



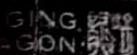
DVD
Included

Qigong Massage

for Your Child with Autism

A Home Program from Chinese Medicine

Louisa Silva
Foreword by Dr. Anita Cignolini



QIGONG
GON

COMMENTS FROM PARENTS WHO HAVE USED THIS PROGRAM WITH THEIR CHILD

"He used to have that 'I hate you' kind of thing and lately he's been running up and hugging me, no problem."

-Peter R, father of a five-year-old

"He used to have major tantrums, hitting himself, throwing himself against the wall. Now we might have a minor tantrum now and then, but then he calms down."

-Dan S, father of a six-year-old

"I remember starting the program and thinking, if I could only feel there is some hope here, I'd be so happy by this time next year. I never dreamed he'd emerge so tuned in, so vocal, so inquisitive, so loving, so aware and so happy. I'll never stop singing the praises of qigong. I hope that this method becomes much more common for helping autistic children. You've literally changed our lives."

-Tina B, mother of a three-year-old

"The shell that was around him has dropped off, and he has light."

-Mary S, mother of a six-year-old

"It's a lot easier than I thought it was going to be. At first I was like, 'oh, my gosh! I'm not ready for this.' But it's not hard. It really isn't!"

-Alice M, mother of a five-year-old

"One day he just put his arms around me and said 'I love you mommy.' You could see in his eyes he understood love."

-Linda L, mother of a three-year-old

"When we believed that autism was permanent and unchangeable, we wouldn't have thought of trying to improve it. Now we believe autism is treatable. We do the massage every day."

-Deb M, mother of a six-year-old

"We started looking for sensory help and had no idea that other areas like speech and language would also improve. I had no clue. I'm just dumbfounded by the whole thing!"

-Bonnie L, mother of a five-year-old

"Now he wants to brush his own teeth, he lets us brush his hair; I even checked him for head lice last night. When I started he said, 'don't hurt me.' After a moment he said, 'that doesn't hurt.' I was checking him like any other kid and he didn't scream or fight."

-Keith R, father of a four-year-old

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Qigong Massage

for Your Child with Autism

A Home Program from Chinese Medicine

Louisa Silva

Foreword by Dr. Anita Cignolini



LONDON AND PHILADELPHIA

now the ears of my ears awake and now the eyes
of my eyes are opened.

e.e. cummings

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A NOTE ON VOCABULARY

We live in a world rich in definitions of "family." In writing this book, we refer to the primary caregiver as "parent" and the second adult most connected to the child as "parent" or sometimes "partner." We see in these words the connection that is unique to children and the particular adult(s) who, in the parental role, shelter, love, nourish, and teach them. A parent who is the only adult in the household should not despair. A second adult is helpful, but not required. Forge ahead anyway.



FOREWORD

I had the pleasure to teach Dr. Silva and work with her on the first research studies applying scientific standards to test the effectiveness of my qigong massage treatment for young children with autism. My work in the field of Chinese Classical Medicine began in the early seventies and included many periods of intense study and research in academies and universities in China. Over the years I developed a rich knowledge of the theory and its fascinating clinical applications little known in the West. During my practice in both Europe and the United States I had the opportunity to apply my knowledge to the treatment of children, and was the first doctor to do it outside of China. My work in these years led to an ever greater appreciation for the need to discover how to apply these methods to the growing population of children suffering from disturbances with Autism Spectrum Disorders. I worked to develop the theory and intervention protocol that is now known as the Cignolini Method. This was the methodology for which Dr. Silva and I first published research showing effectiveness for young children with autism. In her work to bring qigong massage to early intervention therapists, and directly to parents, Dr. Silva has since adapted and expanded my original methodology. I am pleased to accept her gratitude to me for being her professor of Chinese medicine, and endorse her work in bringing this precious knowledge to the many families that it can benefit.

Dr. Anita Cignolini, MD
Palermo
March 2011



PREFACE

Welcome!

In picking up this book, you have taken the first step in embarking on a magnificent journey, one that can have a significant positive impact on your child's struggle with autism and on your family. For centuries, Chinese medicine has treated children's illnesses with massage and diet. On the pages that follow, you will learn a simple 15-minute massage program to help your child's nervous system open up and thus help him become more aware of the world around him. Given every day for five months, it will reduce the symptoms of autism and improve sleep and digestion. The research shows that when combined with some simple dietary recommendations and common-sense protection from toxins, this program can strengthen the body, mind, and emotions of your child, and set him or her on a more normal developmental path.

Chinese medicine offers many different home massage programs for different children's illnesses and disabilities. This book describes a program that has been shown in rigorous scientific research to significantly diminish the effects of autism in children age six and under. It is important to say that it is not appropriate for children with other serious medical conditions, such as uncontrolled seizures or severe emotional disturbances, nor has it been proven to be the optimum massage treatment for older children with autism. But as for the children under six with autism or sensory problems, parents who give their children this simple, daily, 15-minute massage reported that within a few months mood and behavior was better, social and language skills increased, and the stress of caring for their child with autism was significantly diminished.

Our earliest research used trained practitioners who worked intimately with the families who participated in the studies. This work occurred over a prolonged training and included 20 subsequent visits where the practitioner administered the massage, in addition to the daily massage done by the parents at home. We were delighted with the results. The children in the study showed significant

improvement. We then launched studies in which the parents had training and coaching from a trainer, but did the massage themselves. Again, we had exciting positive results. Over the years, we have perfected the specifics and continually moved toward creating a program that enables parents—once they understand the massage and make the commitment to follow through—to achieve, on their own, the same positive results the families in our first studies enjoyed.

Learning something new has a natural learning curve. We had to put a lot of information in this book to make it a complete resource, so you might feel a little overwhelmed by the time you close the book the first time. Hang in there; it gets easier. The program is actually surprisingly simple. For most people who pick up this book, the concepts behind qigong massage are entirely foreign. It might take a while to get there, but, if you stick with it, it will become second nature.

We are so excited to be able to make this program available to everyone. Before this handbook, we were only able to help families in our geographic area. Now, we can offer it to you wherever you are. We wish you the best success. If you have problems or questions, there is contact information in the Additional Resources on page 137. Write us, or email us or check our website. We want to help you and your child unlock his or her potential and join in all the world has to offer.

Note

All of the studies discussed in this book were done on children up to the age of six. While we have anecdotal evidence to show that the massage works for older children, we have no empirical evidence to support any claims in that regard. In general, our expectations of the over-six group would be that the massage would be most successful with smaller, younger children.



INTRODUCTION

Making the Most of This Book

The treatment described in this book has had *proven* results in children with autism under six years of age. This success came from parents who were able to learn the massage, get it into their child's routine, and give it every day for five months. As the weeks passed, the children improved. Children started to ask for their massage and parents came to enjoy it as a close time with their child.

Still more can be gained, however, by parents who work with their child's responses *during* the massage. The more the parent adjusts the massage to their child's body language during the massage, the better the results. In our studies, we had trainers involved to ensure that the parents had every chance to most fully understand how to attune the massage to their child's changing responses. These were hands-on professionals who checked in with the parents regularly to coach them and to improve their techniques.

While we have made every attempt to describe the steps clearly in this book, most people who will be using it will not have the benefit of a professional to guide them. For this reason, we strongly recommend that you gather some other parents of children who have autism into a massage group so that you can learn the steps together, share information and discoveries, and give feedback to one another as you hone your skills. It will also help you stick with it through the sometimes difficult first weeks until you begin to see and recognize tangible results.

You probably already know other parents of children on the autism spectrum through your early intervention program. If a group of five or six families doesn't come to mind immediately, ask your early intervention specialist to suggest some families. Also check any online support groups to which you might belong.

Having specific goals for such a group is important. Of course, every group will create their own goals and culture. You might form the group to achieve a few stated objectives and then disband. Or you might find new friends who can

share this journey with you, providing help and support in ways that far surpass the scope of this program.

Here are the initial goals we suggest:

- Bring the group together initially to watch the DVD together. Set this date whether people have read this book or not. Try to arrange it as an adults-only gathering so people can pay close attention to the DVD.
- Everyone should have a copy of the book. It helps if people have watched the DVD and/or read the book prior to coming, but it shouldn't be a requirement.
- Take a moment for each parent or couple to turn to Appendix C and record the three specific improvements in their child that would be the most helpful or meaningful for their family (e.g. sleeps through the night, responds to her name, aggression subsides).
- After watching all 12 massage movements on the DVD to see the flow of it, watch the first two movements again and then break into groups of three or four to practice giving the massage to one another. Refer to the Movement Chart on page 141-142. Then watch the next two movements, practice those, and continue watching and practicing two at a time, until you've practiced all 12.
- It is best if everyone gets to give the massage and receive the massage at least once. For the sake of social comfort, you can adapt the massage (patting the air above the chest or buttocks, for example) for this activity. The others in the group should watch and give feedback, using the Movement Troubleshooting Checklist in Appendix A as a guide.
- Gather together after the practice time to compare notes about what was learned or observed and to ask questions if they came up. Trade contact information so you can talk over questions or observations later.
- Then, meet in a week as a group or in pairs, to demonstrate the massage again for one another; again using the Movement Troubleshooting Checklist and comparing against the Movement Chart to be sure that the movements are being done correctly.
- Take a moment to mark your calendars to remind yourselves to reread the book or go through the Movement Troubleshooting Checklist again.

This practice and feedback will help ensure that the participants are leaving prepared to start practicing on their own. Everyone should plan to practice at home, with

a partner or typically developing child, before beginning with their child. They should also read the entire handbook before they begin, paying careful attention to the step-by-step instructions in Chapter 4. If they go only with the experience from the parent meeting, they will miss much of the material that is critical to their success.

Subsequent meetings, once or twice a month, are helpful because those who are seeing results early will inspire others to continue. Also, on those days when you are tempted to skip the massage, knowing that you will be meeting again and reporting whether you are doing the massage daily will help you keep going and keep you learning from others' experience and insight. Regular contact between group members outside of the meetings can be very helpful and provide support.

Every child will respond differently to the massage program and will progress at her own pace

There will be lots for the group to share, and you will be continually reminded of something you already know: every child is different. Everyone should fill out a Developmental Checklist from the QSTI.org website. A much-abbreviated version of it is in Appendix C. The measure of progress is not how fast or slow your child improves compared to someone else, but to where your child began.

Chapter 1



AN EASTERN EXPLANATION AND TREATMENT FOR AUTISM

The phrase “to be comfortable in your own skin” is an old one, one that exists in many languages. It tells us something about how we function as human beings and how we relate to one another. A person who is comfortable in his own skin is both comfortable with himself, and relaxed in company. She is easy to talk to and talks easily to others. The idea of being comfortable with ourselves and others includes all of our senses, because we use our senses to know ourselves and to relate to others. Children on the autism spectrum don’t feel comfortable in their skin. Massage is a way to give that comfort back to them.

Qi, our life energy

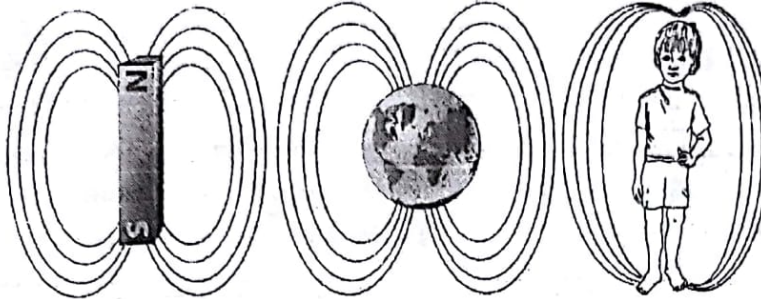
The massage you are about to learn is based on ancient Chinese ideas about energy and how it works in the body. To do the massage well, you need to learn some of the concepts behind it. You’ll learn to use the word “qi” (chee) or energy, and a related word “qigong” (chee-gong), working with energy using exercises or massage. When we say we are low in energy, it means we don’t have much qi-energy. Qigong helps us improve the quality and quantity of our qi-energy.

One of the best tools qigong gives us is a way to improve our circulation. This is because qi-energy and circulation are linked. When we improve our energy, we improve our circulation.

The particular form of qigong massage that we recommend is called Qigong Sensory Training, or QST for short. It is one of hundreds of possible massage routines used by Chinese medicine to treat illness, and it is specific for autism and sensory problems.

In the West, the concept of “life energy” is somewhat mysterious and nebulous. Not so in China, where our physical energy has been understood for three thousand years. If a person needs to improve her overall energy and circulation, there are qigong exercises and massages for that. If he needs to improve his digestion, there are different qigong exercises and a particular diet.

Just like the earth has an electromagnetic field, so do we. Our energy circulates continually in this field from the top of our head, down the outside of our body to our hands and our feet, and then back up the inside of our body to our head again. As our energy flows, it helps our blood circulate into our tissues.



In health, we have plenty of energy and good circulation. In illness, we have problems with our energy and circulation. What parents need to learn about qigong massage isn't complicated and, in fact, you'll be surprised at how well it explains much of what you've seen and experienced with autism.

We've treated many children with autism whose parents now use concepts about energy and circulation daily to help their children. And so, although the ideas might be new to many, they work, regardless of whether we understand and recognize them or not. Our children's bodies behave in the way the Chinese describe. Once you learn how to see their bodies in terms of energy and circulation, the massage becomes reassuringly predictable.

In this book, we do our best to give you clear, simple instructions for giving the massage, and what signs to look for in your child. After you've done the massage a number of times, you will recognize that your child is starting to react just as we have described, and the instructions will make more sense to you. If your child doesn't react as predicted, there will be a reason for it, and answers that we can search for.

Energy channels

Once you understand the idea that our bodies have an energy field, the next idea to grasp is that within our energy field there is a system of energy channels. You might be surprised to learn that there is a map of these energy channels, and that Chinese medicine has known about this map for thousands of years. They are like a system of rivers flowing north-south, and east-west, bringing life energy and blood to all our tissues. We use this map to understand *where* the problems are when we do qigong massage.

As the energy flows through the channels, it sends blood in and out of the little capillaries that deliver nutrients to the tissues. If the channel is blocked in an area, that area will have poor circulation and won't feel right. If, for example, the circulation is blocked to your child's scalp, it will be difficult to cut his hair. If the channels sending blood to his fingers are blocked, it will be hard to cut his nails. In these two examples, the qigong massage works by opening up the blocks in the energy channels, restoring the circulation, and making things feel better.

It is easy to see why qigong massage is a treatment of choice for children. It is especially effective in young children because their systems are small enough that a parent's healing touch can address problems at the skin's surface as well as deep inside.

"In terms of what they said in the trainings about the things he has difficulty with—everything improved exactly like the training said it would, especially his finger sensitivities and his verbal abilities. I can even cut his nails now. I personally like the qigong because it is not anything that is scary or invasive, it is just a massage." (Tom's dad)

The three energy "sources"

There is one more concept from Chinese medicine that will help us understand qigong massage, and our children's reactions to it. It has to do with the *sources* of the electromagnetic activity in our bodies. Just like the Earth's electromagnetic field has a *source*—its molten iron core—so our electromagnetic field also has a source. Actually, we have three sources. Deep in the head, chest, and abdomen are areas of concentrated energy, which the Chinese call *dantien*. These are the deep sources and reserves for our mental, emotional, and physical energy.

Although we don't conceptualize these energy sources in the West specifically, nor do we map them as the Chinese do, we do differentiate between our physical, emotional, and mental energy. We have a sense that our mental energy centers in our head, our emotional energy centers in our heart, and our physical energy centers in our gut. We are aware when our reserves are tapped, and we become mentally, emotionally, or physically run down. Chinese medicine teaches that when we have been ill for some time, eventually we draw down our reserves, and they become depleted and empty. It offers us a way to replenish and restore the sources of our energy—qigong exercises and massage. During the five months of this program, parents will be doing this for their children by placing a gentle hand over their heart, forehead, and lower belly during the massage. Children,

likewise, will be drawing their parent's hands to these areas, asking them without words to help fill them up.

When it comes to understanding energy, "seeing is believing." We don't want you to take anything on faith, so just keep an open mind, follow our instructions, observe your child, and see for yourself.

One of the best things about a parent giving their child qigong massage is that a parent and child share the same energy. When a parent gives a child energy, it is like giving them a blood transfusion with perfectly matched blood—it is exactly what they need without side-effects. This, and the love a parent shares with their child, can make qigong massage given by the parent more effective than qigong massage given by a professional. This is one situation where you really can be the best doctor for your child.

Energy and autism

Let's try to understand more about what your child's physical energy has to do with her autism by looking at a couple of different forms of autism. In the regressive form of autism, for example, a child develops normally until somewhere in her second year, and then suddenly loses speech and eye contact and regresses into autism. Alternatively, in the non-regressive form, she may be going along developing normally, when at a certain moment, her development just peters out. What happened to her energy? What was her energy like when she was growing normally? What happened when she stopped?

Chinese medicine would say that before your child got autism, her energy flowed freely and abundantly down from the top of her head to the tips of her fingers and toes, keeping her head clear, her eyes and ears open, her fingers and toes comfortable, and sending blood into all her tissues and organs to keep her healthy and developing normally.

In any situation where we have illness or pain in our body, Chinese medicine makes the diagnosis of a block in our energy and circulation, and then gives treatment to open up the block and restore circulation. It pays particular attention to where the block is.

In both of our examples, regressive and non-regressive, when our little girl developed autism, her energy and circulation became blocked in her head and neck. Her head was no longer clear, her eyes and ears no longer worked together. Downstream of the block, the circulation to her fingers and toes was

diminished, and her skin stopped feeling normal. The circulation to her brain and organs suffered, and her development slowed down. Terrible though this is, these blocks can be reversed.

In autism, there are many blocks in the channels through which qi-energy travels—especially in the areas where the senses open to the world around us. Because these conditions prevent the senses from working properly, the child can't receive accurate information about the world around him. These different sensory problems result in troubling behaviors and a limited ability to learn and socialize. Depending on the blocks and the degree of emptiness in their energy sources and reservoirs, children with autism lack the robust health the typical child exhibits.

-
- Qi means energy.
 - Gong means skilled work or craft.
 - Qigong means working with energy.
-

The removal of these blocks and the filling of the channels with qi-energy is at the heart of what this qigong massage accomplishes. As you progress through these pages, you'll learn to recognize blocks when you see them. And you'll learn techniques for knowing when and how to help your child fill the places that are empty of qi-energy and blood. We'll discuss the causes of these blocks in a later chapter, but the exciting thing is that qigong massage removes these sensory blocks very well. And through the massage, many parents have already been able to help their child open up to the world.

Take a moment to visualize a river that is watering a vast, verdant delta. If you dam up the river, parts of the downstream environment will begin to wither. Things might still live there, but growth will be impeded and the area will not flourish. The energy system that enables a rich flow of blood to the body is similar. Once we remove the dams and refresh the reservoirs in a child who is struggling with autism, normal function can return in many areas.

Remember that autism is not a genetic disease in the way Down syndrome is; the manifestations of the disease are not fixed. In other words, the diagnosis in the case of autism is merely a snapshot in time of where your child registers as being behind on his developmental milestones. As you will see, he can catch up. And the tools are, literally, at hand.

We have found that it takes about two months for the massage to become automatic for parents, and for them to become fully comfortable with the concepts we present in the following pages. By this time, the massage is typically

a relaxing, enjoyable time of the day for both parent and child. In our research, parents who complete the five-month program report a significant reduction in stress levels across the board as autistic behaviors abate in their child. If you persevere and get past the initial learning curve, you can have these kinds of outcomes, too.

Treating the causes of autism with qigong massage

Chinese medicine says, “for every physical illness there is a problem with our energy channels.” For example, if you have a pain in your shoulder, and can't lift your arm, we would look for a block in your channels where they run through the shoulder. Once we found the sore spot, we would carefully massage and pat it down towards your hand. It would be like combing the tangles out of long hair. We would keep going until we got the tangle out.

So one of our first questions in autism is, “Where are the blocks?” We want to find them, and work them out. Whether you believe in these blocks or not, if you try to massage them out, you will see them melt away.

Qigong massage works differently than ordinary massage. It follows the energy channels instead of the lymph drainage, it provides lasting improvement instead of temporary relief, and, because it works on energy, it addresses the whole person instead of the separate parts.

One of the main practical differences you will learn over and over again, as you learn the massage, is that the direction of the strokes in qigong massage is very important; we always move down from the head to the hands and feet.

The first step to working with your child using qigong is to have a broad understanding of the autism symptoms you see in relation to how the massage will address them. This general understanding is important so you can more easily understand your child's responses during the massage and appropriately respond to them.

Treating the symptoms of autism with qigong massage

Sensory problems

Research shows that behind the developmental delay seen in children with autism lies a sensory nervous system that is out of balance—the child's skin, eyes, ears, and nose simply don't perceive his own body and the events of family life in the same way that the rest of the family does. Children with autism might not notice if someone speaks to them. Their perception of gentle touch and of pain can be out of kilter on different parts of their body. Things that should feel

good (e.g. holding hands, hugs from grandparents) don't feel good, and things that should hurt (e.g. cuts, scrapes, burns) don't hurt. In the end, the positive reinforcement that comes from feeling good when we are with our loved ones isn't the same and social interaction doesn't come naturally.

Because the senses are out of balance, they don't work together. It is hard for a child with autism to pick out a human voice and a human face from all the other sights and sounds. And then it is hard to coordinate turning her head with looking at and listening to someone. That is why the hallmark of autism is not making eye contact—her sensory nervous system isn't working properly.

Eye contact is critical to communication. Trying to communicate without eye contact is like talking through a telephone line that keeps breaking up—it's really hard to get the information across. With no eye contact, communication is an uphill battle. No wonder it is hard for children with autism to learn language and social skills. How do we help his sensory nervous system so he can connect naturally with the people in his world?

Qigong massage and sensory problems

The qigong massage described in this book restores the normal feeling of pain and pleasure to all five senses. Now the sensory information from the skin, eyes, and ears stops being contradictory and starts fitting together. The senses work together and the child can make sense of what the people in his world are doing. He is curious and begins to make eye contact and tune in.

Once the senses are working better, many of the symptoms of autism begin to abate. It is easier for the child to focus and pay attention to what is going on around her. With her senses no longer overloaded all the time, the child is more relaxed about participating in social situations. It becomes fun to play with other children, and social learning is free to come naturally out of day-to-day experiences.

Stress and relaxation problems

The human nervous system is set up to trigger two opposite states of being: stress and relaxation. The first state is triggered in response to discomfort, and is why the baby cries when she is hungry or wet. It is under the control of the *sympathetic nervous system*. The second state is triggered by the pleasure of food and comfort and is where she spends most of her time. When she is relaxed, she opens up the world around her. Because she is a young mammal, her security and comfort come with her social group, and she has the ability to relax and enjoy togetherness. The relaxed state allows her to bond with her family, digest

her food properly, be social with others, and fall asleep at night. This state is under the control of the *parasympathetic nervous system*.

So what happens in autism? Children with autism don't tolerate change well. Day-to-day changes are difficult to cope with and even a small change in the routine can trigger a meltdown. Research shows that this is because in autism the *parasympathetic nervous system* is underactive. Without its calming influence, the child's nervous system is easily tipped towards stress, and does not know how to de-stress.

From the moment of birth, we experience many episodes of stress, and have to learn from our parents how to calm down. When a baby has a need that is not immediately met, his stress doesn't automatically go away when his need is fulfilled. He needs to be held and soothed by the parent. This triggers the *parasympathetic nervous system*, and he relaxes again. As he gets older, he learns to soothe himself, and to trigger his own *parasympathetic nervous system*. He tolerates change better, and once he can communicate his needs and wants more clearly, he can change the situation to meet his needs. By the time he is in preschool, he is starting to be able to stay calm and open in social settings where there is an amazing amount of change and activity going on around him.

Often children with autism did not learn to self-soothe in the first year of life, and small changes in the routine can easily trigger tantrums. The child is difficult to calm and so the tantrums can be both long and loud. The stress impacts everyone in the family. Parents also have to deal with uninformed outsiders commenting on the child's "bad behavior." Public situations like the grocery store, where the child has to respond to even more stimulation and change, most of which the parents can't control, become especially stressful for parents.

Qigong massage and stress and relaxation problems

Qigong massage awakens and stimulates the self-soothing mechanisms in the body, enabling the child to participate in family and school life without becoming overwhelmed. With the ability to self-soothe, she can better handle the changes and transitions of her daily life. As the massage helps her to be more comfortable in her skin, she learns to recognize and communicate her needs more clearly and the stress response is triggered less frequently. Eventually, the self-soothing abilities become embedded in her nervous system and she learns to regulate her emotions and stress levels so that they are appropriate to her needs and the situation around her.

Repetitive and self-injurious behaviors

In our work with children who have autism, we see *self-injurious* behaviors such as self-biting, pinching, and head-banging as a response on the part of the child to "wrong" sensory information coming in. While self-injurious behavior is an attempt to muffle or stop the sensation, repetitive motions, such as rocking, are an attempt to self-soothe.

Other *repetitive* motions, such as repeatedly turning the light switch on and off or lining up toys, are like a phonograph needle stuck in the groove of an old LP record. By practicing tasks, very young children learn to understand and manipulate predictable elements of their world. They practice through repetition until they've mastered the skill and then they move on to the next thing. Children with autism engage in the first part of this, but, because their senses are impaired, they can't really pay attention to what they experience. So they never learn enough to abandon the behavior and move on to the next step.

Qigong massage and repetitive or self-injurious behaviors

Once the sensory nervous system comes back to normal, the uncomfortable sensory messages cease, and the self-injury response stops. And, because the senses open up and the child starts to notice what he is doing during the repetitive behaviors, he learns from what he is doing, and progresses on to the next step. So, even though he is delayed according to a typical timetable, the child is no longer stuck in the same groove.

Tantrums and meltdowns

All parents expect a few tantrums from their toddler, but parents of children with autism often distinguish between tantrums—which in autism are typically more frequent, longer, and more easily triggered—and meltdowns. To the parents of a child with autism, a meltdown is a situation in which screaming and hitting escalates, the child is usually on the floor, and it takes a long time for the tantrum to dissipate.

Parents of toddlers learn to recognize the signs of a pending meltdown in their child and put the child down for a nap or otherwise anticipate their child's needs according to what they perceive is wearing him down. The typically growing child learns to tolerate longer periods of discomfort and adapts to not having his needs met immediately. For the child with autism, the world is already taxing his system far beyond the experience of the normal child. He might "hit the wall" more suddenly, and because the self-soothing mechanisms are not functioning well, he has little ability to fend off the meltdown himself.

Qigong massage and tantrums and meltdowns

The movements that promote self-soothing are critical parts of the qigong massage program. As the child's nervous system begins to learn to calm itself instead of being overwhelmed by stress, the meltdowns become less frequent. Additionally, because the child begins to learn more about his world and to recognize and communicate his needs better, the situations that caused him to have a meltdown previously cease to be problems.

A few months into the massage program, when parents can take a deep breath and reflect, there is often a tremendous sense of liberation and joy to realize that this behavior that has been such an exhausting part of daily life is abating. Does this mean that tantrums and meltdowns will cease completely? Of course not. The child still has to grow through all the stages of development, including those in which a meltdown is going to happen even for a typically developing child. The difference is that the meltdowns are much less frequent and the parents can now respond to them as they would with a healthy, albeit younger, child.

Aggressive behaviors

Aggressive behavior is possibly the most stressful for families, especially if the child with autism is aggressive with a younger sibling. As in other troubling behaviors common to autism, aggression is a result of the nervous system being more tipped towards stress—the “fight or flight” state typical of the sympathetic nervous system—than relaxation. A second factor that triggers aggressive behavior is exposure to toxins. Children with autism have an immature detoxification system, and may not be able to handle certain foods or products in the home that are harmless to the rest of the family. There is more about this in Chapter 9. An exposure to a toxin can result in unusual or aggressive behavior. For some children, the triggers can be fairly easy to spot, and, once eliminated from the child's environment, the aggression can abate. Examples of substances that can trigger aggression are things like markers (switch to crayons!) or processed food with red dye.

Qigong massage and aggressive behaviors

The qigong massage addresses three underlying problems that cause aggression in children with autism. The first is the ability to self-soothe. A child who can properly self-soothe will be triggered to aggressive behavior less frequently. As the child spends more time in the relaxed, open, learning state, the “fight” response won't be part of an ever-present state of being for the child. The aggression might continue for a while, but the number of instances should abate significantly over

the months of the massage. Also, as the child is better able to understand what is happening around him and to communicate his needs, his frustration levels will go down, and his tendency to trigger into aggression should diminish.

The second effect of the massage is in the reduction of toxins in the body. While eliminating toxins in the environment can also help significantly, the qigong massage boosts and balances the digestive system so the child can clear the toxins he is already holding in his body and better process new ones coming in. Soon after beginning the massage, you should see one or more smelly green poops. This is evidence that the body is finally able to process and shed these foreign substances that can have a hand in fostering aggressive responses.

The third contribution the massage can make toward reducing aggression is that, as the senses open and the child's body becomes more balanced, he begins to develop empathy. For the child who did not feel pain previously, these sensory openings are critical: without the ability to feel pain, he cannot understand pain in others. When a child cries for the first time after injuring himself, the door to acquiring empathy has opened and the child can begin to learn that aggressive behavior can hurt others.

Sleep problems

Children with autism have a high prevalence of sleep problems including sleeping very little, great difficulty falling asleep, being awake for long periods of time at night, nightmares and night screaming. Easing into sleep and staying asleep is regulated by the nervous system. Because the calming, relaxed, open state of the parasympathetic nervous system is not the dominant state in most children with autism, the ability to wind down to sleep and stay asleep are not readily at hand.

Sleep problems make it harder for the child to cope with daily life because she is not rested, so the symptoms of autism are amplified. Children's sleep problems also dramatically impact the parents' stress levels and quality of life. Parents of children with autism can be severely and chronically sleep-deprived, which only adds to the difficulties of caring for the child on top of coping with all the other demands of home and work.

Qigong massage and sleep problems

Our research has shown qigong massage is helpful in improving all manner of sleep problems in children who have autism, within the first few months of implementation. The most common time of day parents in our studies chose to give the massage was at bedtime. They consistently report that the massage

becomes a relaxing part of the bedtime routine, enjoyed by both the parent and the child, often ending with the child being asleep within minutes.

Digestive problems

Children with autism commonly have an array of digestive problems that can include diarrhea, constipation, poor appetite, and/or food allergies. Young children require specific nutrients to support the needs of the developing brain and body. If a child is eating a severely limited diet, he might not be getting the necessary nutrients for brain development. Or, if she is eating nutritious foods but has diarrhea, she might not be absorbing the nutrients she needs. In either situation, growth and development may be hindered.

For children who already have developmental delay, this is a double-whammy, because their digestive problems create a further barrier to learning and health that can lead to a downward spiral in their condition. Because the nervous system regulates digestion, it is little wonder that children who have a disrupted nervous system will have problems in this area. After all, when somebody is wound up and on full alert, she is in no position to relish a meal. Nor will her body digest it well.

Because this is a common state for children with autism, getting nutritional value from food is a chronic challenge for their bodies. Add to that the probability that their sense of taste and their sensations of texture are likely to also be disrupted and it can be hard to get nutritious food into their system. As they restrict their diet to fewer and fewer foods, the likelihood of developing food allergies increases.

Qigong massage and digestive problems

The digestive problems of children in our studies consistently abated as the digestive systems became stronger and the choice of food widened. Diarrhea and constipation resolved and appetite improved. As their bodies began to be fully nourished, their intellect was able to open to the new, more accurate, sensory input they were suddenly receiving. Their bodies and minds began to grow naturally.

If a child has food allergies, the massage not only makes it easier for her to handle the allergies by helping her to better eliminate toxins from her system, but it also broadens the array of foods she'll eat. Because we often crave the foods to which we are allergic, the improvement of appetite resulting from the massage makes it easier to sort out the foods to which a child is reacting and to eliminate them for a time. (For more information about diet and food allergies see Chapter 10.)

Chapter 2



IS THE QST HOME PROGRAM RIGHT FOR YOU AND YOUR CHILD?

The QST Home Program is a treatment that you will be giving your child at home. It is important to make sure it is the *right* treatment for you and your child. Our definition of a right treatment to put in parents' hands is a treatment that is safe, effective, non-invasive, and can be successfully carried out by parents without taking too much of their time and energy. All treatments take a parent's time and energy, but some are much more burdensome than others. As you are researching and coming to your decision, here are some questions that will help you decide.

For whom is the QST Home Program recommended?

Our research has shown that the home program is safe and effective for children with uncomplicated autism who are six years and under, and are not undergoing other intensive medical treatments.

Who is the QST Home Program not recommended for and why?

- *Children who have active seizures.* If a child has an active seizure disorder that is not controlled on medication, then the gentle qigong tapping on the head can actually trigger a seizure. These children should not receive qigong massage unless it is under the direction of a Chinese medicine physician.
- *Children who have other complicated medical and emotional conditions.* The QST Home Program is just one of many possible massage programs, and is tailored for uncomplicated autism and sensory problems. Children with other severe physical or emotional problems would need a different home program, and it should be individually tailored to them by a Chinese medicine physician.

- *Children who are going through a lot of medication changes.* The success of qigong massage comes when the parent can read and respond to the child's cues during massage. While a child is going through a lot of medication changes, the medication is affecting the child's body, and this makes it difficult to know whether the child is reacting to the massage or reacting to the medication. Some strong medications like Tegretol or Risperdal tend to block the effect of the qigong massage altogether. In general, it is better to wait until the child is stabilized on medication before beginning the home program.
- *Children going through chelation therapy.* Chelation is a very strong treatment. It releases toxins and can cause regressions in behavior. It is much better not to mix qigong with chelation as the chelation process makes it far too difficult for the parent to tune the massage to the child.

Can I give the massage to my other typically developing children?
Absolutely.

Can I give the massage to my older child who has autism?

The research is not in on this one. You will have to decide for yourself and do what is comfortable for you. Some of our parents have given the massage to their older children and had great results. Others couldn't get past the initial difficulties and the child's rejection of touch. We hope to do a research study with older children so we can encounter the problems systematically and be in a position to offer strategies.

Can I give the massage to other children with other medical conditions?

Better not. We are currently researching a home massage program for cerebral palsy and Down syndrome. Keep checking our website. If the study results are good, we will post the information there as soon as we have it.

Chapter 3



GETTING READY TO GIVE THE HOME PROGRAM

Now that you have decided that the QST Home Program is right for your child, a number of questions go through your mind: Is it affordable? Is it hard to learn? Is it time-consuming to give? Luckily for parents, qigong massage is parent-friendly on all these counts. It can be given in the home at no expense and it takes only 15 minutes a day. Qigong massage is among the least invasive of all the autism treatments—it involves neither medication nor lengthy therapy—and research shows that, when done correctly, it is both safe and effective.

Thousands of years of experience with qigong massage in China show that the younger the child is, the more effective it is. That is why we strongly recommend it as a first-line early intervention as soon as a diagnosis of autism is suspected.

Through the past decade of working with parents, we have found that the success of this program depends on one main thing: *the parents get the massage into the daily routine and keep it there for five months.* It is really that simple. The massage works, you just have to do it! Once they get over the hump of learning the massage and getting their children over their worst sensory problems, we have found that parents, as well as children, enjoy the massage, and it is not difficult to keep it in the routine.

Massaging your child strengthens the bond between you, and when see you are helping him to overcome some of the obstacles in his path, you will feel great satisfaction in your job as a parent.

Following are some of the most common questions we hear as parents get ready to start the home program.

Who should do the massage?

Any adult family member *who is emotionally connected to the child* can learn to give the massage. In fact, it is best for at least two family members to learn how to give it. That way if one person is too tired or is unavailable, the child needn't miss out on the help and support the massage offers.

When should I do the massage?

Bedtime is a great time to give the massage because it helps the child to quiet down to sleep, but before or after school or before nap time might work better for you. The important thing is to get it into the daily routine at a time that supports your ability to get it done. After a while, your child will expect it and ask for it.

Where should I do the massage?

You don't need any special mats or tables to do qigong massage, but it will be best if you can find a comfortable spot that you can use most days—a bed, a couch, or even the floor with a comforting blanket and pillow. It is up to you and your child what will work best for the two of you. Ideally, it is a place where the child has the best chance of relaxing and where you can comfortably get to both sides of his body. This will make it easier for you to make the massage part of your daily routine.

How long do I need to continue the program?

The massage is like a calming and balancing medicine. You should give it daily for at least five months. Then you can decide whether to continue. We recommend that you fill out the checklists in the Appendices before you start, and again at five months. This will help you measure the progress your child has made, and give you some benchmarks to decide how long to continue. Many parents keep going for a year or two, because they see that the massage keeps their child on track, and without it, their child's progress slips a bit.

Are there times when I shouldn't give the massage?

Giving qigong massage requires some extra energy of the person who is giving it. Everyone has days when they have nothing left to give, either because they are too stressed, too tired, are getting sick, or are in too bad a mood. If you are sick, angry, or exhausted, do not give the massage. Going through the motions with a negative feeling will not help your child—our children feel our emotions. Ask another family member to do it. If nobody else is available, it is better to take the day off and wait for a new day when you are feeling better. Feeling calm, open, and positive yourself is a vital part of the treatment. If you are mildly stressed or somewhat tired, however, giving the massage will help you calm down and relax, and then both you and your child will feel better.

What if my child isn't feeling well?

You will need to play this one by ear. If your child is aching all over with the flu, for example, the massage would be uncomfortable and not a good idea, but if your child has something minor like a cold or upset stomach, the massage can help him get over it much faster.

What if I make mistakes?

Parents are often afraid of making mistakes. The big mistakes are obvious, and you aren't going to make them: to be rough with your child, to give the massage when you are angry, or massage upward towards the head. If you study this book and DVD, remain gentle and calm, and follow the qigong movements downwards from the head towards the hands and feet, you won't harm your child. It's normal to feel uncertain of your abilities when you are learning something new. But, as you do the massage every day, your skills at reading your child's body language will get better, and your child will start asking you for the massage.

How will I ever remember all 12 movements?

It might feel like 12 separate movements is a lot to learn, but you'll soon find that you can move through the movements with ease. They become second nature. In fact, over time, children learn the parts of the massage and ask for them.

Until then, here's some help: there is a Movement Chart at the back of this book (see page 141-142). While it doesn't teach you what you need to know about the movements, once you have worked through this book, it is an excellent quick reference sheet. You might like to turn to this page and follow along on the chart now.

First, notice that the movements fall naturally into four groups:

1. The first two movements focus on the full length of the body down the back. Then you turn the child over, and the third movement focuses on the full length of the sides of the body.
2. The second group of three movements focuses on the energy moving from the head, down the arms, and into the fingertips.
3. The third group, which consists of Movements 7 and 8, focuses on the chest and abdomen.
4. The fourth group of four movements is done with the legs, toes, and feet.

So, it's really very easy. Start with the whole body, take care of the arms, address the torso, and finish with the legs and feet. Everything is moving *down* the body.

Which movements do what?

By starting at the top of the head with Movements 1, 2, and 3, you are opening your child's awareness of the world around her. It usually takes some weeks before she can lie quietly on her belly as you do the movements, but by the time that has happened, you will see that you've accomplished a great deal in helping her to be more aware of her surroundings. As you pat the energy down to her feet, you are also helping her body to settle down and relax.

Movement 4 opens up her ears so she can listen.

Movements 5, 6, and 7 all work on opening the social senses. Movement 5 facilitates making eye contact and smiling. Movement 6 helps your child's tongue and lips form speech. Movement 7 helps him to be able to calm himself down when he is upset.

With Movements 8 and 9, you are strengthening digestion and helping your child eliminate toxins. Children with autism have a harder time getting rid of the chemicals that we encounter in daily life that can trigger difficult behavior. Over time, these can build up in their systems. Sometimes, you may get a strange taste in your mouth when you do the massage, and your child may pass a dark green, smelly bowel movement afterwards. These are immediate indicators of success. Your child is starting to clean out.

With Movements 10 and 11, you are helping to move energy all the way down into the legs and feet. Once it fills the toes, it circulates back up to the lower belly to restore physical vitality. Finally, Movement 12 sends the energy all the way up to the head to nourish the brain.

After a couple of months, your child may reach for your hand and place it on her forehead, chest, or belly. This signals that the deep energy fields are open and ready to fill up. This is wonderful! Just rest your hand gently on the area, stay longer on it, relax, and enjoy the connection.

Do I need to do the movements in order and all at once?

Ideally, the movements are done in order in one session, but at first, it can be hard to accomplish this. Touch can be so difficult for a child who has autism that the whole massage is too much for him to accept at one time. That's okay. Start with the first movement and see how far you go. Do part of it, and then pick up where you left off and finish up later. In other words, do the movements

in order, but you don't have to do them all at once. Within a week or two it should become easier for both of you to do the whole thing in one session.

The important thing to understand about this massage, and about Chinese medicine in general, is that treatments in response to individual symptoms are never just about the individual symptoms. Chinese medicine always looks at the body as a whole. Western medicine likes to take a one-symptom-one-treatment approach, but because everything is connected in the body and what happens in one area influences the rest (as the health of the whole also affects the performance of the parts), the Chinese treatment looks at a unified picture. All of this is to say that it takes all of the pieces to make the massage work. Each of the pieces has effects, but taken as a whole, the massage has general effects throughout the body. Yes, it might be hard to get the whole massage done at first, but that must be the ultimate goal, and most families find they can accomplish the whole massage in one session within a matter of days.

Can I use the movements outside of the massage time?

The single most important thing is that you do the entire massage, in order, at least once a day. Of course you can do it twice a day—families who do it twice a day see faster progress in their child—but once a day is perfectly adequate. You can also do extra of some movements during the day. As you'll see at the end of the discussion on the movements, there are some movements that are especially helpful for certain things.

How am I going to get my child to lie still for a massage?

In short, you aren't. This is a process, and children can be very wriggly. You will have to be persistent, especially at the beginning. It makes things easier to have a partner helping you so one person can either hold or stabilize your child while the other does the massage. Initially, you might feel like you are working hard to get the whole massage in during the day, sneaking in a few movements now and then as you see the opportunity. It's okay. As the channels open, your child will be able to settle down more for the massage. Try to create the idea of a certain place and time for the massage from the start, even if it doesn't turn out that way for a while.

Is it okay to distract my child with a toy or DVD?

Absolutely. The energy benefits will happen for your child whether he is paying attention or not, and a DVD can make the massage a lot easier in the beginning.

Over time, the distractions will no longer be necessary because the child is enjoying the close connection time with his parent.

Every time you do the massage for your child, you are building toward future success. You might not see improvement in one day, but it is cumulative. Without the difficult first days, you won't get to the easier days a few weeks down the road.

Are two adults giving the massage better than one?

There is no doubt that two parents make it easier, especially at the beginning, but one parent can definitely give the massage alone. You know more than anyone how to read your child and work with him. When he squirms, put him back in position and keep going. Do this gently and matter-of-factly and consider it part of the massage; you have to stay calm. Having the second parent can be helpful—in fact, there are some specific supporting postures for the second parent covered at the end of the 12 movements—but don't let the unavailability of a second parent prevent the massage. Go for it!

What if parts of the massage seem to hurt?

This is a tricky issue. Your child is more attuned to your touch and voice than anybody else's. You are the person most likely to touch her in the way that will seem most natural to her. You are going to encounter places that are very uncomfortable to the touch—those being the places that are causing your child the most problems and are going to ultimately need the most help; the ears, fingers, and toes are common. We never, ever, want to cause harm to a child with our touch, so it is always gentle. Even after several months of massage, the pressure never exceeds that with which we would give a big hug to a small child, but in the beginning, your child will react in some places as if you are hurting him. It is important that you note those areas and study this book to learn how to best address them. As a general rule, though, only you can judge what is too much based on your child's reactions. At first, the discomfort might be too overwhelming for the child to tolerate and you might have to take a break between massage movements. That said, you have to find a balance. Your child can tolerate some discomfort—after all, she is already uncomfortable, and you have to find a way to work through that discomfort a bit at a time. Just remember that everything you are able to accomplish will get you closer to the time when the massage becomes easier and routine.

Should I force my child to have the massage?

No! If you force a child who is actively kicking, hitting, angry, or fearful, into submitting to a 15-minute ordeal, his nervous system will be in full "fight or flight" mode, and will most likely be stuck there for some time. It won't be helpful to trigger this and, in fact, it will be counterproductive.

This is where a professional trainer can be helpful, but without one, you as a parent can still figure out ways to work through this. It takes some grit and persistence on your part, but if you don't do it, your child won't get the benefit of the massage. Perhaps you can try again later, and do a small piece of it at a time. Perhaps you will initially use a partner who can distract the child and help keep him in position while you go through the movements. It will get easier. The really difficult times usually last only a week or two, at most a month. You have to have faith that no matter how imperfect the early attempts might be, they are creating the conditions that will make it easier down the road.

If you don't start somewhere and keep going, you won't get to the destination. The first weeks can be trying, but whatever you accomplish in those early days will help.

Does my child always have to be lying down for the movements? Could one parent hold him on her lap for some of the movements?

At first, you may not be able to get your child to lie down for the movements. You may even have to chase him around the room to do the massage. It is always helpful if one parent gently corrals the child in her arms and on her lap while the other works on the child. But as you persist, one of the goals is for the child to lie down on his own for the massage. If he won't lie down on his belly, it means that he has a block in his energy flow somewhere that needs your help. Once you've addressed it, he will lie down easily.

There are some movements that are particularly uncomfortable for my child. Is it okay if I skip those?

Qigong massage is a treatment and, as we know, sometimes treatments that ultimately help us are not comfortable. Discomfort at gentle touch carries with it important information for us. It is showing us where the biggest problems lie. And so, contrary to our instinct to avoid an area, discomfort is an indicator that we must spend extra time there. The strategy is to adjust the touch, make it

lighter and quicker, or slower and pressing, depending on what the child accepts best, and spend more time in problem areas, doing the movements additional times. Over time, the discomfort will be replaced with pleasure and relaxation.

Discomfort with gentle touch is a signal that your child needs extra help there. Figure out whether the area is blocked or empty, and you will know how to adjust your touch.

Is more better in general?

The research shows that once a day for five months works. You don't have to do more than that. Some people like to do the massage twice a day as a nice way to begin the day and to end it, for example, and the children tend to progress faster that way. But again, the research shows that once a day for five months is enough.

What about self-care for parents who give qigong massage?

On occasion, parents have reported feeling slightly sick or head-achy after giving the massage, as if they have picked up some of their child's toxins. You can help to clear this by washing your hands and taking a walk outside.

Our bodies continuously clear the toxins we encounter in daily life, and we can flush them out immediately with a qigong exercise routine. There is a 15-minute exercise routine called *Self-Care Qigong* available on our website that you can do at home. These exercises naturally clear out toxins and fill you with energy, leaving you calmer and more relaxed for the day. You can do your qigong exercise routine after the massage or at any time of day. It is a good addition to your self-care.

Many of our parents do qigong exercise routines in their homes or take qigong classes in the community where they can practice with a group and receive feedback. We recommend that you make a qigong exercise routine part of your daily life.

Chapter 4



THE MASSAGE

Before you begin to do qigong massage with your child, read this chapter and watch the DVD located at the back of this book. Then practice the 12 movements with a partner until you feel you can do them calmly and smoothly. This practice is very important. While it is tempting to jump right in with your child, resist! Once you are comfortable with the information in this chapter and can do the 12 movements smoothly with the help of the Movement Chart (see page 141-142), you are ready to start with your child.

Once you've begun, you will have questions, and there are some more concepts for you to understand in order to get the most out of the massage. Be sure to visit the material in Chapters 5 and 6. You might not remember it all after one reading, but, after you've revisited it a few times in the early weeks of the treatment and you've had some experience with the techniques, it will all fall into place.

You need to be as calm and confident with the motions as possible when you begin with your child so you can fully engage in what is happening with him. If you are distracted and trying to learn the movements while at the same time dealing with your child's reactions to the massage, it increases the chances that you will get off to a rough start. Why make it harder on yourself? Find somebody to work through the movements with. Additionally, there is some more helpful information to know once you have mastered the 12 basic movements.

More than going through the motions—but that's a start!

You will find that as the months pass, your understanding of how to best do the massage for your child will grow. You will know that on any given day, you will need to adjust to how she is responding to your touch. You will recognize when you've encountered a trouble spot and you will know how to deal with it. And, best of all, your child will become increasingly more receptive to the massage as her channels open. Over time, she might start to ask you to adjust the massage,

pressing harder, going faster and lighter, spending more time on an area, or just pressing your hand against an area of her body to help it fill with energy and blood.

There is a troubleshooting guide in Chapter 6. It is good to read it often to remind yourself of what it contains so you can reference it as things come up during the massage.

Don't worry about knowing everything all at once, or even at being good at the massage at the start. Like anything worth knowing how to do, it takes some practice. You'll get better and, as we said, if you follow the instructions, even if you aren't perfect, you won't harm your child. When you've finished the book, watched the DVD, and practiced, you will remember some things, but not everything. Don't sweat it beyond that. Use the Movement Chart as a guide until you know the movements automatically and come back to the materials often to check your understanding and to pick up more skills so you can continue to improve the effectiveness of your massage. Beyond that, it's all on the upside, so take the plunge!

Form, awareness, intention: Important elements for success

In addition to learning the movements, the person giving the massage must think about and practice three important elements of the treatment: Form, Awareness, and Intention.

Form

Another word for form is technique. Your form alone determines 30 percent of what is possible with this treatment. Are your hands starting and ending in the right places? Are you carefully following the channels as shown on the Movement Chart? Are you spending the appropriate amount of time with each movement, or are you rushing through the massage? Is your child in a comfortable place and are you able to perform the massage easily in the space you are using?

A smooth and continuous execution of the movements is not the end goal; tuning in to your child so you can clear blocks and fill emptiness is.

Awareness

Think about how good it feels to really connect with someone, to have a sense of being seen and heard. It feels like there is a lot of communication going on,

whether verbal or non-verbal, because you are on the same wavelength. The massage makes communication happen between your hands and your child's body. If you are watching his face, his hands, and his body, and paying attention to how he tenses or relaxes as you massage—and then you respond to that—there is an energy flow happening between the two of you. It is like a direct body communication that says, "I feel you, and when you show me something, I respond to you."

For example, you might be tapping your child's neck during the massage. You notice that he starts to turn his head so a different part of his neck is under your fingers. Instead of moving on past the area, you continue to tap. He keeps turning his head to move a different area under your fingers. It's like a cat saying "scratch here, scratch here." After a few minutes, he stops and you go on to the next part of the massage. He showed you what he needed, and you responded.

It's like surfing together; as the wave moves, you move with it, gently rebalancing on the board all the while. It is all about finding the right touch at the right moment for the right part of your child's body. This might sound a little overwhelming, but realize that you have already been doing this for your child's entire life. When you found the best way to burp him or how to move his sleeping body from car to bed, you were adjusting your touch to his response in the way you knew to be best.

Intention

The parent's ability to focus and hold an intention can account for a whopping 70 percent of the effectiveness of the massage. This is one reason why it is important to be physically and *mentally* ready to give the massage before you start.

The word "intention" has a special meaning in the practice of qigong. It has to do with the ability to keep the goal for each movement in mind as you do it. For example, if you are doing a movement for which the goal is to get the qi flowing down from the head clear to the feet, there is a lot of body to traverse before you get there, and you are likely to run into some problem spots along the way! If you keep the *movement goal* in mind—the intention—you will adjust to your child's responses more appropriately and ultimately achieve success.

A second part of the intention piece is the goal that you want your child to eagerly enter the world and more fully connect with it and you. As you go through the massage, you will be creating openings through which the child can begin to see and experience the world more accurately. Part of intention is creating a welcoming, safe place that your child will want to emerge into. If you

keep a cheerful, connecting, warm intention as you give the massage, it will help your child immeasurably as his senses begin to open. Make it light, be cheerful, be calm and matter-of-fact in dealing with the rough spots. Initially, you might need to be reassuring: "You're okay." Later, you might name the body parts as you pat them, helping with language acquisition. The specifics of what you say are up to you, but always, always, be there in the moment, smiling, chatting, singing. When she becomes able, your child will join you there.

Before you begin each day's massage

Before you begin the massage each day, it is important to prepare yourself physically and emotionally to give this time to your child. Make it part of your practice to do the following steps as preparation.

- Be sure there is good air flow in the room.
- Assess yourself physically to be sure you have enough energy to give the massage.
- Assess yourself emotionally to be sure you can perform the massage with loving intention. Let go of all your other cares and thoughts for the time being. Prepare to be emotionally present for this time with your child.
- Prepare your hands to give the massage.
- Watch the accompanying DVD to see a demonstration of how to do the first two steps in the following list:
 - Stand straight, but relaxed, arms to the side. Turn your palms up and, bending only at the elbow, raise your hands in front of you to waist level and then lower them back to your sides. Do this three times, feeling the air move against your arms and hands, letting go of everything else in your day and getting ready to be with your child.
 - Elbows at your side, hold your hands in front of you at waist level. Cupping your hands, bring them toward one another slowly until you feel the warmth of the other hand like a soft ball between your hands, and then slowly take them back to a neutral position—roughly shoulder width. Breathe gently and fully as you do this motion.
 - Alternatively, you can rub your hands together however it feels best. Do this three times to prepare your loving energy to flow to your child.

Why do I need to assess my physical state before I begin?

Giving qigong massage gives some of your energy to your child. Although the massage generally leaves you and the child both feeling better, if your own energy is particularly depleted by exhaustion, stress, or illness on a certain day, you need to consider if you have appropriate reserves for yourself before you begin. There are times when we simply don't have any extra energy to give to someone else. Those are times not to give the massage. When the barrel is empty, there is no water for anyone.

Why do I need to be emotionally calm before I give the massage?

Our emotions have very strong energy—both positive and negative—and parents and children can readily feel each other's emotions. Energy doesn't lie; if you are agitated while giving the massage, it is much more difficult to find that loving parent place within you to connect with your child, and your child is much more likely to pick up your agitation. Just as much as positive emotions contribute to healing, negative emotions contribute to stress and illness. One of the reasons parent-provided qigong massage is so effective is because of the profound love and commitment a parent feels for her child, love beyond all reason. When a parent is relaxed, and focuses on his child to give her massage, this calm loving energy is what is transmitted through touch and voice. The massage movements are designed to make the most of that transfer of calm, loving energy.

General instructions

Repetitions

The instructions for each movement show a minimum number of times you should do each one *but you can do more*. As you become more skilled, you will find yourself repeating the movements many more times or spending more time in one place or another depending on how your child is responding and what she needs that day. Typically, the whole set might take 10–15 minutes, but it could take twice that long.

Touch

This qigong massage is actually about patting and pressing, more than it is rubbing or kneading muscle as we typically think of massage. Watching the DVD will give you a good sense of how to do the pats, but practicing with someone other than your child will help you best understand how to use the

appropriate weight and speed. There needs to be some weight in your pats to move the energy under the skin, similar to the weight of hand you might use to burp a baby. It must be firm and intentional—you want that gas bubble to rise, that qi to move—but it is never hard or hurtful. Most people give the massage from the side, but position yourself where you feel most comfortable. Except for around the ears, it doesn't matter in what direction your hands are pointing. It's the direction of the patting and the touch that matter.

Your child will tell you with words or body language to move faster or slower, heavier or lighter, and you will learn to automatically “tune” your touch to your child. Remember, though, that unlike most other times you touch your child during the day, there is an end result you are working toward. If, for example, you find an area on your child's head, hands, or feet that is uncomfortable, don't avoid it. That's a place where your child needs some extra help. Try a lighter pat, going a bit quicker, and making a few extra passes over the area. If your child is ticklish, in a spot, it is empty. Gently press there instead of patting. If the fingers or toes are uncomfortable, press them gently instead of rubbing them. Listen, watch, and adjust.

Shape of your massage hand

The shape of your hand is important in the massage for two reasons: it ensures a more comfortable touch, and it better transmits your energy. If you think about your palm and how you use it to interact with people, you'll realize that is a point of *connection* with other people. We greet people by pressing palms in a handshake. We shake hands to show respect; we hold hands to communicate love.

There is a hollow at the center of the palm from which qi-energy connects directly to the heart. If you begin to watch for it, you'll see that humans instinctively use this connecting point—it is like a conduit into our emotional core. We even show it to others as we wave in greeting or goodbye. We talk about “loving touch” coming from the hands in Western thought. In Chinese medicine terms, we are transmitting qi-energy from our heart through our palm. When we cup our hands slightly, we create a little air space in the palm. It is filled with qi-energy. And so we pat with a slightly cupped hand. From a practical point of view, you need to cup your hand slightly so you aren't using a flat hand on your child, but at the same time keep your fingers relaxed enough to mold to your child's body. You can see how this works when you watch the DVD.

When you work on the ears, it is a little different. You are cupping *around* the back of the ears, but not actually patting the ears with your palm. That would

hurt. Also, be careful to spread your fingers, so that air passes between them. You don't want to be pushing air into the ear itself. This cupped hand, with the fingers slightly spread, causes your fingers to naturally land on the points behind that ear that will help to open it.

Don't forget to remove headgear and hair clasps or ties from your child's head before you start. Earrings, bracelets, and necklaces are fine as long as they don't get in your way.

Intention

In the description for each movement that follows, we've included a stated intention, or goal, for the movement. Think about teaching a child to ride a bike. As a parent, you have an intention that she will learn to ride it, but you know it will take a while. You will be right there to guide her, but, in the end, she is going to learn to ride at her own pace. Working with your child's energy is the same; you can't force it with your will, but you can guide it with your hands and knowledge, and support your child emotionally while she goes through the bumps of learning something new. You have to decide when you've made enough progress for the day on a particular step, and some days you'll feel like you're making more progress than others. Everything you do will help, so use your parents' wisdom and knowledge of your own child to know when it's time to move on.

Responses

There are a number of responses that have specific meanings. We've included many of these within the descriptions of the movements, but we've also listed them in alphabetical order in the next chapter. It is very important that you become familiar with these responses and learn how to adapt the massage to them. For example, humming is a specific response that you might not notice unless you are attuned to it. The legs lifting, ticklishness, your child's hands resting on yours—paying attention and adapting to these responses is part of the Awareness piece (Form, Awareness, Intention) that is integral to your success. Once you have the 12 movements of the massage under your belt, watching for your child's responses and understanding them will become one of the most fascinating and rewarding parts of the experience.

The movements

As you do these 12 qigong massage movements, keep in mind that each movement has intention—to open up blocks in the energy channels, to fill areas where the energy flow is weak and there isn't enough blood circulation, and to get the qi-energy moving through the body so your child can grow in a healthy and balanced way.

At first, nearly every place you work, except for the hands and feet, will have blocks that need to clear down and out. We use a fast light patting to help blocks clear. Watch your child's head and feet. Often he won't lie down to start with—or he keeps his head up. Your first goal is to get the energy flowing down from the head. Just do your work and watch his head—when he puts it down, you will know the energy is moving down. Once his energy is flowing down freely, it will fill in the circulation to his feet and you will notice that his feet are lying flat on the table.

As is demonstrated in the DVD, when a block is releasing, the child will often join in the qigong and hum. When you hear the hum, just stay patting on that part, in the same way, until he stops humming, and then continue on down. After a block has cleared, the circulation can start filling in.