



Everyone is all smiles at Graduation!!!

Teaching Reiki to Children with Special Needs

BY DODI SARETTE

Twenty-eight years ago, life as I knew it changed forever when my son Isaac was born, and I was told he had Down syndrome. In my arms I held a small, beautiful child who would have great big challenges ahead of him. Well meaning doctors brought me out-dated literature about Down syndrome and quietly suggested there were “places” for children like mine. This was still a common response at that time, as children with special needs were often seen as a burden. Only 19 years old myself, I felt overwhelmed by the magnitude of what lay ahead, but looking into my son’s eyes, I saw light, love, hope for our future. In his eyes was a reassurance that, “We can do this, Mom, just wait and see.” We went home the next day to begin our lives together.

Just five weeks later, we were back in the hospital. Isaac had developed serious digestive issues, which required surgery. Once again, the doctors prepared me for the worst. During those next hours any doubts or fear I may have had about having Isaac in my life were put to rest as I called on God to bring him healing. “Just let him survive this,” I prayed, “and I will love him and teach him everything I can.” My prayers were answered as Isaac made it through and healed quickly. He was determined to continue on the path he came to travel in this world. This would be the beginning of a life with a child who, as I taught him all about life, would surely teach me all about love.

My First Reiki Student

Many years later, when I became a Reiki Master Teacher, I knew I wanted my first student to be my son, Isaac. It was a challenge to think of how to best translate the curriculum of a Reiki I class in a way that Isaac could understand and apply to his own life. I knew that I had to make the material come to life in such a way that he would be able to feel it. I used the International Center for Reiki Training outline for the foundation of my class and let my intuition guide me for the rest.

In teaching the history of Reiki, I was able to use Isaac's experiences in the martial arts to connect him to Dr. Mikao Usui by using the title of "Sensei" as Usui was known in Japan. As I explained the origin of the word Reiki, we used a visualization of light and the feeling of our breath to "feel" the Universal life force moving through us. We talked about how it feels when we are in pain and how the touch of another human being can make us feel better. We talked about how energy is in us and in everything else. After the "Reiki talk" portion of the class was done, I asked Isaac if he could tell me what he thought Reiki was. He said, "God's loving, healing energy." Okay then, I thought, we've got that down.

Before the attunement, we practiced Gassho meditation, and I used a visualization of bringing the light of Reiki into ourselves through our crown chakras to help him feel calm and centered. After the attunement, Isaac related seeing a lot of light and feeling warmth all over. He also related seeing my brother John, who had passed on in 2000, and Jesus. As a new Reiki Master, I had some trepidation about the effectiveness of my attunements. (Is this thing on???) Isaac, with his beautiful and simple explanation of his experience, relieved any doubts I had. We practiced all the self-Reiki hand positions and some of the other techniques such as *kenyoku* and *byosen* scanning. Isaac played with the feeling of warmth and energy in his hands and even gave some Reiki to our dog.

As I processed the richness of this experience with Isaac, I began to connect the many events in my life that led me to this moment. When we are on the seeking path, many times our travels lead us back to where we first began. Over the years with Isaac, as we learned and grew together, we became part of a community of children with special needs and their remarkable families. I began to advocate for these children in many ways, participating in the school system, breaking down barriers in the community, and becoming very involved in Special Olympics. I saw, on a daily basis, how these souls could light up a room with their joy and light and determination. They had a connection to God that was beyond explanation. What better way could I endeavor than to assist them in opening up more fully to the very energy that created them? If they could make a difference in the world just by being in it, think what they could do with the gift of Reiki moving through them! I knew that I had come full circle to my soul's purpose: to help these magnificent souls do the work they came here on earth to do.

Finding Other Students

Reaching out to the parents of children with special needs to offer Reiki classes was a natural process. I had already had many experiences offering Reiki to children and young adults with special needs during sports events or outings when minor injuries occurred, and several parents had come, with specific issues or just curiosity, to experience Reiki for themselves. Parents of children with special needs often feel as though they carry the weight of the world on their shoulders. The stress of dealing with the physical, emotional and developmental issues of a child with special needs can be quite demanding, and Reiki offers feelings of peace and healing during these times.

When I began to offer classes, I had many eager to learn. I felt strongly, that if possible, the parents should learn first, followed by their children. This would give parents an opportunity to experience Reiki first hand, and it would prepare them for what their children would experience. Also, with both parent and child learning Reiki, there might arise a sense of interdependence between them. So often the relationship between parent and child is seen as one of teacher and student, and in the special needs community this is magnified by the many challenges these children face on the path toward growth and learning. On an energetic level, however, the souls who have chosen to come here for this experience as a person with special needs are truly teachers in their own right. Allowing parents and children to share this experience together could give them insight into their importance to the world and to each other.

Teaching the Parents

For the parents, I taught Reiki I classes using the ICRT outline, with lots of time for discussion of individual insights and ways to support their children. Because these parents routinely overlook their own needs in support of their children, I emphasized the need for them to give themselves the gift of Reiki daily, and that by healing themselves, they can be better equipped to be of support to their children. Understanding the parents need for support as individuals was one of the deciding factors in keeping classes separate for parents and children. I felt the classroom dynamic would be best served by having parents interacting with, and gaining support from, other parents and by having their children able to express themselves fully in their own learning environment.

Teaching the Young Adults and Children

Teaching more than one student with special needs at a time would prove challenging, as each brought something different to the classroom. How was I going to translate Reiki through the differing cognitive and sensory issues of those present in the class? The differences presented both a challenge and a gift as I soon realized that each person needed help in one area but could offer assistance in another.



In the hours of reflection spent in preparation for this experience, I received a great deal of guidance from my higher beings. A good friend and spiritual channel Laura Mirante and I received much encouragement that I was moving in the right direction, and we received specific guidance to allow the “silliness” of spirit to fill the Reiki classroom. I had seen the “silliness” of spirit at work on many occasions with these children in Special Olympics, and I knew this was a powerful way for them to feel spirit. Spiritual matters can seem so deep and serious at times, but Jesus encouraged us all to “be as little children.” So with this in mind, and my experiences with Isaac, I constructed a class outline that was fun and fluid, leaving spaces for my intuition to guide me in the direction that was needed for that particular group of souls.

The First Special Class

My first class consisted of three students. Keeping it fairly small allowed for more time for practice and individual attention. I included Isaac in this class, although by now he was at the Reiki II practitioner level. I knew intuitively that his presence would give his classmates a sense of connectedness and confidence that they too could learn this healing art.

We began the class with a meditation that helped students visualize the light of Reiki flowing through them and to see themselves as pure energy. We discussed the presence of energy everywhere and used examples such as electricity, the heartbeat, lightning, and the sound of music. We talked about how energy cannot always be seen, and used the example of a fan, whose

blades are solid when still, but blend together when moving and become almost invisible at high speeds. Bringing physical examples of energy into the classroom helped to translate the concept of energy in a way that was fun and tangible.

We talked about how they are a part of God and the Universe energetically, and how they are connected to God, each other, and to all other beings. We talked about the chakras and practiced trying to see each other’s auras. We had fun with this, and I was amazed (but not surprised) at how easy it was for them to see light and energy around each other.

We discussed the history of Reiki and what “Reiki” means, and made individual posters of the Reiki Ideals for them to bring home to place in their rooms. We practiced Gassho meditation and talked about what being “attuned” meant and what to expect when we did it. Frequent breaks and well-placed silliness kept the energy in the room light and fun!

The attunement process was an intuitive experience, as each student seemed to require a different approach. I did each attunement



separately, in its entirety, all the while taking care to do the attunement in the Usui/Tibetan tradition. For one student, I felt compelled to do a healing attunement first, as I sensed a heaviness which I felt needed to be lifted before the Reiki I attunement. Later on, that student’s comment was, “I feel lighter in my soul, like something lifted up from me with a *wooshing* feeling.” I tried to sense intuitively for each student any areas that might need specific attention later on when practicing self-Reiki. The experiences that each one related after their attunements were individual and inspiring. One student, eyes closed, just softly said, “Wow.”

Students practice self-Reiki hand positions



Afterward, the students could easily feel the Reiki in their hands. They spent the balance of the day giving themselves and each other Reiki. As I helped them review the hand positions and watched their interaction, it was clear how important it was for them to feel that they could contribute to the well-being of each other. We closed the class with a meditation that was a journey into their minds, where they were asked to imagine themselves as anything they wanted to be. I asked them to see how they were connected to and a part of God and to see themselves surrounded by joy and hope and love.

A note on teaching Level II Reiki

Repetition is important with individuals who have cognitive challenges. With regard to teaching the Reiki II symbols, several hours of practice are needed to help the students get the feel for drawing them and saying their names. When I first taught Isaac Reiki II, we practiced drawing each symbol for about an hour; first tracing the symbol, then saying its name, drawing it on paper, drawing it in the air, on the hands, clapping while saying the symbol, and seeing it in our minds. After a lot of practice with drawing the symbols, Isaac began to see pieces of the symbols in many things he looked at that day, which was his way of assimilating them into his mind and heart.

Continued review, even after the course is complete, is key in helping the student fully assimilate the symbols. In addition, I allow each student to keep one drawing of each symbol to look at when they need to, after an agreement between us that this is for their eyes only. I keep an atmosphere of joy and silliness when

learning the symbols, remembering my guidance that silliness connects us to our highest beings. Learning in a joyful manner honors the sacred nature of the symbols just as much as learning them with quiet reverence!

Being aware that each of us is on our own individual path, I knew there would be some parents who would choose not to learn Reiki. So, in addition to the classes, I organized Reiki shares as an important part of supporting the children as they developed their skills in Reiki.

Moving Forward

What does teaching Reiki to people with special needs mean to the rest of humanity? One in every 150 children has some type of Autism spectrum disorder (according to the Autism-Society.org) and one in every 800 children has Down syndrome, according to the National Down Syndrome Congress. These are just two of the many developmental disability issues affecting children today. At this time in our evolution, more and more souls are

coming here with an agreement to be one of these "special" children, to bring light into this world and raise the vibration of the planet. The use of Reiki can expand their awareness of their own inherent power. Realize that when you give these loving souls the opportunity to learn Reiki for themselves, you are opening a portal for them into their higher consciousness and equipping them with the energy they need to assist in the ascension of our planet. As you teach them, remember to thank them, for they are also teaching you. 

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Lauren gives Reiki to Isaac