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James's Choice: Treating an Infant with Craniosacral Therapy (CST)

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James's Choice: Treating an Infant with Craniosacral Therapy (CST)

Cover Page Footnote

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James's Choice

When I first met James, he was nine months old. He had been born three months prematurely and weighed one and a half pounds. He spent the first ten weeks of his life in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) of the hospital, where he showed steady progress.

The James I met was a beautiful, healthy little boy whose growth and development were generally appropriate. The only major concern was that he was not using his arms or hands at all. His hands remained fistled and held rigidly against his chest, with virtually no active or passive range of motion present. On a previous assessment by another physical therapist, James was considered to have a tight shoulder girdle, and his mother was told that he would likely benefit from physical therapy.

As a licensed physical therapist, I was asked to see and treat James. His mother was not familiar with CranioSacral Therapy (CST), so I explained it to her. James and I spent a total of one hour together that day.

With Mom and another staff member present, I sat on the floor with James in my arms. As my hands felt and worked to release the fascial tension throughout his chest and shoulder girdle, I began an inaudible heart-to-heart, soul-to-soul "dialogue" with him. I silently congratulated him on being such a remarkable survivor. As this dialogue continued, I had a feeling that James' posturing of his hands and arms was protective in nature.

I tried to imagine what it would be like to be so tiny and defenseless in the hands of so many strangers while undergoing so many procedures. Was his contracted posture one of fear? We talked about how his circumstances had changed. He was no longer in the NICU but was at home with his wonderfully loving parents and older siblings. I asked him if he felt safe now. I also asked him if he would like to be in control of his upper extremities and make choices about how he used his arms and hands --- to play, to feed himself, or to provide protection, security, and self-comfort.

At this point in the CST session, James' six-year old brother Peter came home from school. He was curious to know what this stranger was doing with his baby brother. As I held James in my arms, I had Peter kneel by my side so that he was looking down into James' face. Then for the first time in his life, James reached out. He stretched his arms over his head and began to touch and explore his brother's face.

On my next visit the following week, Mom reported that James was reaching out to grab everything. He was also sleeping with his arms stretched up over his head. He continued to freely use his arms and hands after that one CST session. Mom said, "I will always remember that day. It was amazing, touching, unbelievable."

James is now three and a half years old. His mother says he is doing great, his progress is age-appropriate in all areas of development.

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