

# The Benefits of Reiki for Autistic Children

BY ALLISON BATTY-CAPPS, MA, MFT



I AM A MARRIAGE and family therapist and a Reiki practitioner and have begun integrating the two practices in my work with clients. Recently, I started working with children on the autism spectrum. Working with these individuals has been inspiring and beautiful. In my experience, they are highly intuitive and communicate in diverse ways other than mainstream traditional means. I have seen that Reiki can be a bridge to merge our world and theirs. We can better understand their experience and communicate with them through Reiki.

In my research on Reiki and autism, I have found studies and anecdotal reports that show that there may be many different benefits to those who have Reiki sessions on a regular basis. We can explore these benefits through examples

of what I have seen in my work with this unique group of individuals.

Some of the benefits of Reiki may include:

- **A chance for the individual to connect with another person uniquely**—One of the most common struggles for individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) is social interaction, often finding it difficult to connect with those around them. During Reiki sessions, an individual with ASD will have the chance to communicate with his or her practitioner uniquely.

In one session with a nonverbal, highly agitated teenage boy with ASD, I saw that as the Reiki session progressed, he went from being un-

able to make eye contact with me, to keeping eye contact for several minutes at a time. During these moments of connection, he appeared calm, relaxed and at peace.

- **Reduced stress and anxiety**—Individuals with ASD are often fidgety and hyperactive. Studies have shown that exposure to Reiki may reduce feelings of stress and anxiety. This benefit may, in turn, have a calming effect on the individual with ASD.

With one young client, the session began with him pacing the room. By the end of the session, he was lying on the Reiki table relaxed. He was not comfortable with physical touch, however, at the end of this session he took my hand and placed his hand in mine for several minutes. In a later session, using a letter board to communicate non-verbally, he asked to be attuned to Reiki so that he could give himself Reiki when at home. After the Placement, he asked me to provide him with hands-on Reiki, guiding my hands to where he felt he needed healing. He let me place my hands on his head, ears, eyes, heart, knees and feet.

During this exchange, he kept my gaze and smiled. I felt as though I saw through his eyes. After the session, his mother stated that he allowed me to touch him, while giving Reiki, in a way that with her is a struggle. I felt honored and

blessed to have shared this connection with this boy. The family intends to learn Reiki as they see it provides an opportunity to have these types of experiences with their son. I hope to offer parent/child classes to help families learn Reiki and show how to use Reiki to communicate and share beautiful moments of connection.

- **Healthier sleep patterns**—ASD has been known to disturb sleep patterns significantly, leading to increased symptoms and stress. Reiki may improve sleep patterns, allowing the client to get a more restful, restorative sleep.

After several sessions with an adult client with ASD, he reported that his sleep schedule had normalized, and he was sleeping through the night without anxiety attacks disrupting his sleep.

- **More control over the disorder**—The parents of children with ASD, in addition to the children themselves, often feel that they have no ability to control the disorder. Reiki sessions allow both children and their caregivers to be proactive about dealing with difficult symptoms and improving their quality of life.

In a distant Reiki session with an autistic boy, the mother reported that the client had been agitated before the session and that when it began, her son settled and after a few moments he started giggling with joy.

While some studies and reports show that Reiki may be beneficial for individuals with ASD, there can be challenges for a practitioner in performing Reiki on an individual with an autism spectrum disorder. This situation is especially the case in young children, as ASD

makes it difficult for them to remain calm or still for the length of a session. Some ways to address this issue is to plan sessions when a child is sleepy or to start with shorter sessions and work up to more extended sessions. When I work with individuals who struggle to remain still, I fill the room with Reiki energy and focus on giving distant Reiki before they arrive. I have found that after several sessions conducted in this way, the individual settles into stillness. It is also common for autistic children to sleep after sessions.

I believe that Reiki may be a tool to assist families who have autistic children by affording them the ability to experience their child's world in a way they would not otherwise be able to experience. How amazing would it be if we, as adults, could enter the autistic child's world, rather than always asking them to adapt to ours?

In 2000, in an article published in *Autism/Asperger's Digest Magazine*, Lewis Mehl-Madrona, M.D., Ph.D., Coordinator for Integrative Psychiatry and Systems Medicine, Program in Integrative Medicine, University of Arizona, College of Medicine, Tucson, Arizona wrote:

“We have done a pilot study of Reiki massage for autistic children. The preliminary results are encouraging, especially when the parents are taught the Reiki along with visualization in between formal appointments with the therapists. The use of Reiki by parents and therapist appears to encourage communication; especially non-verbal communication. Children are calmer and have less self-stimulation.”<sup>1</sup>

While on *The Oprah Show*, Mehmet Oz, M.D., Vice-Chair and Professor of Surgery, Columbia University, said:

“We're beginning now to understand things that we know in our hearts were true but could not mea-

sure. As we get better at understanding how little we know about the body, we begin to realize that the next big frontier in medicine is energy medicine. It's not the mechanistic part of the joints moving. It's not the chemistry of our body. It's understanding for the first time how energy influences how we feel.” (November 20, 2007, *The Oprah Show*).<sup>2</sup>

And finally, Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, the Nobel Prize-winning scientist who discovered vitamin C, asserted, “In every culture and in every medical tradition before ours, healing was accomplished by moving energy.”<sup>3</sup>

I hope that we can all continue to build a Reiki bridge to merge our world with that of children on the autism spectrum and their families. I believe that our work with this community is an opportunity to integrate Reiki into mainstream healing modalities further and I know that I am not alone in this belief. 🌱



Allison is a marriage and family therapist and Reiki Master Practitioner. She received her Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute, and her Usui/Holy Fire® III Reiki Master certification from The International Center for Reiki Training. Contact Allison through her website at [www.battycappscounseling.com](http://www.battycappscounseling.com), by email at [allison@blossomingheartcounseling.com](mailto:allison@blossomingheartcounseling.com) or by phone at 503-880-7190.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Lewis Mehl-Madrona, iEnhancing Conventional Medicine: Alternative Medicine's Place in Treating Autism, *Autism/Asperger's Digest Magazine* (2000).

<sup>2</sup> <http://menalive.com/why-the-next-big-frontier-in-medicine-is-energy-medicine-now-you-can-use-these-revolutionary-tools-to-heal-yourself/>

<sup>3</sup> Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, *Introduction to a Submolecular Biology* (New York: Academic Press, 1960).