

The Feldenkrais Method

All new parents are excited to watch their babies move through the typical, much-anticipated milestones: rolling over, sitting up, crawling, walking. And it's no coincidence that a child's early life is marked by these physical changes. "Developmental patterns are based on physical advances," says Kathleen Aharoni, owner of **WATER OVER STONE** (3309 N. Clark St., 773.755.1347). It's a pattern that persists: As a dancer, Aharoni consistently observed how movement related to emotional response, and as a kid, her self-esteem had always been rooted in physical activity.

This body-mind connection plays center stage in the Feldenkrais Method®, a bodily education system developed by Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais that uses movement to enhance human function. "It facilitates awareness of the body and how to really be in our body—and therefore our lives—at the present moment," says Stephanie Davies, who uses the method at her studio, **SD REHAB** (1962 N. Bissell St., 773.477.7599, sdrehab.com).

Indeed, awareness is perhaps the most important component and goal of the Feldenkrais Method. Aharoni describes it thusly: "Imagine that what you know about yourself as a person is a circle, divided into quarters. As we move through life, we have only those quarters to draw upon; we only know ourselves in those ways. That's why we have habits. But through Feldenkrais, those quarters start dividing and dividing until they are in microslices. We learn all the shapes and nuances of what we're actually capable of. It helps us to become bigger and better choosers and creators in our lives."

Feldenkrais can be used to rehabilitate injuries, alleviate chronic pain or simply help individuals reach their fullest potential. It's popular with athletes and musicians looking to refine their stride or improve dexterity and coordination. "I worked with a musician who experienced a complete reorganization involving her tongue, mouth, throat and fingers," Aharoni says. "[Afterwards], the sound that came out of her instrument was amazing."

How exactly does Feldenkrais accomplish these minor miracles? The discipline employs two distinct methods. During "Awareness Through Movement," an instructor verbally leads students through a sequence of movements (many of which are based on everyday

motions, like reaching or sitting down). "Functional Integration," on the other hand, finds the instructor guiding an individual's movement through touch. In either case, the goal is to facilitate awareness of the body and the relationships between muscles, joints and posture—as well as to recognize and break habitual movements in an effort to improve flexibility and coordination.

"I might have a student lie down on the floor, and I'll ask him or her to cross one leg over the other and tilt them to the right," Aharoni says. "Then I'll ask how much of your body you can feel participating in that movement. At first, it might just be the legs and the hips. But by the end of the lesson, you'll feel how multiple parts of you—the spine, the ribcage, the head—are working together in that movement."

As much as Feldenkrais focuses on how the body connects, it's really about how we connect with ourselves. Aharoni says, "It helps you feel all of you as *you*. It helps people break any patterns that aren't serving them, and it gives them the tools to help themselves."

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