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My Happy Baby is Back:

Zero Balancing, CranioSacral Therapy and a Baby's Journey to Becoming Mobile

By
Veronica Quarry, MS, MSPT

I first met Alison when she was 13 months old. Due to gross motor delays, she had been receiving weekly home visits from colleagues of mine in Early Intervention (EI): services from an excellent physical therapist for 3 ½ months and from a very experienced occupational therapist for one month. Alison's progress was reported to be very slow, she cried and screamed during the home visits with her PT and OT and she was also having significant problems with constipation. As an EI specialist and PT who practices Zero Balancing (ZB) and CranioSacral Therapy (CST) with babies, I was asked by these colleagues to join their EI team and see if Alison could benefit from this therapeutic touch.

Alison's mother said she thought she might have had COVID-19 during pregnancy. She also reported that it had been a very difficult pregnancy with gestational hypertension and that she had not felt well most of the 9 months. Alison was delivered by emergency C-section at 39 weeks gestation due to heart rate decelerations. She weighed 6 lb 12 oz at birth. As a young baby, Alison gained weight in significant amounts and, at 13 months, was above the 100% on the weight chart. This was being monitored through GI, nutritionists and genetic counseling.

Mom said Alison had been a wonderful, happy, easy baby for the first 9 months. She did, however, have a history of absolute intolerance for being on her tummy. At 9 months she sat to play but was showing delays in meeting her other gross motor milestones such as rolling and crawling. Mom said her temperament changed dramatically at this time. She thought it was due to Alison's frustration at being "stuck" in her body and not being able to move but mom also

began to worry about long-term special needs. Alison was also dealing with chronic constipation. She was given prune juice daily to support her digestive system but mom said Alison would grunt and cry for many minutes (up to 20 min.) when passing a stool.

During my first visit at Alison's home, when she was 13 months old, mom said Alison had rolled over on a bed but would not do this on the floor. She routinely sat to play on the floor but would only bend forward to get a toy that was easily within reach. She would never twist her body or put a hand out to support herself to get something by her side. Since Alison had always hated being on her tummy (despite parents' ongoing efforts to encourage this) she had never learned to crawl. Mom thought that she was very "stiff" in her hips and abdominal area. Alison liked to "walk" but required a lot of adult support and assistance to do so. She did not bear weight on her feet but instead moved forward on her toes while leaning forward and "hanging" from adult's hands. Alison clearly loved this opportunity to move about in her environment but was totally dependent on adults to be mobile in any way. Her parents certainly wanted to offer her this opportunity but could not be available all her waking hours to offer her this mobility. Frustration on both sides was mounting. Alison's PT and OT had been working on her gross motor skills but mom said these sessions were very difficult for her (seemingly challenging, and perhaps painful and frightening) and resulted in a lot of resistance and crying. Constipation, with prolonged related crying and grunting to pass a stool were still major concerns.

My first session with Alison was rooted in the ZB protocol while also being informed by my CST background. CST and ZB are gentle touch therapies that work with people of all ages who remain fully clothed throughout the session. Light touch, often experienced as calming, relaxing and/or nurturing, is used to help release tension or restrictions throughout the body. These releases allow the body to reorganize and support the body's natural healing process.

The ZB protocol seeks to balance structure and energy from head to toe. ZB practitioners want to be sure that energy is moving through the body in a healthy way. Through therapeutic touch, I used my hands to evaluate the energy or tension throughout Alison's body. I focused especially on her skull, ribs, pelvis and hips. Due to her constipation, I also paid careful attention to her abdominal organs. When I experienced places where the energy felt either excessive or depleted, (too much or too little) I held my fingers over those areas to create a fulcrum. A fulcrum is the working tool we use in ZB that offers a stable point around which the body can reorganize.

I paid particular attention to the tension in Alison's diaphragm and the organs of digestion; to her hips and pelvis; and to the base of her skull where the Vagus nerve exits the brain and innervates many organs of the body. When I put fulcrums along the base of her occiput (base of her skull) I felt a noticeable increase in heat in that area. An increase in tissue temperature is a working sign that a release of held tension has occurred. I did the Eight Pointed Star on Alison. This is a Zero Balancing Expanded technique developed by Judith Sullivan. (Sullivan is a ZB teacher and author of *Zero Balancing Expanded: The Attitude of Awaiting a Fish.*) It is a technique that involves gentle strokes that engage the tissues of the abdomen. It has many benefits and is known, for example, to calm the nervous system and improve digestion. When I did this, I felt areas of increased tension in her abdomen soften. On re-evaluation of her hips, internal and external rotation felt more fluid and balanced as compared to the tension I felt in those joints at the beginning of the session. I spent about an hour with Alison that day which is the typical amount of time of my visits. [During my visits, I talk with the parents about their child, offer education as to the work I do, spend time having the child become comfortable with me, evaluate and treat the child and do an end of session discussion with the parents including

guidelines for future sessions.] I thought Alison responded well to her first ZB both in terms of how much she settled and let me touch her as well as the releases experienced as described above.

When I returned to meet with Alison and her mom in their home the following week, one of the first things mom said was, “My happy baby is back”! She said that within a day of our first visit, Alison was calmer and showed increased, sustained attention. Mom also observed changes in her gross motor play. Constipation was still a major concern but while Alison was still doing a lot of grunting, the amount of crying had decreased.

During our time together that second session, I continued to do ZB and CST as described above. Toward the end of the home visit, while playing on the floor with Alison, she spontaneously, independently rolled onto her tummy, seemed happy there, and began to push up with her arms, lifting her chest well off the floor. She also did a little pivoting while on her tummy. When sitting, she placed her hand on the floor out to her side, rotated her body and reached out for toys well to the left and right of her. Mom confirmed that these were all new behaviors for Alison.

Alison fell asleep during our third visit and slept through most of the session. I took advantage of this time of stillness to offer this gentle, therapeutic touch. During this visit, mom reported that Alison had been demonstrating progressive ease in passing stools.

The next week her OT wrote the following:

It's exciting to see her progress! Alison just continues to become more and more confident and motivated to MOVE! She is constantly standing, cruising, getting in/out of sitting and even took 3-4 steps on her own several times. She now spontaneously crawls several feet on hands and knees with more control and smoother movements and is doing more squatting and standing.

Alison has been enjoying some new adventures with her family including going to the beach. It's great that she is able to participate in and enjoy these activities now that she is more mobile.

Alison's mother wrote:

When my daughter was 10 months old she began receiving early intervention services for a motor planning delay. After one month of receiving physical therapy she rolled! However, she was extremely frustrated because she wanted to move her body more but did not know how. As the PT said, it was "like she did not know she had a body".

We added OT services to her plan, which helped a bit. However, she still was struggling with making progress and was so cranky and frustrated all of the time. My baby went from being happy and pleasant (she was an extremely easy newborn and infant) to having a mad and unpleasant demeanor. She wanted to explore her environment and move around but there was something blocking her from doing so. Nothing we would do would make her happy or satisfied. One of the hardest parts for my husband and me was that nobody could explain to us why she wasn't making the progress she should be and meeting the appropriate milestones.

When she turned 12 months, the OT suggested ZB and CST. The OT explained how there were babies she worked with over the years who were not making good progress and then started receiving ZB and CST and their entire world changed. I had never heard of ZB or CST but by this point we were so desperate to understand how to help her learn to move her body that we were open to trying anything!

The ZB and CST therapist came to our home for a consultation and worked with our daughter for about an hour. Our baby sat and played with her toys while the therapist worked on her with light touch. The next day I started to notice the changes in our little girl. Her demeanor was much calmer and pleasant. She also moved a bit easier. As each day passed she was more like

herself.

As the weeks progressed, her muscles were no longer rigid and stiff. She was learning to move with ease. Plus she was so happy! Her PT and OT sessions started to become pleasant instead of being filled with her crying and screaming.

Just before our baby girl turned 14 months, she took her first steps. It is amazing the progress she has made at a breathtaking speed. ZB/CST was the perfect complement to the PT and OT services she was receiving. It has truly changed her life and ours!

My hope is that this will help other parents see the benefits of this therapy! Please let me know if I can help spread the word in any other way.

Best,

Alison's mom

Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social-Emotional 2nd Ed. (ASQ:SE-2)

Grading ASQ:SE Scores for ages 6 months through 14 months 30 days:

Scores equal to or less than 40 are within normal limits.

A Score of 50 is at the cutoff.

Scores above 50 are of concern.

Scores above 75 are in the 90% and are of high concern.

Alison's Scores:

Score before receiving ZB and CST: 175

Score after 7 ZB/CST sessions: 50



Veronica Quarry, MS, MSPT. Veronica lives in Winchester, MA. She is a physical therapist, ZB faculty member, has advanced training in CST and is a certified Early Intervention Specialist. She worked as a research associate in cardiology where she published papers in peer reviewed medical journals; is the Co-Editor with Amanda King of *Experiencing the Power of Zero Balancing: Case Studies of Journeys to Health and Wholeness*; and has published 2 case studies in Upledger's *Working Wonders: Changing Lives with CranioSacral Therapy*. Through transformative touch, she is grateful for opportunities to assist people of all ages in supporting them on their journeys to health and wholeness. She cherishes her time with family and friends, practices yoga and meditation and loves being in nature and water activities including kayaking, sailing and swimming with wild dolphins. She can be reached at (617) 702-2373.