

Alexandra and Elisabeth

(See photos under Feldenkrais Method for Children and My Work with Children)

Alexandra and Elisabeth are twins who were born 3 months early; they started with the Feldenkrais Method 6 months after they were born. My first impression upon meeting them was how tightly closed Alexandra's fists were and how much larger and livelier Elisabeth was. Both of them lay on their backs with their arms above their heads and their legs wide apart and down. Neither of them moved much. Elisabeth responded more than Alexandra when I touched her feet, but neither of them lifted their feet or hands from the floor.

At first, I worked with them to begin using their hands. They (like many premature babies) had been strapped down in the hospital so that the procedures could be done that saved their lives. Since their birth, they had also had many difficulties with breathing.

Once they began to reach for things I began to use this desire in the lessons so that they started to feel that their chests and heads were moveable. Both of them had little chests that were more like wooden boxes than babies' chests. As soon as their chests became free, they became louder and more active.

After a month they began to be able to grab for their own feet, and at home this provided hours of entertainment. Elisabeth learned much more quickly and started needing less of my time. Alexandra clearly had more difficulties with movement. She often forgot about her left hand and had it in a fist by her head. I gave her several lessons on the use of both hands. When she started to roll from the back to the belly, Alexandra reached across her chest, pushed very hard with one foot and arched her back so much that she would stay stuck on her side. She often seemed frustrated and would throw her head too far back to be able to accomplish what she wanted to do. I needed to find a way to use her habit of throwing the head back to help make rolling easier for her. Then I found an ATM (Awareness Through Movement) Lesson on this theme, and it became clear to me how to help her to do it with a great arch in the back. Rolling soon also became possible. Before long Alexandra could do many variations. She no longer forgot about her hand, she could roll and get to objects by her self. She could also more easily bend while lying on her back to reach her feet.

I include something that the mother wrote for "Mothering Matters" parenting magazine.

Article written for Mothering Matters Magazine (July/August 2003) My experience of Feldenkrais therapy for babies

Before we had children, all I knew about Feldenkrais therapy was that it had something to do with movement and healing. Our own experience with

Feldenkrais began two months after our beautiful twin daughters, Alexandra Niamh (pronounced "Neve") and Elisabeth Erin, came home from hospital for Christmas.

Alexandra and Elisabeth had been born three months earlier by emergency Caesarean section after just 28 weeks of pregnancy. It was at a routine follow-up check that Alexandra was found to have low muscle tone and a slight preference for her left side. Physiotherapy was prescribed. In fact Alexandra had not been feeding well since leaving the hospital and remained very "closed" and floppy. Elisabeth, on the other hand, had normal muscle tone but seemed intent on getting ahead of herself by constantly trying to sit up, despite the fact that her back was by no means strong enough to support her yet. And so, on a friend's recommendation, I contacted Nancy Aberle, a Feldenkrais therapist specialising in babies and children.

Within a few weeks of starting the twice-weekly Feldenkrais lessons with Nancy, Alexandra's feeding significantly improved, she was more open and alert, and she even started trying to roll. Alexandra's hands and feet, previously "closed" and sometimes clenched, started to open up to actively explore her environment. Nancy introduced Elisabeth to her toes to help her build up some of those sitting muscles and this quickly became one of her favourite pastimes.

Two months on and the consultant paediatrician who had treated Alexandra rated her overall muscle tone as normal (with the slight exception of her shoulders and upper arms). Indeed Alexandra has made such progress with her rolling technique that she can quite confidently reach a desired toy or object at will. Last weekend she even started pulling her knees up to try and crawl! Elisabeth too has benefited from the Feldenkrais lessons and is much happier on her tummy and back than before thanks to some new tips from Nancy.

All in all, the Feldenkrais work has played a significant role in building Elisabeth and Alexandra's confidence. It has reduced their frustration levels and generally helped both of our precious daughters on their way to becoming more fully who they uniquely are.

Mutter von Elisabeth and Alexandra, May 2003