

Craniosacral Therapy

for Death, Dying and Loss

by Debra Collins

Craniosacral Therapy (CST) is a system of compassionate touch, objective listening with hands and ears, and supportive intention to evaluate and encourage the body to heal itself. Dr. John Upledger, osteopathic physician and founder of the internationally recognized Upledger Institute, was known to describe CST as a “light touch therapy to facilitate change, promote healing and aid in the completion of the biological process of living.”

In his course manual, *Craniosacral Therapy Around Death and Dying (CADD)*, Don Ash, PT, CST-D and founder of the Craniosacral Therapy Alliance, states, “Just as there are certain movements toward the completion of birthing and the delivery process, there is also a process that, when activated, is a gradual progression of awareness and cessation of bodily functions and a deliverance back to where we came from. That place is Universal Consciousness.” As a gentle hands-on therapy, CST can be used to unite the conscious and the unconscious aspects of the body, mind and spirit to assist in a more peaceful completion of life or transition as the survivor of loss.

In the CADD course, practitioners learn that when a person is faced with death, he or she is faced with losing their identity. The person is giving up their body, their name, their family, friends, home, job and even their senses. In *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, Sogyal Rinpoche writes about a false image of ourselves that is ever changing to protect its very existence; the ego. Our great fear of losing control allows the ego to convince us how important it is to do anything necessary to avoid death or other great change of identity. Therefore a great deal of resistance can arise

to the acceptance of death and change. A trained craniosacral practitioner can offer support and comfort by creating calmness and peaceful awareness in the body and mind.

Experienced craniosacral therapists have devoted much attention and intention to “listening to” and feeling the nuances and variations of the Craniosacral Rhythm (CR). The CR is accessed by a deep engagement with the body. As stated by Don Ash, “Tuning out the breath, tuning out heart beat, and tuning in to what is left” i.e., fluid exchanges in arterial blood flow and cerebrospinal fluid. Therapists take note of symmetry, quality, amplitude and rate of the more superficial rhythm and then, with great focus and trust, sense the deeper, slower rhythms. Craniosacral Therapists are aware of and can initiate a gentle cessation of the CR known as a stillpoint. In this way, the practitioner connects with “the waters of life.” The person receiving this deep attention and appreciation experiences a tranquil, calming effect. As Don Ash states, “Coming to a point of deep self-awareness helps us realize we are all really ‘One.’” This realization is key to the process of the ultimate “letting go.”

The goal of therapy is self-realization and awareness for the client. This requires a therapist who is neutral, grounded and unconditionally present. In John Upledger’s conscious/non-conscious model, there is interaction between the client and therapist via dialogue guided by the therapist who is monitoring the CR of the client while offering intentional touch. An abrupt stopping of the CR alerts the therapist to the possibility of significant “other than conscious” material within the client. This combined with respect and support, opens the avenue for Inner Wisdom Communication

with the client. A new level of self-awareness is accessible if not already achieved. Developing self-realization and awareness is an essential process for any person who is growing consciously. Engaging with a craniosacral practitioner for this purpose is especially beneficial following the diagnosis of a terminal illness. It is supportive for loved ones and survivors needing to process their own acceptance, thoughts, beliefs, concerns, and fears around death and/or a new identity.

There are other “Little Deaths” we experience in life that result in grief, fear, denial, anger, or shock that can become lodged inside our bodies. Loss of limb, breast, or embryo can create emotional holdings and physical tensions. We are subject to survivor issues related to life events such as loss of a business, divorce, retirement, recession or empty nest syndrome. These same practices of CST apply to the acceptance, awareness and forward movement needed at the time of such significant events. Death and loss are inevitabilities of physical life. In *When Things Fall Apart*, Pema Chodron writes, “The way to dissolve our resistance to life is to meet it face to face.” Thankfully, we do not have to do it alone.

Debra Collins, BS, LMBT, CHT, is a Licensed Massage and Bodywork Therapist, a Certified Hypnotherapist and a teaching Reiki Master. She is certified through both the National Guild of Hypnotherapists and the International Association of Counselors and Therapists, and has special certifications in Hypnosis for Fertility and Regression Therapy. She can be reached at The Center: Natural Health Specialists, 8404 Six Forks Road, Suite 201, Raleigh. Phone 910-200-9442 or visit www.restoredessence.net

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