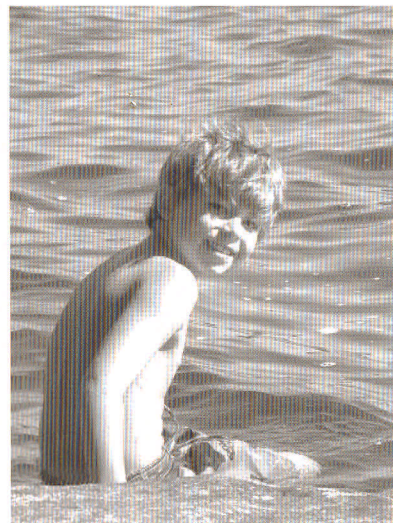


Lazy 8s Make Transitions Great!

Sharon Todd

It is amazing how children know what they need, and then begin to support themselves when given the right tools.

My business partner, Jill Hewlett, and I are licensed Brain Gym® Instructors/Consultants who offer our clients a variety of tools that support cognitive fitness and multi-sensory success. In our experience, many children, especially those with Autism, hold a great deal of anxiety in their bodies. This is particularly evident during transitions from one activity or environment to another, sitting still for extended periods of time, waiting in line or even when coming in from recess. Such heightened levels of stress tend to obstruct any meaningful learning and connection, not only with the intended curricular materials but also with peer to peer social interactions



and the ability to self-regulate (the process of taking in sensory information, and calmly monitoring and adjusting one's behavior in response to it).

This subject is especially meaningful to me because my son, Kirk, has Autism. I remember when he completed grade one; during that school year he required frequent movement breaks to nourish his sensory integration needs.

Given the right tools, children will naturally attend to their needs, and the needs of others.

When Kirk had difficulty sitting for the twenty-minute period of carpet time, his teacher developed a very effective strategy to help him stay alert. Since she rarely had Educational Assistants available, and could not always attend to his needs while facilitating the curriculum, she began tracing Lazy 8s on his back to support his attending skills and proprioception*.

Of course, kids catch on to these things, and Kirk's classmates started noticing how his behavior would shift



once the teacher began to do these Lazy 8s. He would go from not being able to sit still or stay out of others' personal space, to sitting calmly, and honoring personal boundaries.

One day when the teacher was busy during carpet time, one of his classmates noticed that Kirk needed support and began to do Lazy 8s on his back. The result...he became regulated!! From that point on, doing Lazy 8s became an instinctual response by the students when my son needed it.

Just this one Brain Gym® movement brought inclusivity and cohesion to the group.

There would be no discussion about who was going to do it; Lazy 8s would just happen.

Months later, Kirk was invited to move to an integrated school, and we leapt at the opportunity! While the change of environments was positive, we wanted the transition to be as well. I initiated the "transition talk" with my son. I said, "Guess what? You get to go to a new school that teaches the way you learn. Not all teachers know how to do this, and we are so lucky to find a school that does. You get to keep your current friends and make a bunch of new friends too!"

Kirk sat there for a while considering this and then said, "But Mommy, who is going to rub my back?" This response brought tears to my eyes.

Evidently, my son knew how much

the Lazy 8s offered by his classmates and teacher had helped him with transitions, self-regulation and attending skills. He knew this same kind of assistance would be needed for a successful experience at the new school. If this was his primary concern, then I could not ask for a better outcome! I was not worried because I knew the new academic environment would be open to addressing his needs in this way.

My son transitioned very successfully with the help of lots of Lazy 8s, among other tools. We went back to his old school a few weeks later to visit the teacher and his friends. It turns out that once Kirk left, the kids kept doing the Lazy 8s on each other during carpet time! Just this one Brain Gym® movement brought inclusivity and cohesion to the group. I believe it also provided a coping tool for his absence, as my son was definitely missed.

Children are amazingly intuitive! Given the right tools, they will naturally attend to their needs, and the needs of others.

Jill Hewlett and Sharon Todd are both Licensed Brain Gym® Trainers/Instructors in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Their company, Brain Works Global Inc., trains clients of all ages on how to maximize their learning potential while working in conjunction with their individual goals.
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