An Introduction to the Upledger CranioSacral Therapy Paradigm

“Every treatment protocol should be dictated by the wisdom of the patient’s own body.”

—Dr. John E. Upledger

This quote by Dr. Upledger is at the heart of Upledger CranioSacral Therapy and is the foundation for its Paradigm.

The Upledger Paradigm describes the core principles of Upledger CranioSacral Therapy (CST). It is a combination of Dr. John E. Upledger’s in-class teachings, his written material, and the interpretation of his work by Upledger Institute International Instructors. The Paradigm is designed to evolve over time as CST continues to progress. It is composed of, but not limited to, the following aspects.

1. Human beings and all living biological systems are gifted by nature with ingenious and inherent methods and processes by which they survive, function, adapt, and self-heal.
   - The craniosacral system (CSS) is a primary system in the body.
   - CranioSacral Therapy (CST) is grounded in the soma/body.
   - CST integrates well with other healing disciplines, including Western conventional disciplines. “CST can integrate with anything.” — John E. Upledger
   - We access the CSS by listening through palpation, melding, and blending with the body’s tissues, by connecting intentionally and communicating directly with the innate intelligence—the Inner Wisdom—of the body.
   - Structure and function are interrelated.
   - We recognize the interconnectedness of all, from the microcosm to the macrocosm.

2. Inherent within each living system are unique and natural adaptive processes that are best suited to each individual system, and which may need support when the living system demonstrates signs of faltering adaptive ability.
   - We strive to use physical, emotional, energetic, and spiritual neutrality, while remaining open and grounded at the same time, subordinating our egos, having no preconceived notions, and remaining non-judgmental.
   - We treat the whole person/being and use a whole-body/whole-person approach.
   - We treat the person/being, not the disease or dysfunction.
   - The Still Point is an inherent, as well as therapeutic, way in which the body functions and adapts, and it is believed to offer the opportunity for the central nervous system to reorganize.

3. Self-healing is inherent in each human being and all biological systems.
   - The therapist acts as a therapeutic facilitator, meeting people ‘where they are,’ to enhance the healing process.
   - We expand CST work to different species, as with horses and dolphins, and in different mediums such as water.
4. Therapeutic support is a process by which inherent self-healing processes are facilitated as gently as possible.

- The intention and intentioned touch are non-invasive, using the least amount of pressure and influence necessary to achieve results.
- The therapist does not take the tissue where it does not take itself; the therapist follows the tissue.
- Upledger disciplines are non-invasive and essentially risk-free.
- Indirect technique versus direct technique is most often used to facilitate change as gently as possible. Use the least amount of force and follow when the tissue asks for more and/or needs a barrier.

5. The solutions to health problems are present in each unique biological system, and distinctive to that particular system.

- Each new patient/client is considered unique and individual.
- After assessing for contraindications, a patient’s/client’s symptoms and diagnoses are put to the background as the therapist establishes rapport with the patient’s/client’s innate intelligence via the tissues, fluids, energetic qualities, and motions.
- Treatments are given without consideration of previous knowledge, so that new findings will not be missed because of bias from previous sessions. “Treat what you find.” ~ John E. Upledger
- We listen to the Inner Wisdom via the Significance Detector (SD), which is a perceived stoppage of the craniosacral rhythm indicating something therapeutically significant.
- CST is process-oriented rather than technique driven.

6. Gentle therapeutic touch, verbal or non-verbal communication, and intention are used to access information about health problems and natural, inherent self-healing processes.

- We work with both the consciousness and nonconsciousness.
- We are open to all aspects of the being: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual, often referred to as a mind-body connection and approach.
- Body, mind and spirit are open systems, that physically and energetically interact with the environment.
- We strive to work with compassion and empathy.

7. The history of each person is contained within their body and is expressed by their tissues, fluids, energetic qualities, and motions.

- After accessing the history through melding with intentional touch of CST, we may explore this information through CST and the SomatoEmotional Release (SER) process.
- The “Avenue of Expression” is one of the foundational pieces for all SER work.

8. Each human being possesses, and has access to, infinite levels of consciousness that can manifest at the conscious level in support of health, self-awareness, self-responsibility.

- Through CST we help the patient/client to take responsibility for their own health.
- We assist in the enhancement of the patient/client’s self-confidence.
- Our goal is patient/client independence from the therapist.
- We work toward the development of a free and trusting communication between the infinite levels of consciousness each of us possess.
- Healing is a joint endeavor toward which the patient/client must offer attention, interest, and commitment and often it requires significant effort.
- Self-realization and empowerment are goals of healing through the CST and SER process.
9. The roles of the therapist are to facilitate client access to their ‘inner-knowing’, which is called the "Inner Physician,” and to follow the Inner Physician’s guidance in support of self-healing.

- There is an Inner Physician (IP) in all of us who understands each health problem and how best to resolve it.
- The core of the Upledger Paradigm is the IP.
- The IP is accessible through the Craniosacral System (CSS), as well as other systems in the body.
- We support the IP by connecting, listening, and trusting the IP, which entails a shift from listening to an outside authority to listening to an inside authority (innate intelligence).
- Melding is the way of entering into a therapeutic relationship that shows us how, when, and where to follow and facilitate the IP, as well as to what level, degree, and quality, as shown by the patient’s/client’s IP.
- Melding engenders a shared space or living field that becomes a therapeutic space for listening, following, and facilitating.
- We connect with the IP through intentioned touch, often using the techniques of Therapeutic Dialogue and Guided Therapeutic Imagery as accompaniment.
- The therapist’s responsibility is to follow the advice and guidance given by the IP once the IP is brought into “dialogue” or nonverbally with guidance of the Significant Detector.
- We connect with and integrate CST techniques with the core, the CSS.
- “SER is only the beginning.” ~ John E. Upledger --- The process continues.

10. The dedication to maintaining, sustaining, and researching these concepts, and any others related to body-mind-spirit, integration, and inherent self-healing, is important for practicing CST therapists.

- Simple, straightforward communication on the part of the therapist is necessary so that the patient/client may best understand what is being done to facilitate their healing.
- Healthcare professionals from all disciplines have access to this knowledge, and the ultimate beneficiaries are the patients and clients.
- Therapists must practice in order to become proficient, competent, self-realized, and well-integrated so as to offer safety, trust, and optimal facilitation.
- Competency increases with clinical experience, offering the opportunity to learn to trust one’s hands while focusing on the patient’s/client’s experience.
- An important part of becoming a well-integrated, self-realized, and more competent therapist is to get treated.
- "Multi-therapist” treatments may enhance the treatment process.
- We strive to work within the core intent of CST techniques and Upledger principles.
- Patients/clients are our best teachers.
- We will always remain open to the research, evaluation, and use of new methods, provided they are in keeping with the above criterion that applies to all our methods and disciplines.
- The Upledger Paradigm is a way of living life, which includes a constellation of the above interrelated principles that function as a whole for the health, well-being, and creative evolution of life.
Upledger CranioSacral Therapy Definitions

**Avenue of Expression** – all of the structures, tissues, fluids and energies involved in allowing and performing the oral expression of thoughts, images and feelings, and whose components have at least some influences over one’s ability to express oneself, and the foundational work for all SomatoEmotional Release (SER) processes, verbal or nonverbal. The Avenue of Expression also opens for patient/client connection to their inner emotions, to get in touch with how they are feeling.

**Blend** – to join a therapeutic process by connecting energetically with another being or beings, with or without physical touch. Intention of trust and acceptance is the basis of the process. Neutrality, a healthy therapeutic boundary and listening to one’s Inner Physician for guidance is fundamental to the process. That will set ground for communication from that being, their tissues and their energy.

**Compassion** – the feeling of sympathy and concern which arises when one becomes aware of another’s misfortune or suffering, understanding their situation as they are experiencing it, and helping to relieve any suffering without judgment, with empathy-without losing one’s neutrality.

**Consciousness** – a state of general awareness of oneself, one’s environment and one’s own mental processes, such as thoughts, feelings, and sensations, including those on a universal level.

**Core intent** – someone’s, or something’s, underlying intention, and inner meaning. It clarifies the purpose of any support, therapy technique, or intervention engaged in by a therapist with a patient/client. That initial awareness of core intent keeps the therapist in observant state and connected to the process and its unfolding.

**Craniosacral rhythm (CSR)** – a subtle intrinsic rhythmic motion within the body that can be felt in general as a widening and narrowing of the cranial vault, and external and internal rotation of the rest of the body. The rate of the CSR has been shown to be in a range of 4 – 12 cycles per minute. The source of the CSR is unknown, but there are numerous ideas such as the fluctuating increase and decrease of cerebrospinal fluid production within the central nervous system.

**Craniosacral system (CSS)** – the physiological semi-closed hydraulic system contained within the dura mater, which envelops the brain and spinal cord. It’s function is to produce, circulate and resorb cerebrospinal fluid, maintaining the physiological environment in which the brain and nervous system develop, live, and function, and often felt to be where the mind, body and spirit meet. This physiological system is composed of the bones of the skull and the sacrum, the meningeal membranes, the cerebrospinal fluid, enclosed within the waterproof Dura Mater, the outermost layer of these meninges, and the system that regulate input and outflow of the CSF.

**CranioSacral Therapy (CST)** – as developed and named by John E. Upledger, D.O. A complementary method of gentle, hands-on manual therapy for the purpose of evaluation and treatment of the craniosacral system, and its related systems, working with the natural unique rhythms of the body to support and nourish the central nervous system, pinpointing and addressing problem sources, may it be within the CSS, external to the CSS, emotional or spiritual. CST, as a manual therapy, works with a person’s/being’s natural, self-correcting, healing mechanisms to improves overall health and well-being.

**Direct technique** – a therapeutic process wherein one follows the tissue to end range of barrier, holds the tissue up against its barrier, until it releases, allowing for softening to occur and release of the abnormal restriction; the opposite of indirect technique where we follow first to end range of ease and hold until release, before we go to the end range of barrier and treat if needed.

**Ego-subordination** – the state of putting one’s ego in a position of lower priority, as a therapist should when one is practicing CST and SER. Not have the need to get credit or personal power for good results during a treatment. Not have need to lead or influence the treatment other than following the Inner Wisdom’s treatment plan.

**Empathy** – the ability to understand and share the feelings of another, while at the same time transcending one’s own subjectivity and maintaining personal integrity in order to be present for that person’s subjective experience. It is an important part of every treatment session, especially with therapeutic dialogue in the SER process.

**Empowerment** – the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one’s life and claiming one’s rights.
Facilitate – to make an action or process easier or more productive, as in the goal of a therapist when supporting someone in a healing process. To neutrally initiate and then follow the therapy process by following the tissue and the inner treatment plan of the Inner Wisdom and give appropriate support when needed.

Facilitator – one who makes an action or process easier. One who neutrally initiates, follows, and supports the therapeutic process as needed.

Function – a process, work or action performed by an organism or any part of an organism. In CST, function is considered to be interrelated with structure. A goal of CST is to help the client/patient to restore and optimize the functional operation of their body.

Grounded – referring to the state of being wherein one uses their feeling senses to connect to the earth, can be literally and/or intentionally. The optimal supportive state for a therapist to maintain in a therapeutic setting. Being centered within oneself to be fully present with the client.

Indirect technique – a therapeutic process wherein one follows the tissue to end range of ease, holds the tissue up against the end range, until it releases, allowing for softening to occur and release of the abnormal restriction, sometimes followed by also treating to the end range of barrier; the opposite of direct technique where we follow first to end range of barrier and hold until release.

Innate intelligence – the inborn wisdom we all possess which is responsible for the organization, healing, and health maintenance throughout all of our body’s systems.

Inner Physician (IP) – also known by many names, such as Inner Guide, Inner Spirit, Inner Voice, Higher Self; the voice of wisdom, the part inside all of us that maintains awareness of our inner state and outer conditions; the form of innate intelligence and the “all-knowing” part of all of us that functions holistically at a personal level to achieve and maintain optimal health, well-being and self-realization of each individual as a whole body, mind and spirit, and which the therapist connects with therapeutically in the Therapeutic Imagery and Dialogue techniques of the SER process to do so. The CranioSacral Therapist must establish a trusting relationship with the Inner Physician in order to help the client/patient get to the primary problems, and to not mask core issues by offering symptomatic relief.

The precise principles that guide the development of trust between the Inner Physician and the therapist are as follows:

1. The therapist must focus exclusively on the patient during the session. His/her mind must not be preoccupied with other matters. Inner Physicians can sense distraction — even in therapists with excellent acting skills!

2. The therapist must be open to whatever twists and turns might occur during the session.

3. The therapist’s belief system must be suspended.

4. There is no room for judgmental behavior or thoughts on the part of the therapist.

5. The therapist does not heal or cure. The healing is done by the patient using the help and facilitation of the therapist. Symptomatic suppression can be imposed by a “healing” therapist, but this may only be denying a deeper problem its voice.

6. Initially, CST employs a soft, gentle use of the hands to facilitate the self-correction of the craniosacral system. Concurrently, this touch is used to convey to the Inner Physician the love, trust, and sincere dedication of the therapist. This loving, trusting and dedicated energy is offered without conditions or strings attached to facilitate the deepest possible healing.

7. Once trust is established, the therapist with intention invites a connection to the IP and connects with the tissue with intentional touch. Applying a technique or following the tissue, sometimes the therapist feels drawn to use greater pressure to facilitate corrections in the craniosacral system or other areas in the body. The therapist may, on occasion, intervene as needed to meet the tension underlying in the tissue, but always listening to the tissue and the Significance Detector, which is the language of the Inner Physician.

8. CranioSacral Therapy improves fluid movement in all systems throughout the body. By doing this it enhances the supply of nutrients to cells; the removal of toxins and waste products from the tissues; the circulation of immune cells, thus enhancing the body’s natural defenses against disease-producing bacteria and viruses; the delivery of fresh blood to organs and tissues; and the movement of
desirable for a whole organism or system; new pains, the same.

- healing
- heal their physical body and vice versa, the nonconscious of the patient to “read” the nonconscious of the therapist. From that connection/reading, Inner Wisdom
- the nonconscious well of information that lies within each person, which is necessary to understand the underlying causes for health problems and what must be done to resolve them. It is the Inner Wisdom that makes the appearance of the Inner Physician possible.

Integration – 1. the combining and coordinating of individual parts into a unified whole; 2. Anat. the process wherein separate parts of an organism are structurally and functionally made a part of a whole organism or system; 3. Psych./CST. the combination of separate parts, as in elements of a personality, to form a complete, consistent, and stable whole, and a vital aspect of the SER process as well as all CST treatments. 4. a way to balance and invite the body, mind, and spirit to adapt to changes that happened during individual treatments. Also refers to the treatment process as continuous inner work to become a well-integrated person.

Intention – 1. the state of one’s mind at the time they carry out an action; 2. CST. the state of one’s mind during a therapeutic session, putting aside ego and agenda to be present for a healing process, with the optimal therapeutic goal being to align with the wisdom of one’s body and allow it to guide their process to an outcome of healing. CST treatment starts with intention—intention to ground, to connect to the Inner Wisdom of the client/patient, to stay connected the entire session. Intention for the highest good for the client.

Intentioned touch/therapeutic touch – the act of a therapist engaging and blending with a patient through touch, and either consciously or unconsciously initiating the treatment session with the intention of that patient’s healing. The intentional touch allows the nonconscious of the patient to “read” the nonconscious of the therapist. From that connection/reading of the nonconscious, the patient can decide what the therapist is capable of supporting. With the intentional touch the therapist can offer universal energy and non-judgmental support for whatever healing process needs to occur and is the technique Dr. Upledger often used to initiate the SER process.

Meld – CST. the act and process of connecting, with another being, listening to their tissues, possibly using the Inner Wisdom as guidance and possibly dialogue, while staying blended and neutral and maintaining a healthy boundary and positive therapeutic intent. Meld to an energy cyst and stay melded can be what is needed for the client to stay in the process. If the client loses connection, what is often needed is that the therapist check if they are melded enough. It is like an art; you can play with the melding like you play a piano.

Mind-body-spirit approach – a therapeutic philosophy of healing which believes that one’s thoughts and emotions can be used to help heal their physical body and vice-versa, considering the physiological, mental, and spiritual parts of all of us, and that there is a natural healing force within all of us to facilitate this process.

Mind-body-spirit connection – the term referring to the concept that the mental, spiritual, and physiological components of living creatures are interrelated.
Multiple-facilitator treatment – also known as multiple-therapist treatment and “multi-hands”; a treatment where more than one therapist is present with hands-on to facilitate a patient’s therapeutic process. Generally, in a lead therapist and assisting therapists-type format. Therapists blend with the patient and connect to each other’s energy through the client’s body, communicate about perceptions and insights, enhance energy for tissue release and with unbiased therapeutic intent for optimal healing, all working in harmony as one therapist. Very powerful way to work with SER.

Neutral – 1. CST. in evaluation and treatment, a state where energy is neither sent nor received by the therapist, acting solely as a conduit with no engaging intention to avoid influencing the patient, or one’s perception of the information coming from that patient; Energetically, neutral is to initially neither send nor receive energy, but with invitation that the client’s body will do what is needed—either start to dissipate energy or draw in energy. It is a quiet, still, aware, centered, compassionate, and receptive practitioner state. It is also an active state through which the practitioner relates to a client and aligns with, is led by, and follows the client’s unique inner guidance. The concept of therapeutic neutrality, also known as "neutral," in CST has three aspects: a) the practitioner’s inner state, b) the client-practitioner relationship, and c) the therapeutic process. Neutrality releases the practitioner from assumptions and preplanned approaches, so as to be able to see, feel, accept, and support the client as a unique individual. 2. SER. a state of being grounded, impartial, unbiased and without judgment, wherein one has no inclination toward one side or the other, or support for one thing or another, in a conflict, disagreement or negotiation.

Nonconscious – any somatic, mental or spiritual process or situation not within a patient’s conscious awareness at the time, and a term used by Dr. Upledger to avoid the wide variety of connotations which have accumulated around the words “unconscious” and “subconscious”.

Non-invasive – referring to a process, or procedure, which does not involve connecting with the body in an invasive/intruding manner, physically, mentally, energetically, or spiritually, but rather remaining neutral and maintaining healthy boundaries.

Non-judgmental – referring to anything without bias or opinion on the basis of one's personal standards, beliefs or opinions. A quality necessary for a therapist to maintain in the therapeutic healing process of others.

Non-verbal communication – the sending and receiving of wordless expression and messages through methods other than verbally, such as body language, facial expressions, body posture, touch, or energy. The therapist can communicate to the client’s nonconscious with thoughts, intention, therapeutic imagery, etc. Listening to the Significant Detector is important part of the process.

Palpation – the act of using touch, of varying degrees of pressure, to explore the structures of the body beneath the skin and use one’s proprioceptors to determine what is occurring within it, as well as monitoring the (electromagnetic) field surrounding the body.

Paradigm – a frame of reference, example or model, and a distinct set of concepts or thought patterns which are often a different way of looking at something.

Preconceived notion – an idea, which one has already decided upon the answer, whether it be correct or incorrect, before the situation actually occurs, something we strive to not do in the practice of CST.

Process-oriented – referring to something which emphasizes and focuses on systems or processes rather than underlying causes and results.

Resolution – a solution to a problem, as in reaching a decision and moving past a problem. It is an ultimate, yet not guaranteed, goal of therapeutic imagery and dialogue within the SER process, whether it be temporary or long-term. Clients/patients also get resolution to issues (physical, emotional, spiritual) in general in CST without necessarily being an SER.

Self-healing – the ability for one’s body to heal itself, without outside intervention.

Self-realization – the satisfaction of reaching one’s own potential, perhaps by understanding one’s path and purpose, fulfilling one’s optimal health and possibilities in life, and an important part of CST or SER process, as depicted in the Patient-Facilitator Connection model. Client/patient gets resolution to issues, whether physical, emotional, spiritual, or other source. Self-realization can also be for a body organ or structure, such as a part of the brain that has never been seen. It can be self-realization at the cellular level.
Significance Detector (SD) – a sudden perceived stoppage of the craniosacral rhythm indicating a therapeutically significant body position, thought, image, sensation, or verbal process is occurring, allowing the opportunity for an energy cyst to release, whether it be physical and/or emotional. An SD has a quality and different depth to it. The therapist can observe when the SD gets deeper and expresses more significance. Also, when the SD get shallower, it can mean that the therapist and client are losing connection to the significant thing. Not all sudden perceived stops of the craniosacral rhythm are SDs, as a person could have moved into a hyper- or hypo- arousal trauma state. An SD is different from a ‘freeze’ state when a client is triggered into a trauma memory and their system shuts down. Often this is a dissociation from the experience for self-preservation. SD is more a deeper suspension as the patient descends into another layer of experience.

Soma – the whole body from the deepest cell to the skin.

SomatoEmotional Release (SER) – a natural evolution of CST, a sign of emotional release from the body tissue. The treatment process named and developed by Dr. John Upledger. SER is spontaneous expression of emotion which, for reasons deemed appropriate by some part of one’s nonconscious, has been retained, suppressed and/or isolated within the soma, and which is released as part of a therapeutic occurrence and in connection with physical tissue release. SomatoEmotional Release is a manual therapy that enables the therapist to be led by the Inner Wisdom to support the client to connect to emotions, and safely and its own time, to release them and come to a resolution with the incident. An SER can be quiet or loud, gentle or active, and may or may not involve conscious recollection of the initial incident or trauma.

Still Point – the temporary perceived interruption, or perceived stoppage, of the craniosacral rhythm, either spontaneous or imposed anywhere on the body, which is believed to offer the opportunity for the craniosacral system to therapeutically reorganize with such physiological effects as redirecting and enhancing fluid motion, releasing minor membranous restrictions, relaxing connective tissue, relaxing the sympathetic nervous system, improving autonomic function, facilitating homeostasis and balancing the craniosacral rhythm (CSR).

Structure – the arrangement of particles or parts, or the formation of tissues or organs as part of a whole organism and interrelated with the function of that organism.

Therapeutic dialogue – a therapeutic technique employed to help enhance a therapeutic session, wherein the therapist and some parts of the patient/client are engaged in conversation, symbolically or aloud. The therapist stays grounded, blended and objective, and utilizing imagery, whether solicited or unsolicited, and guided by the patient’s craniosacral rhythm via the Significance Detector, and Inner Physician, to help facilitate the resolution of a meaningful healing process, or better understanding of one’s situation for optimal acceptance and self-realization. The different parts of the client that the therapist can have a dialogue with through the voice of the client/patient can be their Inner Wisdom, resistance, organs, cells, pain, or other symptoms, even to other beings such as guides, family members, or ancestors.

Therapeutic imagery – a nonconscious communication, which can present in myriad of forms such as a vision, smell, sound, taste, movement or feeling, and when brought to the consciousness, often with the help of therapeutic dialogue, gives one the opportunity to make decisions and realize their own potential and personal truth, and experience a healing process.

Therapeutic imagery and dialogue – a technique used during a CST session using imagery and conversation to gently connect to the patient’s Inner Physician and to help facilitate changes in the tissue. A non-leading, therapeutic conversation focused on supporting the client’s healing process. The Significance Detector is followed by the therapist when dialoguing. How the tissue responds is much more important than either the questions we ask or the verbal responses we get from the client.

Therapeutic intent – the grounded, blended, and objective intention held by the therapist while facilitating treatment, and their ability to put aside ego and agenda to support and enhance the healing process, with the optimal therapeutic goal being to align with the well-being of the patient on multiple levels and allowing their process to reach an outcome of healing.

Upledger Paradigm – the philosophy, set of concepts and core intent of CST, which are unique to the teachings of John E. Upledger, including research and theory, and exemplified by such terms as Inner Physician, Inner Wisdom, Still Point, Significance Detector, and Melding.
Whole Body Approach – also known as Whole Person Approach; the method of assessing and treating body dysfunctions without regard for compartmentalized symptoms or diagnoses, but rather treating what is found when the entire body and apparent unrelated areas or body parts are considered possible causes for the dysfunction, as well as considering mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects as possible causes, or contributors. Evaluation and treatment of the body dysfunctions by connecting with intention to the Inner Wisdom and tissue memory and to treat what is found, thereby potentially assisting the person on many levels – physically, mentally, emotionally and/or spiritually. The cause of a problem is not necessary at the site of the symptoms. It is about trusting the inner guidance, which can lead to the facilitation of a global release that can be life changing, rather than a local release of a symptom.