

Double Taps for Body Awareness

by Barbara Wards BA. Hon. Newzealand International Faculty

Email: edukbarb@orcon.net.nz

January 2006

An activity for a quick assessment of body-organisation level in young children. It builds consciousness of the core/torso – hips and shoulders, to which arms and legs attach.

Procedure

Lie the child on his/her back on a table or floor.

Discuss how many arms and legs they have. Tell them you will **tap twice on any two** of these. They must lift, simultaneously, the two you have tapped.

Three combinations of taps are used. (*These are the three motor organization levels the child must move through from birth till L/R motor consciousness is achieved at about 6 – 8 yrs usually*). Do these in order, noticing what the child is able to access. Mix these up and repeat several times to give you a clear picture. Notice what the child says about the process, how long it takes to sort etc. Have no expectations and make it all fun.

- (i) tap both arms, then both legs (up/down identification)
- (ii) tap L arm and L leg, then R arm and R leg (identify two sides)
- (iii) tap L arm and R leg, then R arm and L leg (coordinate opp. sides)

Begin with two definite, full-hand taps just below the elbows or knees. Over time (maybe over several weeks) move to a single light tap on foot or hand, or even just pointing to fingers and toes to engage vision, as the ability to locate the limbs and monitor the body improves.

Comments

Don't expect children, especially boys, to master (iii) until they are 6–8 years old, when the L and R hemispheres are myelinating their corpus callosum connections for increased consciousness.

(Most five-year-olds will do (i) easily, but many will have difficulty separating one arm from the other, or one leg from the other, and three, or even four limbs may be raised in (ii) and/or (iii). Some will "stagger," lifting the limbs one at a time initially. If you sense that the body awareness is particularly poor, they may need to practise this for a while before being able to access together.) Talk about the need to find separation of top from bottom and of one side from the other, and ultimately to have a clear connection between opposite hip and shoulder – the basis for mature Cross Crawl. You can develop the consciousness of having two sides and where the

middle is, by standing the child in front of a mirror and dropping a “plumb-line” string down the middle so they can see, then learn to feel, the symmetry of their body.

With the body out of gravity in this way it is very easy to see what is (not) happening. Observers (parents) get a clear understanding of the organizational immaturity the child is experiencing. If (iii) causes lots of problems, leave it out till they get the homolateral pairing sorted, and have them practise homolateral crawl, (lifting arm and leg on the same side like a string puppet), standing as well as lying down.

Children love this process and parents can practise it easily with them at home, which is good fun for everybody. Girls will usually be competent younger than boys. It shows how difficult it is for the child to do neurologically complicated tasks, accessing both sides for looking with two eyes, listening with two ears, and thinking, when they have not yet completed organising their body movement across the midline. Practise shoulder-rotating Cross Crawl standing to consolidate.

*(Doing this process with adults while they think first of a positive experience, and then of a stressful experience, will usually demonstrate how body organization “retreats” to a simpler level under stress, for **all** of us, at any age.)*