



Pogo Stick Therapy

As a young child, I had all the telltale signs of ADHD: fast-moving, impulsive, non-thinking, but reactive with so much extra, unfocused, erratic energy! I had trouble controlling my emotions, especially anxiety. I was frequently unable to control what blurted out from my mouth.

Somewhere along the way, my father discovered that when I got off of a pogo stick, I was slower, calmer, less reactive, more in control of myself and certainly much more pleasant and fun to be around. My father was a smart man. He didn't know how the pogo stick jumping did it, but he knew that somehow it caused me to have a brain-state change, and I was less annoying and somewhat more rational when I got off of one. So, whenever I wore a pogo stick out, he got me another and then another. It was a simple formula he used: When I got on his nerves, he got me on the pogo stick. He probably thought I was using up all my "excess energy" by bouncing my brains out up and down the street where we lived.

What was really happening were two things: The jumping up and down on concrete or

asphalt was pounding my joints and awakening the neural impulses contained there to signal to the brain where I was in time and in space. That helped bring me back into my center, grounded me so to speak. Highly anxious people with increasing anxiety continue to decrease whatever sense of self they have as the anxiety increases. (Is that a mouthful?) The brain reaches a point when dissociation or meltdown is the end result if the brain is unable to reverse the increasing anxiety.

In addition, the jarring of the joints as the body jumps on a pogo stick also shuts down the vestibular system (inner ear). Judith Bluestone of the HANDLE Institute, with whom I mentored, taught me that practically everything we do depends on the vestibular system. The vestibular system is the air traffic controller, she said, of the brain. It is the first step in the management of anxiety. Jumping up and down on a pogo stick and jarring the joints is a way to shut the vestibular system down so the brain can re-boot. This is much like turning off a computer, and then powering it back on.

So, for children with good balance, who are not hyper-vestibular (unable to handle much movement), jumping on a pogo stick is a fabulous, oh-so-much-fun compensatory activity that jars and stimulates the joints, so anxious, hyper-active or even oppositional children can feel themselves become calmer. Additionally, if the vestibular system isn't managing stress as it should, pogo stick jumping can calm the brain by causing it to re-boot. A re-booted computer is supposed to restart minus the prior glitches. 🌟

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: (Beth) Lucy Powell, LCSW, is a Conroe, Texas-based psychotherapist, neuro-behavioral educator, program/curriculum designer and author. Powell is a gifted and knowledgeable public speaker whose entertaining and interactive workshops have educated appreciative audiences for more than 30 years. Powell's latest book, "Fun Games and Physical Activities to Help Heal Children Who Hurt: Get on Your Feet!" was recently published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers. For more information, visit <https://infamilyservices.com/>.

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BY (BETH) LUCY POWELL, LCSW