Reflex Development

Your Reflexes: A Basic Overview

Sample Edition — First 3 of 35 Reflexes

Contents

Our Reflexes: A Blueprint for Our Nervous System to Follow

Our childhood reflexes serve as a pre-programmed map — a blueprint — for our nervous system to follow as it grows, and we grow with it. Long before our thinking brain takes conscious control of our movements, these automatic responses, which have triggers in all our senses, are the pathways for movement development. They are early physical rehearsals that ensure we, as babies, can interact with our world, build muscle strength, and protect and nurture ourselves without needing to stop and think about how to do it. When working well, these patterns smoothly perform their developmental jobs and then settle into the background, giving the higher brain a stable foundation to build upon.

We can see this blueprint in action through common, everyday examples. The Automatic Gait reflex, for instance, produces rhythmic stepping motions when a newborn's feet touch a surface, mapping out the coordination system for walking long before the baby can stand on their own. That's on top of at least eight key reflexes that coordinate to shape the early actions of seeing, reaching, rolling, and crawling — with lasting effects on later mobility, exploration, vision, and even our adventurous spirit.

Similarly, the Robinson Hands Grasp reflex uses basic palm pressure to close a baby's fingers, automatically building the baseline hand strength that later becomes a relaxed pencil grip, tool use, and self-help skills like zipping a jacket. Even our relationship with gravity is mapped out early on: the Landau reflex prompts a face-down baby to lift their head, chest, and limbs like an airplane, giving the back its first real workout against gravity to support later running and jumping.

The blueprint also outlines how our body manages core survival, protection, and daily stress. The Fear Paralysis Reflex acts as an early physical protection switch, causing the body to briefly freeze and orient to a sudden, overwhelming event before fear is even fully processed. When this reflex integrates properly, the freeze is over in a flash, and the body returns instantly to steady breathing, moving, and connecting with others. On a wider scale, the Core Tendon Guard reflex acts as a physical shield — rounding the shoulders inward to protect the front of the body ("Red Light"), or rigidly bracing the spine backward ("Green Light") — helping us physically navigate moments that call for real protection. These two reflexes worked in tandem to save our 16-year-old son's life when he froze and pulled back and up before accidentally stepping in front of a tram. These reflexes reacted before his brain processed the danger.

When the natural progression of our reflex blueprint is disrupted, or a reflex fails to settle properly, the nervous system loses its steady baseline. Without healthy integration, the conscious brain can't easily take the wheel, and the automatic lower switchboard stays active. The body is then forced to constantly compensate, turning ordinary daily environments into a source of continuous physical strain, exhaustion, or hyper-alertness. When a pattern is underactive or unsettled, the foundational coordination rules are missing, and the body defaults to rigid, clunky, or chaotic physical strategies just to stay upright.

The practical consequences of an unsettled blueprint show up as clear, visible patterns in everyday life. If the Tonic Labyrinthine Reflex stays active, posture can swing to extremes — rigidly stiff and overly braced, or floppy and slumped — while balance becomes noticeably shakier in the dark. An unsettled Foot Tendon Guard reflex can drive a persistent pattern of toe-walking, and landings from a jump can look loud, stiff, and poorly absorbed. Sensory focus can be affected too: an active Pavlov (Orientation) reflex means the brain has a harder

time tuning out the world, pulling attention back to a ticking clock or a shifting shadow instead of settling into a task.

Ultimately, our reflexes are not random, involuntary twitches. They are the building blocks that shape our physical coordination, emotional engagement, and sense of boundaries. They teach the nervous system how to process gravity, balance, connection, and safety from the ground up. Supporting this foundational blueprint, and allowing it to settle fully, is what frees the higher brain to take charge — and lets us move, communicate, and navigate the world with genuine ease and confidence.

About This Document

Your Reflexes: A Basic Overview

Each entry below has two parts: an **Overview & Purpose** — what the reflex is, what sets it off, and what it supports when it's working well — and **What This Can Look Like**, describing patterns that can show up when the reflex hasn't fully settled, without clinical or diagnostic language.

Where a reflex can show up in opposite-looking ways in different people — too much of the reflex, or too little — both are described. That's a real and meaningful pattern across this whole framework, not an inconsistency.

None of this is meant to diagnose anything. It's meant to help you recognize a pattern you may already see, and give you a starting point for a conversation with a practitioner.

1. Fear Paralysis Reflex (FPR)

Survival & Protection

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

This is the earliest of the body's protective reflexes — a freeze that happens *before* fear is even fully felt, not after. When something sudden, overwhelming, or threatening shows up, the body's first move isn't to run or fight, it's to go completely still and orient to what's happening. When this reflex is settled, that pause is brief: the body locks for a moment, takes stock, and then returns easily to movement, breath, speech, and connection with others.

WHAT THIS CAN LOOK LIKE

When this reflex is still active, the freeze response can become the default rather than a brief pause — showing up as a body that stays rigid and locked under stress rather than moving through it, breathing that goes shallow or catches, and a strong startle to sound, light, touch, or sudden change. Emotionally, this can look like chronic worry, a tendency to expect the worst, difficulty handling change or transitions, or going quiet and shut-down under pressure rather than visibly upset. On the other end, when the reflex has gone the opposite direction, it can show up as a kind of flatness — low energy, a hard time bouncing back, or reduced reaction even to things that would normally call for some response.

---

2. Moro Reflex

Survival & Alarm

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

This is the whole-body alarm reflex — the newborn's early startle response to sudden change, and the reflex responsible for that first breath at birth. A sudden noise, bright light, unexpected touch, or falling sensation triggers a big, visible reaction. As it matures, this dramatic full-body startle gradually settles into the more contained, adult version of a startle response.

WHAT THIS CAN LOOK LIKE

An unsettled Moro reflex often shows up as being easily overwhelmed by ordinary sensory input — sound, light, touch, or busy environments feeling like too much, with a startle response that's bigger than the moment calls for. It can come with real physical wear: a body that runs on overdrive and crashes hard afterward, a harder time fighting off illness, or allergies and sensitivities that seem to have no clear trigger. Emotionally it often swings between two poles — an anxious, keyed-up, quick-to-overreact pattern on one side, and a withdrawn, easily discouraged, low-confidence pattern on the other, sometimes both showing up in the same person depending on the day. Trouble settling down after being startled, or a hard time trusting that a scary moment has really passed, is also part of this picture.

---

3. Tonic Labyrinthine Reflex (TLR)

Whole-Body Position & Tone

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

This reflex ties whole-body muscle tone to body position relative to gravity — not to motion itself, but to whether the body is face-down (which calms and curls it inward) or face-up (which opens and alerts it). It's foundational to posture, balance, and the ability to shift easily between resting and being alert.

WHAT THIS CAN LOOK LIKE

When this reflex hasn't settled, posture is often affected in one of two directions — either a body that runs stiff and overly braced, or one that's floppy and low-tone, tiring easily and slumping without realizing it. Balance can be shaky, especially with the eyes closed or in situations that challenge a stable sense of "up." Because this reflex is closely tied to the body's resting positions, it can also show up as difficulty actually calming down while lying face-down (a position that should feel restful) or difficulty relaxing while lying face-up (a position that should feel easy) — a body that stays braced no matter which way it's positioned. Coordination, especially for sports or activities requiring a stable sense of balance, is often affected too.

How to Access the Complete "Your Reflexes: A Basic Overview"

Covers 35 key reflexes

This sample includes the first three of the thirty-five reflex profiles covered in the complete guide.

Why the rest is password-protected: This document represents original synthesis work built from years of clinical training and practice. We'd rather it be read by the people it's meant for than scraped by bots, harvested by content crawlers, or absorbed into AI training data. Password protection is simply how we keep it in human hands.

How to receive a password

1. Complete the Full Developmental Picture questionnaire — the complete, 35-reflex assessment available at reflexdevelopment.net

2. Visit reflexdevelopment.net/get-password and enter the same email address you used for your questionnaire

3. If that email matches a completed questionnaire on file, the password is sent to you automatically, right away

Disclaimer

This document, and the questionnaire it accompanies, are educational tools intended to help you notice and describe patterns you may already be observing. They are not medical or psychological assessments, and nothing in this material is intended to diagnose, treat, or replace evaluation by a qualified professional. If you have concerns about your own or a family member's development, please consult an appropriate medical or therapeutic provider.

Usage Agreement

When you request your password on the page above, you'll be asked to confirm that:

• You (or the person completing this on behalf of a child) have completed the Full Developmental Picture questionnaire

• This document is for your own personal or family use, and will not be redistributed, republished, or shared outside your household

• You understand this material is educational in nature and does not constitute a diagnosis

reflexdevelopment.net/get-password