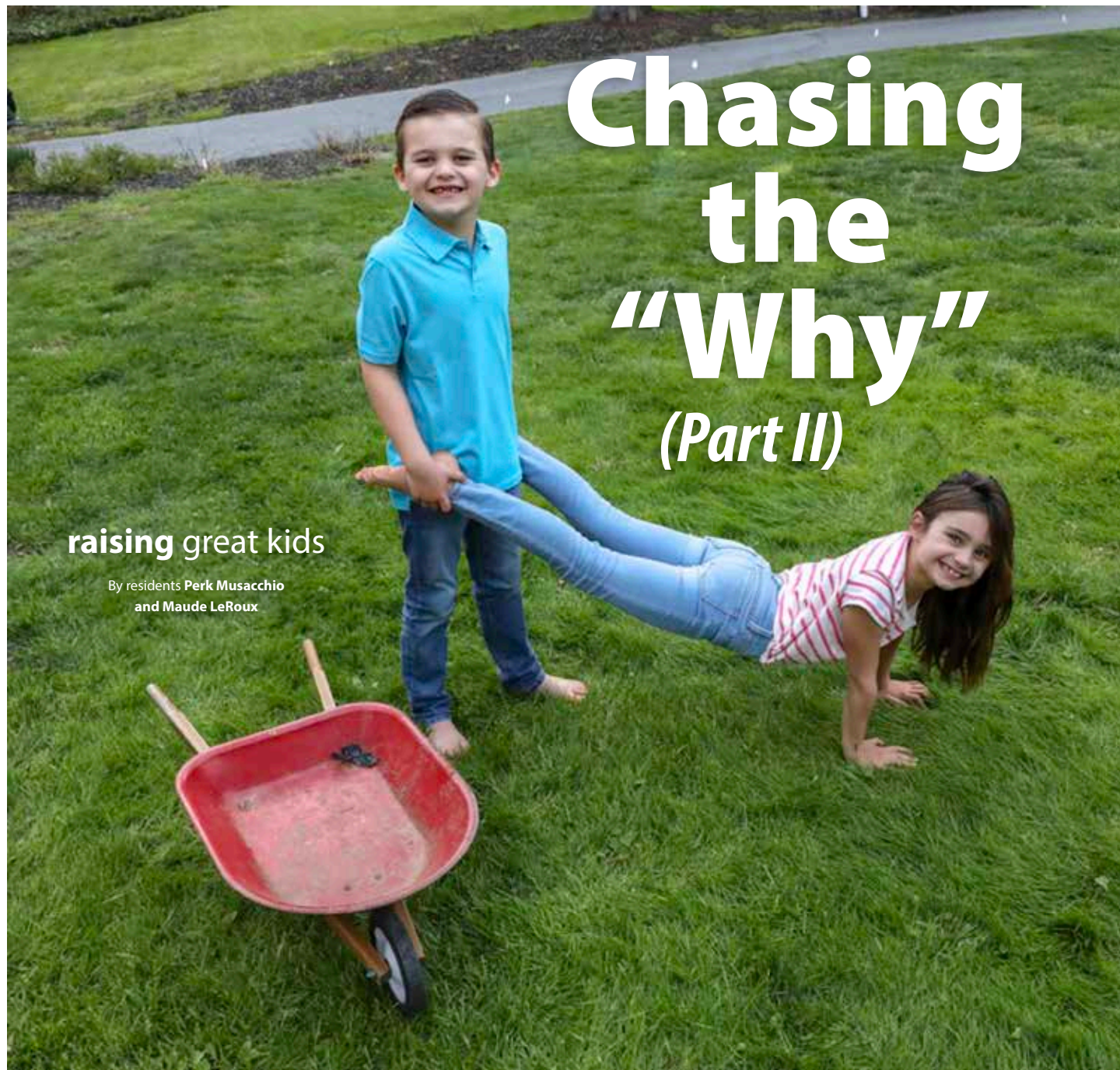


Chasing the “Why” (Part II)

raising great kids

By residents Perk Musacchio and Maude LeRoux



Charlotte and Smith Capitan doing the wheelbarrow

In part two of their series, education specialist PERK MUSACCHIO and occupational therapist MAUDE LEROUX give parents tips for spotting learning disabilities and exercises to overcome them

Last month, we introduced you to several students—students who are all too familiar to their teachers and parents. Hopefully, now you have a better understanding of “why” we see some of these problematic behaviors. This month, we want to help **you**

recognize signs of some of the many retained reflexes (the “why”) and then offer you some “whats.” What can you do at home or in the classroom to help support these retained primitive reflexes and make learning less frustrating?

REFLEX	SIGNS OF RETAINED REFLEXES
Asymmetric Tonic Neck Reflex (ATNR) is an important building block to have the ability to coordinate the left and right side of the body and brain so they can “talk” to each other. This helps build bilateral integration, attention, working memory, and reading, spelling, writing, and math skills. There can be a strong link to dyslexia.	Poor hand-eye coordination, trouble crossing the midline, difficulty mastering right and left, letter and number reversals, poor fine motor skills (handwriting), or visual tracking issues for reading
Spinal Galant Reflex (SG) is very involved in setting up the development of the auditory system, which is needed for phonics in the reading process.	Posture issues, fidgeting, attention and focus issues, bedwetting after age five, or poor short-term memory
Symmetrical Tonic Neck Reflex (STNR) is involved in visual development and using eyes together efficiently, such as copying from the board and setting up the saccadic eye movement needed for reading and writing.	W-sitting, poor muscle tone, poor hand-eye coordination, lowering head to desk when working, very slow to copy from board to paper, fidgety, or low concentration
Tonic Labyrinthine Reflex (TLR) helps develop stability, muscle tone, balance, posture, and coordination throughout the whole body.	Toe walking, poor muscle tone, motion sickness, or spatial awareness issues

The following are some easy exercises and activities that can be done to support the development of these reflexes.

remember about the metronome app is that at first, it is important to start with a slower beat. You will never need to go more than 54 beats per minute. The first trials will be to figure out how to match the beat to your child’s quality of movement, and then with increased proficiency, you can increase the beat.



Cross crawls with Zaynah



Cross crawls with Zayid



Lazy eight with Zayid and Zaynah



Lazy eights with a pom-pom with Ben

Cross Crawls

While in standing position, touch the right hand or elbow to the left knee, then left elbow to the right knee, lifting knee up to meet the elbow. Repeat this at a slower pace for one minute or more. The number of repetitions isn’t as important as the good quality alignment of posture with good control against gravity. You do not have to go too slow, just even-paced and go for quality of movement. As your child becomes more proficient, you can add pieces to have fun with it. Do it on the beat of some “march-like” music or download a metronome app to create an even more integrated brain activity. You can also have your child do this while reading or spelling words that are posted on the wall in front of them, all the while not losing quality of movement. One aspect to

Lazy “Eight”

Another great idea is drawing figure eights in the air but in a horizontal position. Students may know them as “lazy eights.” Your child’s eyes should follow their thumb as they loop to the left, cross over at the midline of the body, then loop to the right again. It’s important to have the eyes follow the thumb. You can do figure eights in all kinds of media, from shaving cream to sand to playing with soap bubbles in the bathtub. As with the first exercise, more is not always better. Go for quality of movement as wide as you can possibly make the figure eight happen. Once your child is proficient, add the music or the metronome timing beat to increase the integration. Tracing or making “lazy eights” is a great warm-up before any written task.



Hug the Ball

To support these reflexes and increase sustained trunk control, have your child lie flat on their back with their arms stretched out to the sides and legs spread apart. Put a large gym ball on their belly and ask them to clamp their arms and legs around the ball and hold on to it while you try to pull the ball away. It is a fun exercise of resistance that frequently ends up in a load of laughter.



Hug the ball with the Coleman brothers

Knock My Socks Off

Another great fun activity is to play on the floor with your child with no shoes on, just socks! Nobody is allowed to get up from the floor while you wrestle with each other to see who can get the other's socks off first! This is a great activity for siblings and a good workout for all!

There are other “everyday” activities you can do at home or in the classroom to promote these integrations. The kids won't even know that they



Balancing with Ben

are working because they will be having so much fun!

- Have your child(ren) stand on a carpet square and jump to the left/right side, depending on which direction is called.
- Mother May I? (focus on jumping and hopping; jump/hop forward, backward, to the side, X number of jumps or hops)
- Skipping and skipping rope
- Body percussion games like clapping (Google the term for more ideas)
- Jumping Jacks and Janes
- Windmills
- Supine flexion hold: child lies on their back on the floor, curl upper and lower body up to meet each other as if holding onto a meatball or egg
- Ball kicks with partner: child lies on their back, second person throws ball in direction of feet, lift feet from the ground to kick ball with soles of feet, flex knees and kick away for the second person to catch
- Climbing: playground equipment, ladder, rope, or rock wall
- Crawling: over cushions, through tunnels, or a homemade maze
- Wheelbarrow walk



Windmills with Zayid and Zaynah

- Google “animal walks” and have fun!
- Cat arches, such as in yoga
- Somersault rolling, rolling down a grassy hill
- Push-ups on hands and knees
- Play with sand by scooping sand from one side of the body and putting it into a bucket on the opposite side of the body without switching hands

The critical takeaways from the last two articles in “Raising Great Kids” are “chase the why” and, “there’s always hope. It just might take a village.”

*Perk Musacchio is the co-author of **No Manual, No Problem: Strategies and Interventions to Help Your Child Thrive in Today’s World**, where many of these strategies and more can be found. She is also co-author of **A Student’s Guide to Communication and Self-Presentation** and the originator of the **PeaceWalk®**. For more information, visit her website at www.skillstosoar.com.*

*Maude Le Roux is an experienced occupational therapist, international trainer in multiple assessment and intervention protocols right in our own backyard! She is the co-author of **Our Greatest Allies**. You can read her blogs and programs at www.atotalapproach.com and view her workshops at www.maudeleroux.com.*



Jumping Jacks with Jack



Jumping Jills with Maddie



Jumping Jills with Maddie



Charlotte Capitan doing the crab walk