

Dealing with regressions over the five months of massage: What to do when behavior goes downhill and emotions are difficult to handle

All children have regressions, whether they are typically developing or have autism. They signal that the child is having trouble dealing with her life at that moment.

Depending on the cause, they can be small or big, lasting a few days or a few weeks. Small regressions can happen if the child gets too tired, hungry, or is getting stressed and needs a break. In this case, the child can go away after a meal, some downtime, and a good night's sleep. Bigger regressions happen in response to life's bigger changes and losses and signal a need for more ongoing emotional support and downtime to allow the child to regroup and integrate. Sometimes they occur alongside an illness or injury, as the child struggles to deal with the changes in their body. As long as parents catch on to the reasons for the regression, and provide extra support and downtime, the regressions don't get out of hand.

Children with autism who are receiving qigong massage have regressions for all the same reasons and some different ones. Parents will tell you right away about a regression - the behaviors and emotions are bigger and more disruptive of family life than those for typical children and are a source of worry and exhaustion for parents. Help parents identify the cause and give them simple instructions about how to deal with it. Parents cope very well with regression if they can point to a cause and have something specific they can do to help. Below is a list of common causes of regression, and effective ways of dealing with it.

| Common reasons | What to do? |
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| <p><i>Terrible Two's (Tantrums):</i> Over the course of the massage, the child has become aware of himself as an independent person with a will. Now he needs consistent limits and help in dealing with his emotions when the answer is "no". He has reached "the terrible two's". <u>This is an important sign of progress, usually happens in the second or third month of massage and passes within a few weeks.</u></p> | <p>-Do the massage every day with lots of extra Movement 7.</p> <p>-Parent as you would parent a typically-developing two-year-old: be supportive, provide consistent limits; don't get into power struggles. He will be learning valuable social skills about how to share and cooperate, as well as how to deal with frustration when he doesn't get his own way. This won't take nearly as long as it would if he really were two years old.</p> <p>-When things get out of hand, give him an extra massage. If the child understands</p> |

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| | boundaries and self-soothing, long-term healthy relationships are possible. |
| Skin sensitivity: The child's skin makes the transition from hyposensitivity to hypersensitivity; suddenly she is taking in a lot more sensory information, and it can be temporarily overwhelming. This doesn't happen for all children; when it happens, it is usually between the second and fourth month of massage. | -Switch to the filling technique on all the movements; do lots of Movement 7. - Increase the massage to twice a day if needed. It usually takes a few weeks for the child to get comfortable and sensory reactivity to go back to normal. |
| Toxins: The child gets into something that is toxic for her: food, red dye, MSG, magic markers, solvents, or other chemicals. | -Remove the offending item from the child's diet/environment. -Do the massage twice a day – it will help detoxify. Toxic reactions pass within a few days once the offending item is removed. |
| Emotions: The child becomes aware of himself, and has to process some difficult emotions related to the years of autism. | Give space and emotional support and continue the whole massage; attune carefully. This can take a few weeks. |
| Growth spurt: Sometimes just before or after a big growth spurt, the child will regress. | -Do the massage every day and spend longer on Movement 7. -Increase it to twice a day as needed. |
| Temporary ups and downs of life: If you don't know why, you can assume that the child is stressed in some way. | Just keep doing the massage and do lots of Movement 7 – it will help him to calm down and process the stress. |
| Bigger life changes: All the usual life changes/losses that would cause a young child to regress: trouble/change at school or home, illness, loss of a caregiver, etc. | -Continue the daily massage. It will calm him down and support him while he processes the change/loss. -Make sure he is sleeping enough and eating well. |