



# Rebound Therapy

## The Perfect Lesson for Students with Special Needs

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NASA describes 'rebounding' as the best exercise known to man. Yet teachers are only just realising the huge benefits of bouncing or trampolining for special needs students. Russell Walker makes the case for universal adoption of Rebound Therapy, or RT for short, in special needs schools.

**A**s a special needs PE teacher my aim is to deliver lessons that are truly inclusive while providing quality of movement and aerobic activity for all students. I feel I have delivered a successful lesson if all students get their heart rate up for at least a few minutes. Teaching students with a huge range of disabilities has always proved challenging and occasionally almost impossible. When I was introduced to Rebound Therapy it was as if someone had invented the perfect PE lesson for students with special needs.

### What is Rebound Therapy?

RT is the use of a trampoline to allow opportunities for a student to 'move' and experience the many benefits of this movement. It is suitable for students who work between the levels of P1 to National curriculum Level 1/2 in PE and Movement. The ability range is from someone being hoisted onto a trampoline and tolerating being gently bounced to independent un-supported standing and seat drop.

RT also offers a functional approach to physiotherapy. Sarah Beat, who

is a physiotherapist with the NHS in London, said: "*Rebound Therapy allows me to successfully deliver physiotherapy to certain students who would not participate or tolerate a traditional floor based approach.*"

The benefits of trampolining - for everyone, not just special needs people - are well documented. The NASA space agency has declared "*rebounding exercise as the most efficient and effective exercise yet devised by man*". This is because it's a low impact, high cardiovascular, resistance workout. This makes Rebound Therapy especially useful for tackling obesity, which is prevalent amongst those with limited mobility, whether in special education or mainstream schools. Unlike more traditional measures, rebounding does not feel like a punishment, chore or 'treatment'. Children in particular see it as something fun.

Tim Richmond, Advanced Skills Special Needs Teacher / SSCO at Linden Lodge School in Wandsworth, London, explained: "Everyone I have seen on a trampoline, when they start to bounce they begin to smile, they enjoy

themselves. The problems come when you tell them it's time to get off!"

### Why do Rebound Therapy?

RT is about much more than just bouncing. Through the movement experienced on the trampoline, students develop key skills, including gross motor skills, independence, relationships, awareness, communication, cognition, perception and enjoyment. It also allows participants to work on specific medical conditions.

### Who can deliver Rebound Therapy?

Once trained any responsible adult, whether a parent, teacher, physiotherapist, occupational therapist or learning support worker can lead and teach RT. "*What I love about Rebound Therapy,*" said Lucy Vijsveld, Deputy Head of Wandsworth's Greenmead Special School, "*is that it doesn't have to be a teacher who leads the lesson.*"

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session Jon was nervous and aggressive. Over 10 weeks Jon made rapid progress from cautiously exploring the trampoline on his own to sharing the experience with me. For each new skill learnt a photo card was made, giving Jon a visual, tangible

### Student Success Stories

While setting up a Rebound Therapy Model of Excellence for Wandsworth Borough's special needs schools (see [www.reboundtherapy.co.uk](http://www.reboundtherapy.co.uk)), I had the privilege of working with the same students over a ten week period. Each student received a 10 to 15 minute lesson once a week and showed huge improvements over the duration of the course. The following examples demonstrate some of the many benefits of RT in these individual cases.

#### Dominic

Dominic is a PMLD student who uses a wheelchair, has metal rods in his back to support his spine, very high muscle tone and muscular contractions. Dominic is hoisted onto the trampoline from his wheelchair and placed in his most comfortable position. After 15 minutes of gentle, rhythmic rebounding Dominic's muscle tone is reduced and the muscular contractions ease, making it possible to manipulate his leg muscles to help improve their function. For Dominic this is not possible with traditional floor based physiotherapy.

#### Jon

Jon is ambulant, autistic, non-verbal and has ADHD. During his first RT

structured routine. Working with me as a rebound therapist, Jon can now perform complex skills including a seat drop with 180° swivel.

#### Eugenie

Eugenie is a wheelchair user and is able to transfer onto the trampoline with adult support. She is very shy and normally nervous of new activities. My challenge was to actively engage Eugenie in a shared task. This was achieved by encouraging her to play

a game of 'Rodeo' (sitting astride a cylindrical physio roll/log). Eugenie tried to stay balanced while I attempted to 'buckaroo' her off of the 'horse'. She had to concentrate, engage her core muscles and react to movements to stay on the 'horse'. The game ended with her falling off the 'horse' into a fit of laughter. Over the term Eugenie was staying on the 'horse' for longer and her posture in her wheelchair had begun to improve.

### Creating a Model of Excellence

Wandsworth has been particularly forward thinking in its adoption of RT. Last year I was approached by Wandsworth School Sport Partnership to help set up a Model of Excellence to incorporate Rebound Therapy into the PE curriculum at the borough's special schools. I consulted on all stages of the process, from choice of equipment, providing staff training, writing lesson plans, implementing assessment and celebration framework, policy writing and preparing detailed risk assessments. The three schools now demonstrate best practice and



are committed to using RT as often as appropriate and as a result most students now have regular access to RT.

The Partnership's Manager, Nick Miller, commented: *"Rebound Therapy was the obvious choice for this kind of development. All you need is a trampoline, hoist and trained staff. After the initial outlay there are minimal ongoing costs. It is the most cost effective development for the special needs PE curriculum we could have made and is hugely popular with both students and staff."*

### Curriculum Entitlement

Despite the well-known benefits of Rebound Therapy, the take-up at special needs schools in other parts of the country has been slow. Practitioners and teachers who have achieved astounding results using this method are now calling for the universal adoption of RT in special needs schools. Roger Leagate, Head Teacher of Linden Lodge School (one of the Wandsworth's Model of Excellence Schools), recently told me: *"In my opinion a high quality special needs PE curriculum must include Rebound Therapy as it is the most inclusive activity for all ability levels."*

As a special needs PE teacher with over 18 years of experience of teaching a wide range of sports and activities, I can safely say that RT provides the best results by far. Some schools at least are starting to reap the benefits. Let's hope more will follow. **S**

### The many benefits of RT include:

- 1) Dynamic physio – working the body to improve bodily function, coordination, head control, balance and saving reactions.
- 2) Improved cardio-vascular fitness.
- 3) Improved core and limb strength.
- 4) Increase or decrease in muscle tone.
- 5) Increased use of the two extra senses – vestibular and proprioceptional.
- 6) Acquisition, use of and evaluation of new physical skills.
- 7) Improved lung function, lymphatic drainage and cough reflex.
- 8) Opportunities for functional communication.
- 9) A high energy work-out with simple commands and communication for ASD and ADHD students.
- 10) Increased confidence and self-esteem.

For more on the benefits and rationale of Rebound Therapy visit [www.reboundtherapy.co.uk](http://www.reboundtherapy.co.uk)

### Reasons to include Rebound Therapy in you PE curriculum:

- Opportunities for higher quantity and quality of 'movement' compared to other PE areas.
- Similar benefits to swimming and hydrotherapy and also provides greater opportunities for all students to increase their heart rates.
- An active, dynamic approach to physiotherapy.
- Logistically easier and cheaper to implement than swimming and hydrotherapy.
- Highly motivating for staff. Support staff can lead sessions.
- Accessible to the whole special needs ability range.
- An easy to follow student progression.
- Can be taught in any reasonably sized space.
- In addition to the physical benefits RT provides opportunities to work on other key life skills i.e. Alertness, Communication, Cognition, Independence, Perception and Relationships.
- Opportunities to measure student progress, not only in terms of physical skills, but also in the key life skills mentioned above.

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