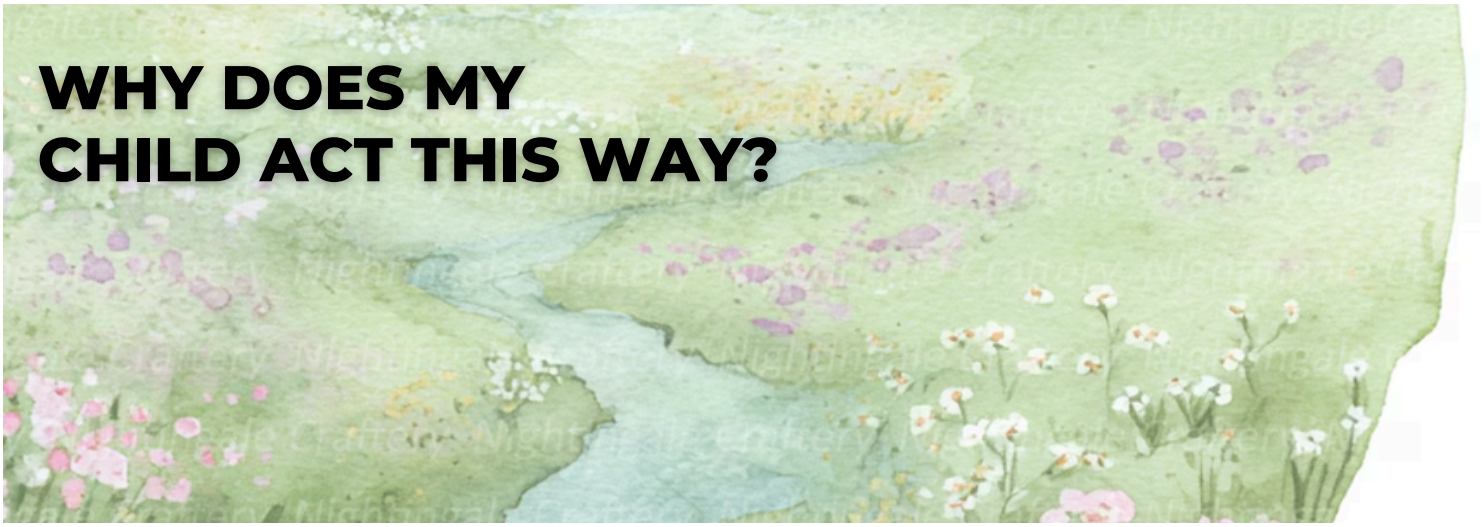
movelearn.org
with Helena Vancells



WHY DOES MY CHILD ACT THIS WAY?

Imagine a river winding through a forest. When it flows freely, the water nourishes the grass, flowers, and trees along its banks. But when a fallen tree blocks its path, the water backs up and flows unpredictably, flooding some areas, leaving others dry.

Our nervous system works the same way. If the flow of neurons is blocked or diverted, the information the body gathers through the senses does not travel smoothly to the brain. Things become chaotic, the child feels anxiety, and unpredictable behavior can result, like meltdowns, hitting, yelling, etc. The child is not behaving this way intentionally - the child is communicating that the nervous system is not flowing as it should. The river is blocked.

We are all born with a set of reflexes that help us survive as infants. Primitive reflexes are automatic movement patterns present at birth that typically disappear, or "integrate" within the first years of life as the child's nervous system develops. Sometimes, however, reflexes can remain (or are "retained"). This can interfere with daily life, contributing to learning difficulties as well as behavioral and emotional challenges.

Why does my child...

Have meltdowns?
Have trouble sitting still?
Get carsick? Play too rough?
Not like being touched?

The answer may be Retained Primitive Reflexes

Here's an example, lack of self-initiated movement as an infant can lead to a retained Moro, or startle reflex. The Moro reflex is an involuntary movement in response to sudden stimuli. It provides energy and adrenaline to begin the birthing process and helps newborns draw their first breath. If the Moro is retained past the usual six months, the child may often be anxious, impulsive and have focus and concentration challenges.

A nervous system with retained reflexes is like a river blocked by debris— focus, learning, movement, and emotions can all feel blocked, leaving the child overloaded and parents asking—

Why does my child act this way?

Frequent meltdowns, anxiety, hitting, or yelling may indicate a retained Moro reflex

Constant fidgeting, attention and concentration challenges, or bedwetting beyond age five may have a retained Spinal Galant reflex

Poor balance, visual perceptual challenges, or leaning over the page while writing may have a retained TLR (Tonic Labyrinthine Reflex)

Difficulty with handwriting may indicate a retained STNR (Symmetrical Tonic Neck Reflex)

Difficulty learning to read may indicate a retained ATNR (Asymmetrical Tonic Neck Reflex)

Difficulty with pencil grip or thumb-sucking beyond the toddler years may indicate a retained Palmar reflex

Poor organization, focus challenges, and coordination difficulties in sports may be associated with a retained Landau reflex

Extreme picky eating or oral texture sensitivities may indicate a retained Rooting reflex

Toe walking or resistance to wearing shoes may be linked to a retained Babinski reflex

How can my child integrate these primitive reflexes?

Intentional movements play an essential role in the reflex integration process. They support nervous system regulation and help build the foundational skills necessary for attention, coordination, and learning. While there is no instant solution, meaningful change is absolutely possible. many learning, behavioral, and attention difficulties can improve significantly — and sometimes disappear — when retained reflexes are properly addressed. As integration occurs, the nervous system can function with greater ease and efficiency. Like a river flowing freely once again, the child's natural capacity for growth, learning, and emotional balance can emerge — no longer obstructed by hidden blockages.

If you recognize any of these signs in your child, I can offer you guidance. Visit movelearn.org for a free consult.