

Appendix 8

*Child Intuition and the Conclusion of
Acupuncture Treatments*

Child Intuition and the Conclusion of Acupuncture Treatments

During my first years as a practitioner of Chinese medicine, I began to take notice of an unexplainable phenomenon recurring during my treatments: some of the children who initially cooperated with acupuncture would suddenly, in the midst of treatment, begin to protest for no apparent reason. An observed correlation between the recovery of some of the children and the onset of their protest made me realize what was happening: children were beginning to protest when they were no longer in need of treatment. These were children who had started treatment, were moving in the right direction, and were almost balanced, and who were therefore less in need of treatment and ready to begin coping with their ailments on their own. In such situations, the practitioner should consider concluding his or her treatment of the child and simply maintain contact in case further treatment is necessary.

My conclusion on this point may not have been based on scientific study, but it nonetheless helped me understand the importance of listening carefully to children, as they tend to feel things, in contrast to adults, who analyze things logically based on their past experiences.

Equipped with this understanding, I began to find a place in my treatments for the opinion of children. Some children have ideas about where to insert needles. In such cases, I check whether they had experienced pain somewhere and therefore chose a point that they thought would not hurt, or whether their idea was based on something else. In cases that I conclude that the child is being motivated by something other than fear, I try to work with him to find a point that meets his needs and that is also suitable to the

treatment strategy. Sometimes interesting treatments are born when a child points to a certain part of his body, and it turns out that the acupuncture point located closest to where the child pointed fits in with the treatment strategy surprisingly well or leads the treatment in a certain direction from among a number of possibilities.

A few years ago, when I myself was a patient on the acupuncture table, I had a distinct sensation of the point at which the treatment had ended. Suddenly, my body was filled with a slight, almost imperceptible sense of discomfort, as if I had been gently awakened. As a practitioner, I began to notice that when I arrived late to remove needles, it was as if some of my adult patients were waiting for me to arrive and finish the treatment. Some tapped their fingers on the acupuncture table. Others turned their heads from side to side, staring at the ceiling. I decided to try asking the children I was treating if they knew when to remove the needles. When I did, it was as if they had been waiting to be asked. Most children responded to the question “do you know when to remove the needle?” with a quick and unhesitating “Yes!” Then, after a bit of time passed, they would look at the needle and announce: “Now!” At first, I would check their pulse to make sure it indicated that the treatment had indeed ended (based on the fact that the pulse beats felt at the lower positions were full and strong). When I did, I found complete correlation: that is to say, the children clearly knew when their treatment was over.

The next step was to allow the children themselves to remove the needles at the end of treatment. As my confidence in this approach grew, the age at which I asked children to tell me when their treatment had ended and to remove the needles decreased.

I discovered that children under the age of one and as old as four understood exactly what was being asked of them. When asked if they knew when the needles needed to be removed, however, children above the age of four said that they did not know. Later, I discovered that children older than the age of four could also be taught to listen to their bodies, and today I use this approach with my adult patients as well. I start by offering the following explanation:

When you need to use the bathroom or get a drink of water, you don't really think about it. Your body just knows that it needs to drink or that it needs to go to the bathroom. If you don't think about when you need to take out the needle, the body will tell you. Let's talk about something else for now and not think about the needle, and if the needle suddenly comes to mind, just say so.

Then we begin a pleasant conversation about kindergarten or the child's favorite books or television shows. When the time comes to remove the needle, shy children suddenly look at it, and when I ask them if it is time, they nod their heads. Children with more confidence, without any assistance, simply reach out their hand, remove the needles, and hand it to me with great care, as if it was something that they had been doing all their lives. I can recall two cases in which a child threw the needles after removing them, and one in which a child tried to prick me with the needle after removing it and looking at it for a moment. But in almost all cases, the children simply know what they are doing. Some parents are unable to believe that a one year old who cannot even talk can communicate in this manner. This in itself is a valuable lesson for parents. Sometimes, parents try to help their children by asking them if it is

time yet. I immediately explain that if the child needs to answer their question, it will require him to think, and that if he thinks, he will conclude that he does not know. For this reason, I explain, parents must refrain from disturbing their children and must simply observe from the side.