Aromatherapy and Autism Spectrum Disorder

By
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Clinical aromatherapy offers children with Autism safe, natural and healing alternatives for sleeping difficulties, anger and anxiety issues, and Candida.

In the world of Autism, sleep can be elusive. Here one night and gone the next. Children with Autism often have trouble with their natural circadian rhythms. In the book, “Cutting-Edge Therapies for Autism,” Dr. James E. Jan explained it this way: “Surveys show that the majority of children with Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) experience sometimes lifelong sleep disturbances which are most stressful for them, their caregivers, and the entire family. Usually these sleep difficulties are falling asleep, frequent awakenings and early morning awakenings, therefore, they are circadian rhythm sleep disturbances.” The circadian rhythm sleep cycle is not only found in human life forms, but also in all living cells including plants. Therapeutic essential oils are the very essence of plants; giving us a pure and intensified form of the natural rhythms of life. Essential oils in their very nature, balance our nature. Children with Autism do not deal well with the artificial world. Their bodies call out continually to live naturally in a state that is pure not only physically but also mentally and emotionally as well. Understanding these children’s needs, essential oils provide solid bases in which to prepare the body naturally for sleep. Many oils would benefit a child with Autism.

Myrtle is known for bringing about a restful and peaceful sleep. It is safe for children to use and is often considered soothing and calming. It can be used in the bath, massaged onto the back, or diffused; which also aids in one’s ability to breathe in deeply.

Roman Chamomile is the essential oil most associated with getting a good night’s rest. It is known for its ability to help with insomnia. Roman Chamomile according to Clare Walters is, “Known as the, ‘plant’s physician,’ as it is known to cure neighboring plants of their ailments.” It is also used to regulate menstrual cycles. Roman Chamomile could then be described as a natural regulator, carrying within its DNA the ability to restore and balance, making it a positive choice to use in ASD children’s circadian rhythm disturbances.

Vetiver oil is another excellent choice to aid those with sleeping issues. It is deeply relaxing and fortifying to the central nervous system. In Roberta Wilson’s book, “Aromatherapy,” she described Vetiver’s emotional effects this way, “It is emotionally calming and is helpful in overcoming depression, insomnia, and nervousness. Vetiver oil reduces anxiety, stress, and tension by calming the mind. It settles nerves and can revive a person who is suffering from emotional exhaustion.” The term, “emotional exhaustion,” fits so well in the Autistic’s world as they are constantly battling for words, expressions, peace and rest. However, it is what Roberta Wilson said next that got me so
intrigued with this oil, “As a root oil, vetiver comes from the earth. It helps reestablish a connection to the earth, nature, the planet, and the universe by bestowing a sense of belonging.” Vetiver in its very nature restores our nature. Giving Autistic children exactly what they are looking for, a sense of belonging, and connection not only to the world around them, but also to the universe. Moreover, when does the universe appear in all its glory? Yes, at night. I believe all of us would like to be tucked in at night with the essence and connecting power of vetiver.

There are many ways in which these and other oils can be used to prepare a child for sleep. Some autistic children do not like to be touched therefore eliminating a soothing massage. However, using the oils in a diffuser or spraying the room with an essential oils air freshener right before bed can be beneficial. Also placing drops of the oil or blended oils on the pillow is known to help.

If you decided to use a bath to soothe the child before bed, you would need to place the essential oils in a carrier oil to act as a fixative. Apricot oil is an excellent choice as it is highly penetrative and soothing. However, you could add up to fifty percent avocado oil to the apricot blend to prove more effective. Avocado oil contains restorative qualities and aids in conditions such as, eczema, a condition commonly found in children with ASD. To make the blend you would then use 15 ml. or ½ oz. apricot oil and 15 ml. or ½ oz avocado oil together to make one ounce or 30 ml. of carrier oil. You would then add five drops of Myrtle as your top oil and four drops of Chamomile as you middle note. Followed with three drops of Vetiver as you base note. Make sure to use therapeutic grade oils to ensure good quality and safety, especially in the bath. You can then store this blend in a brown or dark blue glass bottle with a dropper. At bath time run the water and simply add five to ten drops of your blend to the bath water.

With restful sleep being such a problem for ASD children, it is no wonder that fits of uncontrollable anger and anxiety exists in their lives. The website, Stressfreekids.com, described it this way, “Children diagnosed with Autism are usually more susceptible to anxiety disorders, stress and feelings of anger. Autism and anxiety go hand-in-hand as does stress and anxiety. It’s challenging enough for any parent to deal with a child who is experiencing anxiety or anger, but parents of an Autistic child face even greater challenges.” The site goes one to explain some of the triggers of these emotions as being, ‘changes in routine and environment and of course sleep.’

Daily life does have its routine, but daily life also has unforeseen changes that can easily affect an autistic child. An elementary classroom is a perfect example of this. A study conducted by Monika Meulman using essential oils proved interesting. In her research paper, she explained why she felt essential oils played a part in healing or at least helping autistic children: “Furthermore, the olfactory bulb and its relation to our limbic system ensures that the olfactory nerves have the shortest pathway to the brain of all our senses. Simply put: an aromatic molecule has the potential to be the fastest modifier of behavior, our central nervous system (CNS), and even our thought processes. It is because of this connection between the olfactory system and the brain/blood barrier that we can assume and hope that some aromatic molecules (components of essential oils) can have an effect
The study was conducted in a classroom of Autistic children for six weeks. The children were given oils to inhale during carpet or floor time. The results were interesting; the majority preferred the base tone oils of cinnamon, bergamot and frankincense. The usually calming sense of Lavender proved to be too much of a stimulant.

Cinnamon’s warm and inviting scent soothes the nerves and calms anxiety. Having a peaceful effect on the central nervous system when inhaled. Cinnamon tends to irritate the skin though and may be best used in the form of an inhalant.

Bergamot oil helps fight off fatigue; which plays a key role in ASD kid’s anger and stress and helps balance one’s emotional strength. However, its greater healing property lies in its ability to regulate blocked or trapped energy and send it towards the places that need healing. This helps free the children of built up tension and stress and anger allowing them to re-center. Roberta Wilson wrote, “Smelling bergamot oil can stabilize a person in a shaky emotional state. It evokes feelings of happiness and joy and can restores self-confidence and self-esteem. Bergamot’s balancing properties help minimize the tendency towards compulsive or obsessive behavior.” It is no wonder that these children were naturally drawn to bergamot.

Frankincense is known to ease the challenges of change by calming the mind and lifting mental anxiety. This allows the mind to become less distracted and more focused. It deepens the breath and draws the spirit inward. Frankincense is a sacred oil. It has the ability to speak directly to the limbic system of our brains, sending the message of peace.

All these oils were used in the form of an inhalant. As mentioned above cinnamon can irritate the skin and bergamot is known to increase photosensitivity. Frankincense however, can be used in the bath or as a massage as well as diffused and directly inhaled. There are several ways to use essential oils for inhalation. The easiest is to take a cotton ball, add two to three drops of essential oil onto the cotton ball and inhale. You could steam three to five drops of essential in a bowl of hot water with a towel draped over the child’s head. There are nasal inhalers that contain a felt insert that you could place ten to fifteen drops of essential oils onto and load into the inhaler to be used throughout the day. Personally, I like the Terra Cotta aromatherapy pendants. They look like cool necklaces and come in a variety of designs. You simply put a drop, maybe two of your essential oil on the pendant letting it absorb in. You then wear it as a necklace or you could also hang it in a locker at school or in your car.

A caution with using the inhalant method is to consider the rule, “Less is more.” You need to make sure that your child is not overwhelmed with the scent or over stimulated by wearing it for long periods of time. You might want to switch out the essential oils your child finds soothing.

Children with ASD greatest challenge lies deep inside their own bodies. Often times these children suffer from low immune systems. This can wreak havoc on their bodies.
causing effects not only physically but also mentally and emotionally. Usually the children suffer from Candida an overgrowth of bad yeast.

Doctor Jacquelyn McCandless is an expert in this field of study. In her book, “Children with Starving Brains,” she wrote the following. “Research has shown that 60-70% of the immune system in humans is located within the intestinal tract and its digestive organs, easily making the gut the largest immune system organ in the body. Because the immune system is so involved with the gastrointestinal tract, intestinal pathology can contribute to immune dysregulation, and vice versa. Regardless of whether the immune impairment is acquired or genetic, many of these children are susceptible to multiple infections, especially ear infections, and are often repeatedly treated with antibiotics -without considering the possibility of viral otitis, for which antibiotics are ineffective. Antibiotics not only irritate the intestinal wall and cause gut inflammation, but also destroy the beneficial bacteria, creating an opportunity for Candida.”

When this occurs in the body, nutrients are not absorbed properly and the invading yeast can colonize in the gut lining creating holes better know as, “Leaky gut syndrome.” This problem only intensifies and further frustrates the health of these children. Most develop sever allergies to gluten and dairy. The best way to aid these children is to treat their colds, ear infections and the like with essential oils. Restoring the body to balance naturally. It also reduces the opportunity to develop Candida overgrowth.

Roberta Wilson wrote, “Aromatherapy alone cannot eliminate Candida, but in conjunction with lifestyle changes, an elimination diet, and a positive attitude, aromatherapy can speed your recovery.” She then suggest using a, “Candida Immune-Boosting Body Oil.” There are several oils listed, we will take a closer look at three of the oils.

Tea tree is the champion oil for these children. It has antibiotic, antiviral, fungicidal, parasiticidal properties and that is naming just a few. Its ability to resist infection and strengthen immune systems, gives these children a fighting chance without the use of antibiotics that would further harm them rather than heal them. Roberta Wilson wrote, “Australians call Tea Tree oil a “first-aid kit in a bottle.” If Autism families could use Tea Tree as their first line of defense against cold, flu’s, earaches, and other infectious illnesses, then chances are they could stop the continued cycle of illness, yeast infection, gut problems and emotional difficulties.

Benzoin is another great oil to add to the line up. Its ability to fight respiratory ailments is comforting. Its ability to reduce the body of excess phlegm helps when a child is full of congestion. However, its ability to calm the digestive tract is worth mentioning, as this symptom is so prevalent in children with ASD. It is also antibacterial and will fight off yeast infections.

Clary Sage also strengthens the immune system and is helpful in fighting off Candida, as well as respiratory ailments. Clary Sage also relaxes the muscles, which would help to ease and relax a child. For children with Autism, Clary Sage could be ideal in this
situation as it is known to help with personal challenges and change and it is the go to oil in times of stress. It can calm the nerves yet fight ailments and strengthen the body.

Using these oils for a body massage would be very healing for a child. Again, if the child does not like to be touched, the oils could be defused or inhaled. Benzoin should not be used in a bath, but Clary Sage and Tea Tree would be quite soothing in a bath. If you decided to use the oils for a body massage oil, you would need to place the essential oils in a carrier oil. You again could use a hundred percent apricot oil or you could use a blend of carrier oils. You can also use a hundred percent coconut oil as the carrier. Coconut oil increases immunity and aids with digestion. To make a blend for a body massage you could use 60 ml. or 2oz of carrier oil. An effective blend could be ten drops Tea Tree as your top note. Eight drops Black Pepper as you middle and six drops Myrrh or Frankincense as your base. This blend could be used in the bath, as well as, for a massage blend. To use your massage blend you would rub the blend on the front and back of the trunk of the body. You will want to do this two to three times a day, as needed. Thus allowing the essential oils healing prosperities to work at the source of discomfort.

The world of Clinical aromatherapy offers children with Autism safe, natural and healing alternatives for sleeping difficulties, anger and anxiety issues, and Candida.

By using essential oils, these and other symptoms that effect children with Autism can be addressed naturally. Essential oils let the very source of nature restore us and balance our bodies by gently reminding us of natural rhythms that are found in every living cell. Creating for us, a path to help us not only drift off to a peaceful night’s sleep, but one that connects us to the universe. To oils that sooth and comfort when nothing else seems to reach us. Going deep down in with base oils that connect us so powerfully to our spirits, redirecting blocked energy and redirecting it for our good. Centering us with a simple waif of their scents. Then there are the oils that fight for us, healing and strengthening us when our immune systems are weak. The children with ASD need essential oils because they go to the core of healing and follow the number one rule of doctors, “Physician, do no harm.” ADS children call out to the world to return to things that are more pure, more natural, clinical aromatherapy delivers healing alternatives safely.

SOURCES

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