

A touch of relaxation

Tracey Smith talks to reflexology practitioner Lorraine Senior about how this little known therapy can help prepare pupils for learning

Reflexology is a non-intrusive complementary health therapy, based on the theory that different points on the feet, lower leg, hands, face or ears correspond with different areas of the body.

Reflexologists work holistically with their clients and aim to work alongside standard healthcare services to promote better health and wellbeing.



Reflexology is believed to originate in the China where it is still considered to be part of the health care process, although the Westernised version comes from the work of two Americans, William Fitzgerald and Eunice Ingham, at the beginning of the twentieth century.

As a therapy, reflexology is very easy to receive, being based mostly on the extremities of the body and it involves little or no removal of clothing. Pressure is applied to the feet in a pattern following a reflexology map, which is a plan of the organs and systems of the body represented on the feet. The sensitive fingers of the therapist may detect tensions in certain areas and work to relieve them. People in all walks of life, young or old, well or ill, can receive reflexology with the aim to relax and relieve tension in the body allowing for the restoration of wellbeing. It is gaining popularity with members of the public for its stress reduction effects and other individual benefits.

When it comes to treating children, generally they seem to enjoy reflexology in a completely unquestioning way, settling back and letting the relaxation happen. For some children with SEN, therapeutic touch can be even more important as it is working through one of their primary senses for communication. Some special schools have started to include reflexology in the curriculum.

Reflexology at school

Lorraine Senior (pictured above) helps support children in several schools and also runs training courses for reflexologists, teaching assistants and parents. Here, Lorraine answers questions about how reflexology fits into school life.

How do you integrate your reflexology technique into the school day?

Reflexology is integrated into the daily timetable using a structured approach. The primary intention is relaxation and sessions begin when the pupil is collected from the classroom and finish when they return to class. The children are helped to prepare for the sessions using symbols, photographs and words on their visual timetables. When collected from the classroom, they carry a tool kit which helps to communicate what is happening next. Time out of class can last for up to 30 minutes, with the aim to lengthen the touch time to a 20-minute relaxation session. Therefore, the session is not only the touch therapy; the reflexology therapist works very much as part of a multidisciplinary team.

How can you tell if children are enjoying it?

I know pupils enjoy coming to the sessions as they leave the classroom and walk well to the therapy room, where they prepare the area for their session. They also offer their feet for the therapy.

Parents give their written permission for their child to have the opportunity to receive reflexology. During therapy, though, consent to treatment is in the moment and ongoing; it is the right of the receiver to withdraw consent. At any time, the pupil can end the therapy by removing their feet or requesting that it stops and sitting up; it is their choice. Once a pupil has become used to the structure and routine, though, everyone seems to enjoy their sessions.

How does reflexology link into the educational values of the school?

Reflexology therapists working in the educational environment aim to bring added value into the therapy time. This may be by working on individual targets supplied by the class teacher, such as walking (not running) from the classroom to the therapy room, or it may be by observing how a pupil follows instructions. I may be asked to work with a particular symbol by the speech and language therapist; for example “wait” or “choose”. Alternatively, the occupational therapist might be targeting independence skills, such as putting socks and shoes on, and we will work together on these. At the end of a session with one pupil recently, the pupil was calm enough to listen to and follow instructions about putting her socks on. She took her time, even removing the sock when it was stuck on her toes, and then tried again. This was something that she didn’t usually attempt.

As always, the main intentions are relaxation and helping pupils prepare for ongoing activities, but the therapy time also offers an important opportunity to address other targets.

Do you need to be a reflexologist to help or can others use reflexology techniques?

The use of a qualified reflexologist gives schools the confidence to deliver individual planned therapy sessions supporting wellbeing issues that may have been highlighted by parents. Typically, these issues may relate to problems with sleep or digestion. The primary intention of the session in the school environment will be to bring relaxation in the moment, helping pupils to reduce anxiety and improve their mood. This helps pupils prepare to take part in regular activities and learning throughout the school day.

However, it is not always possible for pupils to receive one-to-one therapy, or for schools to be able to fund it. There are ways of maximising the effect by sharing the basic relaxation routines, using techniques drawn from reflexology with non-reflexologists. The intention of the structured routine remains the same: relaxation in the moment.

Guiding parents to use the routine at home, or sharing it with the school’s multidisciplinary team for use in the classroom, means that children have the opportunity to access the many benefits of the positive touch routine through the structured sessions and with different people.

How is the integration of reflexology into the school curriculum funded?

There are many ways that schools can use different funds to buy in services. Currently, the therapy service in the school where I work is funded through the pupil premium.

Are there any noticeable effects of the reflexology on the children after they return to the classroom?

The Headteacher of an Essex school described the benefits of reflexology like this: “It gives pupils a chance to relax in a deeper way than perhaps they have ever known, and experience a relationship through positive touch. I am impressed with the way the pupils with the most challenging behaviours have responded and are willing to choose to attend the sessions and to engage.”

A Head from Liverpool commented that: “Pupils are calmer, less anxious and therefore more able to learn after their sessions.”

Another Headteacher from Essex said that: “Those pupils who receive reflexology look forward to it and it has a knock on effect on the rest of the school day – they are more relaxed and return to class better able to cope and ready to carry on with their lessons.”

Do you think that reflexology has a wider impact, beyond the school day?

Parents have commented, in particular, how well their child tends to sleep on the night of a reflexology session.

Many parents are choosing to attend the workshops to learn a routine delivered through the colours of the rainbow. It empowers them with relaxation techniques to use in the comfort of their own home at a time that is right for them and

their child. These routines can be as relaxing for the giver as they are for the receiver, so they support the wellbeing of both the child and the parent.

Further information

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www.aor.org.uk

For more information about reflexology in schools, visit:

www.functionalreflextherapy.co.uk