

THE REHABILITATIVE BENEFITS OF WATSU

(Chapter 8 from Watsu by Harold Dull)

This is written by three authors who view Watsu in a western perspective: Lisa who discusses the effects that the elements in a Watsu have on the neurologically involved client; Emily, who addresses how the mind and body are connected and the ways in which Watsu effects both in order to allow for holistic healing; Sunny, who will share the importance of the unconditional stroking and acceptance that is experienced in a Watsu and the implications that has for healing. Each of us brings our own perspective in our assessment of Watsu. These assessments are based on our own personal and professional life experiences. At this point, we will introduce ourselves in order to offer a better insight on how we view the importance of Watsu as a supplemental form of treatment. Then we will present case studies followed by our individual comments.

Lisa Dougherty

Hello, my name is Lisa Dougherty. I was born and raised in a small mid-western town (Leavenworth, Kansas), the fifth of six children of a close-knit Catholic family. I earned a Bachelors degree in Human Biology at the University of Kansas, and a Masters degree in Physical Therapy at the Kansas University Medical Center. Upon completion of my physical therapy degree I came to Timpany Center (a private, non-profit aquatic therapy facility in San Jose, California) to begin my career as a therapist.

Experiencing Watsu

It was at Timpany that I viewed a Watsu for the first time. I must admit that my conservative upbringing left me feeling a little shocked and embarrassed by the physical closeness required to perform the Watsu. My "Western - Put it in writing and prove it" education made me leery of the medical benefits this "Eastern - Woo Woo" technique could possess. Upon receiving a Watsu I had a complete paradigm shift. I no longer was embarrassed by the physical closeness that I had misinterpreted from afar, but welcomed the very nurturing arms that cradled me like a baby as I was floated through the water on one of the most relaxing journeys I had ever experienced. Soon my 'Western' educated mind realized that the nature of the Watsu moves performed in the water were very similar to the basis of Physical Therapy techniques used with neurologically involved clients.

Watsu's effect on the primary sensory systems

The stretching and rotation movements of the trunk and limbs, along with the effects of the water rushing in and out of the ears, lights playing on the eyelids as the head rolls from side to side, and temperature changes on the skin from warm water to the cooler air circulating above; effect the same primary sensory systems (kinesthetic, proprioceptive, vestibular and tactile) used in popular Physical Therapy techniques like NDT (Neurological Developmental Technique), Rood and PNF (Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation). The above mentioned sensory systems effected by Watsu and the Physical Therapy techniques are used to facilitate* active/normal motor responses; and it was because of this similar connection that I incorporate the Watsu into the hydrotherapy treatment of the neurologically involved.

Emily Dunlap

Hello, my name is Emily Dunlap. I was born and raised in Boston, Massachusetts, where I earned my Physical Therapy degree at Simmons College. My early work experience had been in a rehabilitation hospital where I treated a variety of people with differing diagnoses, such as: geriatric orthopedic (arthritis, joint replacements); neurological (spinal cord injury, head trauma, strokes); and chronic pain. I performed therapy treatments both in and out of the water. I am extremely impressed by the positive effects that aquatic treatment has for my clients. I feel that the therapeutic benefits of water, combined with quality treatment, are a powerful facilitator of well being. This is why I sought out Timpany Center.

Empowering the client

In my experience as a PT, I have noticed that recovery from a physical illness or injury is greatly influenced by a person's psychological or emotional state. I have seen over and over again where people who have positive attitudes show a quicker recovery than someone with a negative outlook or unresolved emotional traumas. I also feel that an important part of my treatment is just being close to a person, showing them that you care and using a hands-on approach to facilitate a positive change both physically and psychologically. This, in conjunction with proper education, will empower the client and encourage a lifelong change toward well-being.

For me, Watsu is a wonderful treatment, which encourages both physical and psychological healing. As we go over the case studies I will give my impressions of why Watsu is so powerful.

Sunny Mehler

Hello, my name is Sunny Mehler. I was born and raised in Birmingham, Alabama. My interest in Eastern thinking first began in my studies at the University of Alabama, where I earned my Bachelor's Degree. My interest in eastern philosophy was rediscovered through associations made during my training in Transactional Analysis at Grouphouse, Inc., Western Institute of Psychotherapy for Families and Groups, and membership in the International Transactional Analysis Association. For 18 years, I have been facilitating groups using the concepts in Corrective Parenting, a form of Transactional Analysis. During this time, whether I was counseling families in a crises intervention setting, facilitating individuals in a group setting, or teaching students in a classroom setting--one very basic element continued to be of paramount importance: the element of unconditional 'ok'ness.' The opportunity to experience this quality is that which creates my enthusiasm for Watsu. People who are dealing with chronic pain sometimes find that their conditions are deeply rooted in unresolved emotional issues. Others are dealing with 'normal everyday stress'. The beauty of Watsu is, regardless of what the case may be, the prescription reads: "May be given as needed."

The western paradigm

The most difficult aspect in discussing Watsu within the realm of Western medicine is that Watsu is a holistic and Eastern form of healing. Part of the difficulty arises in that holistic thinking and practices have previously been foreign to the western mind. The western paradigm is to specialize; to separate mind, body and spirit in order to examine them in finer detail. This is demonstrated by our specialized disciplines in Medicine, Psychology and Religion. An advantage to this kind of specialization has been acquiring a knowledge base that has proven valuable in dealing with acute traumas or in identifying and in some instances eliminating diseases. Though modern science continues to advance and make astonishing discoveries in these specialized areas, there are times when a condition will not heal, but rather becomes chronic. Whether it is the mind influencing the body, or the body influencing the mind is unclear; however, it is clear that combining the knowledge base from various disciplines makes the healing process more complete and satisfactory. It is with this thinking and consciousness that Watsu be considered as a supplementary method to be used in conjunction with the present medical treatments and psychological interventions being employed.

The range of needs Watsu addresses

In Watsu, because it is multi-dimensional, the participants have the opportunity for addressing their physical, psychological and spiritual needs to the degree that they will allow. As Harold stated earlier, all of us are influenced by our paradigms and so our experiences vary. A Watsu experience can be a subtle form of healing, or it can be a most profound and consciousness-raising experience. It influences and uniquely blends both the physical and the psychological needs of the recipient. What continues to be of prime importance is that, regardless of the initial paradigm that a person may have, most participants feel nourished by this experience.

Timpany Center clientele

At Timpany Center, we see many people who are suffering from aches and pains of the body and/or mind. Our clientele varies greatly, from young children with learning disabilities to older adults with chronic pain. For these clients, Watsu has been used either alone, or in conjunction with Physical Therapy treatments with great success. We have chosen the following case studies to demonstrate the

wide spectrum to which Watsu is applicable. The clients names have been changed to protect their confidentiality

Case Study 1 - Joe

History

Joe is a 32 year old male, who suffered a closed head injury (brain stem); and left arm dislocation and/or fracture in an auto accident two years prior to initial evaluation at Timpany Center. Joe has severe muscle contractures* of left arm and hand, minimum to moderate contractures of right arm, and moderate to severe contractures of inner thigh muscles due to increased muscle tone* as a side effect of his brain injury. His legs and feet have excessive extensor* tone (increased when angry or excited), and the arms are held curled in close to the chest. Joe appears to understand most of what is said to him, but is often inappropriate with his response. He presently is in the abusive stage (verbally and physically) of his head injury. Accurate strength and range* of motion measurements were not taken upon evaluation due to increased tone and contractures of arms and legs, as well as Joe's willingness/ability to understand commands. At home, Joe is performing stretching exercises (with his wife), and is in a standing frame for an hour a day. He is in a wheelchair and is dependent for most daily activities.

Treatment after injury

Prior to Aquatic Physical Therapy treatment, Joe had received two years of physical therapy rehabilitation on land without any significant gains to recovery. Joe's family reported they believe this was largely due to the excessive amounts of tone and contractures, as well as Joe's abusive (physical and verbal) behavior.

Aquatic Physical Therapy

Joe's hydrotherapy treatment sessions initially consisted of weight-bearing exercises in a 'water walker' (flotation device) and passive ranging of arms and active/assertive of legs. With these exercises, client often resisted stretching of limbs, and had many abusive outbursts.

Watsu Therapy

After approximately three weeks of treatment sessions of this kind, the Watsu technique was incorporated into the program. Because of Joe's excessive amounts of tone and contractors, only the initial movements of the first stage of Watsu could be performed; but the gentle rotation of the trunk through the water while ranging the legs into flexion* and extension* had a dramatic effect on decreasing the tone in the legs. It was also noted that the Watsu had a very calming effect on Joe's behavior, and he became more cooperative with attempting to perform the exercises. In approximately four months time of combined treatments of Watsu and traditional hydrotherapy exercises Joe was able to perform; alternate hip and knee flexion/extension independently while supine; pull to standing in water walker with minimum to moderate assistance at hips and knees; and the incident of abusive outburst had decreased dramatically. At this time the client began physical therapy treatment on land to continue to improve trunk stability and weight bearing tolerance.

Wife's comments

Joe's wife commented, "Joe came to Timpany Center and was pretty stiff and having a lot of cramps. Joe's therapist decided to try the Watsu program hoping it would help ease his cramps and loosen the muscles so he could get more movement with less pain, which was keeping Joe from improving his condition. Since Joe's experience with this program I feel he was able to manage less pain and has a lot more movement in his legs. I feel it's worth trying this program. Joe is on his way back to a better life with more movement and less pain."

Comments (Lisa)

Effects on muscle tone

The effects of Watsu on the sensory system played a large part in reducing the tone of the trunk and legs of Joe. The sensory input of touch in a Watsu can be used to facilitate or inhibit* desired or

undesired responses through the receptors located in the skin, muscles, tendons, joints and inner ears by relaying information about movement to the reticular activating system which determines a person's level of response. A slow, rhythmical rocking/rolling movement applied using firm but light constant contact, in general will have an inhibiting effect on increased muscle tone. An abrupt, repetitive movement involving quick stretches has a tendency to facilitate or enhance muscle tone.

Neurological treatment techniques

Inhibiting abnormal tone for increased range of motion/mobility, and facilitating stability, posture, and normal movement patterns are major treatment goals of neurological treatment techniques such as PNF, Rood and NDT. The rhythmic rotation of head (inner ear), trunk, and limbs with Watsu promotes integration of tonic reflexes* and stimulates the righting reactions (balance) needed to maintain posture with sitting, and eventually standing.

Traction and approximation

In Watsu, when the arms and legs are passively stretched, * forces are applied to the joints. Traction at the joint promotes mobility and flexion of the surrounding muscles; and approximation of the joint reinforces stability and extension of the surrounding muscles. This passive stimulation to the joints applied in Watsu sets up the groundwork for the muscles surrounding the joint to perform actively. Eventually it is the combination of mobility/stability and the active co-contraction of flexion/extension of the muscles that allows a person to advance to the level of performing normal movement patterns or skills.

Watsu's most significant benefit

In closing, I would like to comment that incorporating the Watsu technique in the treatment program of the neurologically involved client will promote increased range of motion by breaking up excessive flexor* and/or extensor patterns, and initiate the beginning stages of developing righting reactions and trunk stability; but the most significant benefit I feel Watsu has to offer is the nurturing, unconditional acceptance experienced with a Watsu that allows a person to let go of some of the frustrations of the mind and emotional state, which in turn can have a profound effect on that person's attitude and their approach to life.

Case Study 2 - Jane

History

52 year old woman who was referred to Timpany Center with a diagnosis of fibromyalgia* and degenerative disc disease in her neck. Her past medical history included low back pain and lumbar* surgery (lumbar fusion*). Jane reported having a history of depression and had seen a psychiatrist in the past. She had a sleeping disorder for more than two years and required medication to get a full night's sleep. Due to depression, work stress (caused by difficulty interacting with her supervisor), and complaints of pain in her hips and upper back, she has been off of work for three months.

Watsu and aquatic exercise

For one month Watsu treatments were administered once a week in addition to water exercise in class setting. She reported a noticeable improvement with her sleeping pattern and was able to get a full night sleep without taking medication.

Aquatic physical therapy and Watsu

At this point, an evaluation was given by a physical therapist. The evaluation showed moderate limitations of the flexibility in her back and neck, as well as moderate tightness in her legs and arms. Jane reported that her tightness had improved since starting Watsu and water exercise, but it was still a problem. She was reconditioned and had severe weakness in her back and hips. Jane held much tension in her upper back, of which she was unaware. When asked to relax she would release her shoulders, but as soon as she was distracted, the tension would come back. She reported being able to walk only 10-30 minutes before the pain would increase.

At this point, Jane initiated aquatic physical therapy twice a week and continued with the Watsu treatments once a week.

Work stress

In two months, Jane noted a dramatic decrease in her level of pain. She reported being able to walk three hours at a time with no increase of pain, and was able to sleep through the night without medication. She had improved flexibility and strength in her hips, back and neck. Her endurance improved as well. At this point she returned to work full time. Unfortunately, her pain symptoms gradually started to return and she reported that she unconsciously clenched her fist throughout the night and woke up each morning with severe wrist pain (carpal tunnel syndrome). She was still having difficulties interacting with her supervisor and realized that her pain symptoms were directly related to work stress. Presently she has been participating in independent aquatic exercise to maintain her strength and endurance and reports that Watsu helps to reduce her anxiety, increase her flexibility, and improve her sleeping pattern.

Case Study 3 - Mary

History

62 year old female came to Timpany Center with a one year old rotator cuff* injury and muscle spasms in her right shoulder. She had injured her right shoulder in the Northern California earthquake in 1989.

Treatment after injury

Mary received traditional Physical Therapy for 2-3 treatments, consisting of ultrasound* and gentle exercises. This treatment was discontinued because her pain increased and she showed decreased range of motion in her right shoulder.

Aquatic Physical Therapy

Mary came to Timpany Center two to three times a week for 3 months. Treatments included supervised and independent active water exercise with emphasis on stretching, strengthening and massage therapy. After this treatment improvements were noted with pain and increased flexibility in her right shoulder (see chart below). However, she continued with significant pain and tightness in her shoulder which interfered with her daily activities and quality of life. At this point, she was referred to receive Watsu treatments.

Watsu Therapy

After having 5 Watsu treatments, Mary showed a dramatic increase in the flexibility of her right shoulder (see chart below), decreased pain and muscle guarding, improved posture and breathing pattern.

The following chart provides goniometric measurements taken of the right shoulder at different times during her treatment

Right Shoulder ROM	6-5-90	10-10-90	11-13-90	12-12-90
	Initial PT eval	PT re-eval	Pt re-eval	After 5 Watus
Flexion	0-90	0-110	0-105	0-150
Abduction	0-85	0-100	0-80	0-135
External Rotation	0-30-	0-60	0-45	0-65
Internal rotation	0-30	0-30	0-65	not measured

Mary's impressions of her Watsu treatments

After the first Watsu

"It is one thing to watch Watsu, quite another to experience it. From the outside it seems rather weird, a body being manipulated in the water, yet there is something beautiful, too. The movements are so fluid. My first impression was of closeness to the guide. The intimacy seems greater than that of being massaged, perhaps it is because you are both in swimsuits, both in the water. You are very close to another person and that person takes you and holds you as a mother might. After I got over certain awkwardness at the intimacy, the back to the womb experience overcame me. This, I thought, was how it might have been before I was born. Totally taken care of, nothing to worry about, nothing to do anything about except go with the flow. This is difficult for one used to being in control, to give up that control. It took most of the first session to learn how to do that."

After the second Watsu

"I came to this Watsu 'experienced', knowing what to expect; but I soon found out the Watsu experience is never quite the same. True, I found it easier to let go and much more pleasant. The more I let go, the more things floated to the surface of my mind. I might have been taking mental therapy, for things from my childhood surfaced, some pleasant, some not so pleasant, but I felt while my body was in limbo. I was learning about myself. I wanted it to go on forever. I wanted to bottle it up and take it home with me. I was very relaxed, especially for the tense person that I usually am. I felt calm and in control."

After the third Watsu

"I came to the third session in a great deal of pain. I wasn't sure how it would go since the pain had kept me awake most of the night. I was, therefore, on guard. At first I was only aware of the pain in my right arm and my desire to protect it from anything that might cause further pain. This made it more difficult to let go. But, frankly, the movements are so beautiful, especially for one like me who has never been able to dance, that eventually the fluidity of my body in the water and the arms I was in, felt so safe and secure, they lulled me into submission. Approximately two-thirds through the session I realized that the pain was gone. I felt like laughing out loud, but I didn't for fear of breaking the spell."

Comments (Emily)

Emotions effect on the body

Emotions have a profound effect on the body's tissues and can aid in their facilitating or impeding recovery. To demonstrate this, I will discuss Case Study #2. Jane reported that she had been under a great deal of stress at work because she had difficulty interacting with her supervisor. Work and everyday stresses had become so intense that she took a leave of absence from work and began counseling with a psychiatrist who diagnosed her with having clinical depression. The stress that Jane experienced was affecting her body in many ways. The most noticeable physiological change was muscle tension or prolonged muscle contraction in her upper trapezium muscles (shoulder). Normally the body is an excellent self-healing machine, which is in a constant state of dynamic homeostasis. But if a continuous stress is placed on the body over a prolonged period of time the body's tissues will change to accommodate this stress. In Jane's case the prolonged muscle tension in her trapezium* muscle eventually changed the physiologic make-up of the muscle, distorting the balance of chemicals in the muscle, changing the composition of cell types (fast twitch vs. slow twitch), changing the vascular structures of the muscles, etc., thereby changing the biomechanics of the muscle. This will also affect the surrounding tissues. The nerves traveling nearby the muscle were compressed by the constant muscle contraction, possibly causing pain. Nearby blood vessels were also compressed, thereby affecting the blood supply going to and from the muscle. Connective tissue adaptively shortened and distorted, while conforming to the prolonged changes from the increased muscle tension. The prolonged muscle tension affected the bony structure of the neck by causing compression of the cervical spine, which aggravated and possibly facilitated the degenerative disc disease in Jane.

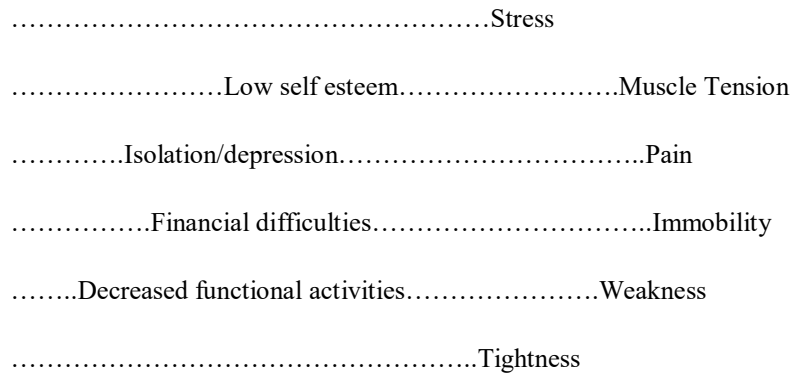
The pain cycle

Pain caused by the degenerative disc disease started another type of cycle which was difficult for Jane to break. When in pain, a person often becomes immobile to prevent increasing the pain. She avoided daily activities, which involved lifting prolonged sitting, standing or repetitive movements. With this inactivity came muscle tightness and weakness. Jane had difficulty doing the activities that she used to

do easily, i.e., grocery shopping, going out to dinner with friends, and working. This led to psycho/social/economical problems, such as decreased self-esteem because she could no longer function in her job, decreased interaction with her friends and family because she felt that they were tired of hearing her complain, and was not able to participate in social activities due to physical limitations. This isolated Jane from others and led to deeper depression. She also suffered from stress caused by economical issues, such as less income while on leave of absence, medical bills which needed to be paid, frustrations with medical insurance and workmen's compensation, etc. These added to the stress that Jane was presently under and translated into more muscle tension.

Below is a diagram of a pain cycle showing how physical, social, economical and psychological dysfunctions effect each other. (Read cycle clockwise.)

PSYCHO/SOCIAL/ECONOMICALPHYSICAL



Embarrassment and depression

This cycle is just one example of how the body and mind interact. Another example would be a physically disabled client who is embarrassed because he is no longer `normal'. His embarrassment causes him to avoid eye contact with other people affecting this posture and isolating him from others. Another example would be someone who is depressed and uses food to satisfy his or her need for pleasure. This person may end up with a significant weight problem which impacts upon their physical wellness.

Breaking the cycles

Watsu provides a channel to break into these cycles of physical/psychological dysfunctions. The nurturing aspects of Watsu often have a dramatic effect on that person's self-esteem and sense of OK'ness. This may be enough to allow the client to release muscle tension that they were holding, which was the experience that Mary (case study #3) discussed when giving her impressions of Watsu.

Stored emotions

Some people feel that emotions of traumatic events can be stored in the body's tissues. The extensive stretching and slow rhythmical movements in Watsu aids in the release of tissue distortion, which can cause the surfacing of these emotions. Once surfaced, these emotions can be acknowledged and possibly resolved. A good example of this would be the memory of sexual abuse held in the body's tissues as tension or distortion, which keeps the trunk flexed, and the arms and legs held in close to the body. This person carries the tension/distortion without realizing. They assume this posture in an attempt to keep their body closed, not allowing others to invade their privacy. In a Watsu session, this person may experience difficulty with the wide open movements, until they let go. Once allowing the tissues to release they may experience reliving or remembering the sexual abuse. When realizing they can remember the abuse without falling apart, knowing that they are OK, they are able to release the tension which had been holding them in a closed posture.

Benefits of warm water

Warm water has many therapeutic benefits. Superficial circulation increases in warm water; this will decrease pain and increase the pliability of soft tissues, allowing for greater range of motion with stretching. The buoyancy of the water unloads the joints, often lessening pain, allowing for greater

flexibility. Water in the ears muffles auditory distractions from the outer environment, allowing for greater relaxation and body awareness.

Relaxation and breath

In Watsu, with the ears under the water . . . eyes closed . . . body flowing smoothly from one move to the other, the client becomes aware of the level of relaxation they can attain. This relaxation will enhance their breathing pattern, allowing for slow, rhythmical, deep breaths, rather than short, quick, shallow breaths which often accompany stress. During the Watsu session the client has time to learn about themselves, without any distraction, demands or needs from the outside world.

Case Study 4 - Joe

History

Joe is a 40 year old male, presently in his second marriage and the father of a 20-year-old daughter. He is the oldest of seven boys and comes from a very dysfunctional and alcoholic home, with physical, emotional, verbal and sexual abuse. Joe is also a recovering alcoholic/addict with almost six years of sobriety training through 12-Step programs and five years of private therapy. He is currently working in a chemical dependency hospital as an addiction counselor. Joe has chronic back pain and had been seen at Timpany Center for aquatic physical therapy and Watsu treatments.

Impressions after Watsu

"My first two Watsu sessions were very relaxing and soothing, but my level of trust was low and I wasn't able to totally surrender and get the most out of them. About six weeks ago, I started getting in touch with some very painful memories and feelings from my childhood and I wanted to access more of the emotional component, so I set up extra psychotherapy sessions and body work, including massage and Watsu. I went into my Watsu session with a willingness to surrender to whatever came up.

Abandonment pain

"In one Watsu session following a very traumatic therapy session using regressive guided memory, I was able to be in touch with a great amount of abandonment pain as my Watsu practitioner was cradling me. I was able to cry and let the pain go and felt a sense of release. As the session ended I felt very young and totally relaxed and was in touch with a sense of well being. In another session, I was able to get in touch with some rather pleasant childhood memories that had been blocked out. I plan to continue to use Watsu to help me unlock and to be in touch with memories and emotions that are difficult for me to access with psychotherapy alone."

Comments (Sunny)

Watsu provides an experience of 'unconditional acceptance' which can encourage individuals to seek this kind of attention in other areas of their life. Even though the above client was seen in physical therapy, his impression speaks to the psychological benefits that he experienced.

Unconditional acceptance

In exploring the value of Watsu as a supplemental treatment, patients have been asked to record their impressions and the results of their Watsu experiences. In almost every case, the results were positive. The most consistently acknowledged aspects in the treatments were intimacy and 'unconditional acceptance'. This is not surprising, because from the day that we are born, this is a fundamental physical and psychological need. After food, physical closeness and nurturing is the next most vital element in good health and survival for the infant. Yet many of the clients interviewed openly admitted that they were not accustomed to 'unconditional acceptance'. That their sense of OK'ness came from their ability to do, how well they perform, or how good they look. That, in fact, their OK'ness from their perspective is conditional. The implication is that the world is full of people trying to figure out how to be loved and accepted. There are many who think they have figured it out within their family system or their circle of friends. They perform accordingly but then something happens. They get hurt or fall ill and can no longer perform in those ways that gave them the recognition that they were

earning. For many, being sick or hurt is the only way they have permission to allow themselves to be cared for by others. Through psychological treatment, these perceptions, and the problems that result from them, can be changed or resolved. For some of these people, Watsu nourishes this need for physical, unconditional and positive stroking. In their Watsu experience, the nonverbal message is that this need is OK and natural. As a result of this permission, they find that they are enabled to pursue this kind of unconditional recognition and acceptance in other areas of their lives. There are few ways in our society in which people can share an intimate and nourishing exchange with another person without a list of conditions that have to be met in order to make that kind of interaction socially acceptable or safe. Watsu offers that kind of opportunity to people who literally do not know one another; yet with 'no strings attached'. This kind of 'unconditional acceptance' can lead to authenticity and the expression of the true self. It is kind of 'openness' that often leads to health and is the quality that people would like to share with their families.

Watsu and family therapy

Though society is heavily weighted in rewarding 'doing', there exists a need in people for the unconditional acceptance of who they are just for their being. Those families who are receiving counseling for the many problems that plague families today can find the use of Watsu as a nice supplement to other therapies being employed.

Recovering from sexual abuse

Using the structure of Watsu among family members would offer them a way to learn to be close with 'no strings attached'. This can be a supplemental form of healing used in conjunction with psychotherapy for those families who are recovering from sexual abuse. Anyone who lives with injunctions of "Don't be close" (because it's not safe) can experience closeness in Watsu that is nurturing to offset previous experiences that have been painful. Many people only know 'being close' through a sexual experience; Watsu offers a way of being close without being sexual.

OK'ness

Often we hear people seeking a respite where they can 'just be themselves'. Imagine a world where people can experience just being themselves. That their 'being' is OK just because they 'are'. That a distinction is made between behavior and the person. That a behavior being exhibited may need to change, but that a person's OK'ness is never in question. That thought is very healing.

Though society rewards doing (families, friends and even yourself) what most people hunger for is the 'unconditional acceptance' of who they are just for their being. If people have learned to believe that they are only conditionally OK; that they have to earn the strokes they need and now they can no longer perform; how will this affect their stroke supply and their sense of OK'ness? It seems that it will diminish their self-esteem.

Parent/Infant Watsu

In recognizing the importance of unconditional stroking and acceptance, a Parent/Infant Watsu class is offered at Timpany Center for families with disabled infants. Most of the parents involved are trained by their attending therapists in administering different exercises or techniques to their babies for the particular disability that they have. One of the prerequisites for this class is that the parents receive a Watsu first. In receiving the Watsu first, the parent then understands that this is an experience they are sharing with their child rather than a technique they're doing to their child. Watsu, for them, becomes an experience of bonding and intimacy with their babies in a healing but most spontaneous and even playful way. One of the most poignant moments in class was watching a young, powerfully built father share a gentle Watsu with his 14-month-old daughter who has cerebral palsy. They were completely focused on each other, like in a dance. This was an experience they were sharing; yet it offered all of the benefits of previously prescribed exercises that were usually done to the child.