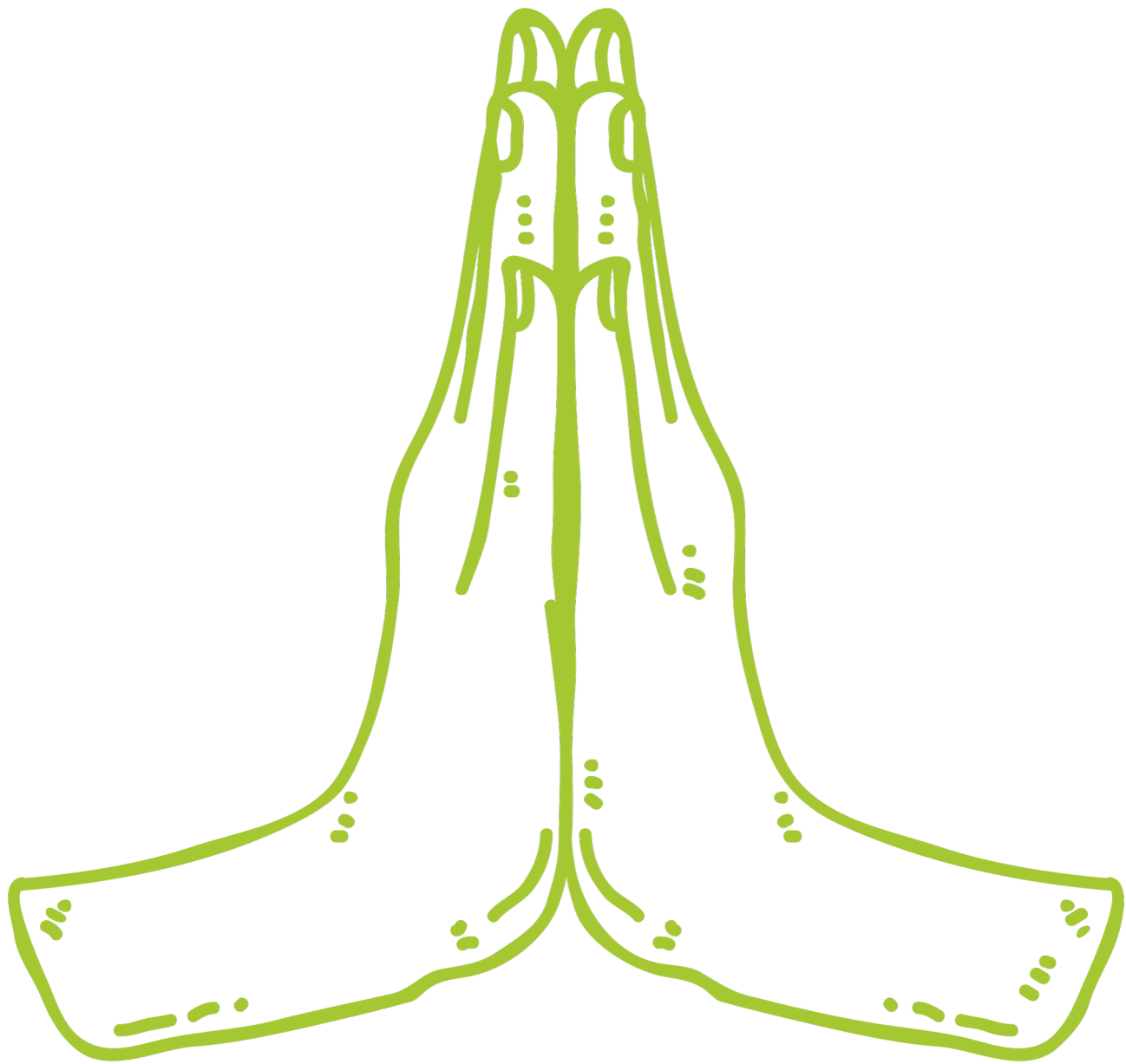
Integration of primitive reflexes



In summary, primitive reflexes is one of the puzzle piece involved in a child's development.

Integrating primitive reflexes and strengthening postural reflexes lays the foundation for higher-level learning.

Thank you!!



Hope this gave you an idea about primitive reflexes.

Follow us on instagram @awetisminsights to stay in touch

Join our app Awetism Insights to learn all the techniques and strategies to integrate primitive reflexes and also to get guidance in your journey to support your child.