



Episode 16: What's the Go With Reflexes?

Hosts: Tracy Stackhouse · Cory Dundon · Michelle Maunder

LISTENER NAME

DATE LISTENED

TOTAL LISTENING + REFLECTION TIME (MINS)

CPD HOURS CLAIMED



Episode Summary

Prompted by re-listening to the posture episode and by OT friends asking about reflexes, Cory opens up a question paediatric OTs wrestle with: why do we test the ATNR and tonic labyrinthine in our clinical observations, and how does that relate to treatment? We draw the line between their functional lens, what does positive reflex integration tell us about this person in the world, and a pure reflex-integration or retraining approach. Tracy lays out the Ayres clinical-reasoning flow, from occupational outcomes on one side back to the sensory and motor systems, vestibular, proprioceptive, somatosensory, that give rise to anti-gravity and bilateral control, and adds the crucial twist: the postural system is also state-dependent. So a reflex showing up might be a discrimination issue, or it might be modulation, protective activation when a child does not feel safe, and the treatment for each is completely different. The repeated discipline: do not grab the shiny thing, pause and ask, why is this here?

They go deep on what Ayres was really after, the same thing a neurologist looks for, the integrity of processing, by reading the pattern, not the product. A provoked reflex is just an adaptation; the real question is the adaptive response to it. When you turn a child's head in the ATNR test, do they collapse, or does a postural adjustment correct the course through righting reactions and equilibrium responses? When the correction is missing, Ayres says you are not seeing sufficient activation of the system, so the problem is not the reflex, it is the lack of response, and the treatment is vestibular-proprioreceptive work for righting and equilibrium, not reflex integration. Tracy brings it to life with an 18-year-old autistic woman who had not leaned over for a decade; intensive vestibular intervention over about four months gave her freedom of movement, she now loves Disney cruises. They explore cognitive override, how higher-cognition kids lock out instead of collapsing, why that is so fatiguing, and Tracy's own stand-up-paddleboarding humility. It sets up Episode 17 on that four-month treatment in detail.



Resources & Mentions

- Jean Ayres, the Ayres Sensory Integration clinical-reasoning flow and the Ayres Clinical Observations, reading the pattern, not the product (the organization of sensation for use).
- Sensory Integration: Theory and Practice (Bundy and Lane), and its discrimination and modulation chart.
- On righting reactions and equilibrium responses as the higher-level integration above the postural reflexes (ATNR, tonic labyrinthine), grounded in the vestibular-proprioceptive system.
- Check out DFX's Learning Journeys to build your clinical reasoning skills: <https://dfxlearningjourneys.thinkific.com/>



Reflection Prompts

Take a few quiet minutes to consider each prompt and write freely. Add or remove a prompt block to suit the episode.

- 1** We reframe reflexes as a window onto the integrity of the system, not a target to fix. How does that change why and how you would test a reflex like the ATNR or tonic labyrinthine?

- 2** A provoked reflex is just an adaptation; the real question is always why it is here, discrimination or modulation. For a child with a persistent reflex, which do you suspect, and how would you tell?

- 3** Ayres looked at whether righting and equilibrium correct the course, so a missing adaptive response, not the reflex, is the finding. Where might you be focused on the reflex when the lack of response is the real story?

- 4** Higher-cognition kids lock out rather than collapse, which is invisible and deeply fatiguing. Where might you have missed cognitive override in a child who looks like they are coping?

- 5** The discipline of the episode is: do not grab the shiny thing, pause and ask why it is here. Recall a recent assessment finding you rushed to treat, what would slowing down to ask why have changed?
