

Pediatric Development Center



~ Newsletter ~



2010

We provide occupational therapy evaluation, treatment and consultation for children with developmental delays, autism/Asperger, cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome, sensory processing disorders, attention, behavioral concerns, handwriting, and other areas of weakness. Contact us for further information:

125 Presumpscot St.
Portland, ME.
(207) 699-5531

Good Resources:

www.southpawenterprises.com

www.integrationscatalog.com

Arnie and His School Toys: Simple Sensory Solutions That Build Success by Jennifer Veenendall (read this one with your child! ☺)

What is Sensory Integration?

Cecilia Cruse, Therapist

It is organizing the senses for functional use. A child's basic awareness of his body and the world around him is integration. The senses must work together, and for most children this happens naturally. Information from the visual, auditory, tactile (touch), vestibular (movement sense) and proprioceptive (muscles and joints) systems must all come together to help a child learn to sit, jump rope, balance, pay attention in class, copy an assignment, or read a book.

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) is to the brain what indigestion is to the stomach. Information from the senses gets jumbled, lost or processed incorrectly. Typical areas of poor integration include touch, muscles and joints, and the movement system. Children with SPD often have poor attention span, hyperactivity or low energy, difficulty in being touched, and gross-motor and fine-motor problems. Faced with the overwhelming challenges of these sensory problems, they may become

tense, unhappy or act out inappropriately.

The Sensory Conscious Child

Abillitutions Education

Sensory Processing is the ability to take information from outside of the body and use it effectively. This information comes to us in a variety of forms (sounds, sights, touch, pressure, movement, taste). For some of us (children and adults), this ability is challenged and information is misinterpreted. It is almost as if the individual is walking around "unconscious" of their surroundings. What we see then is often an under-response or an over-response to the sensation. Children with SPD can have poor attention span, hyperactivity, low energy, difficulty being touched, picky eating, a low tolerance to crowds and noise, emotional outbursts all stemming from the misunderstanding of sensory information. Providing solutions to sensory challenged children can be as simple as adjusting the lighting in a room to a more complex solution off finding the right amount of pressure to apply with a special vest. Occupational Therapists aim to understand these children and provide solutions that they are a part of so that, as adults, they can avoid the "behavior problem" label and instead become fully conscious contributing adults.

Looking 'Deep' for Ways to Calm

*Deanna Macioce, MS,
OTR/L*

As adults, in our daily lives we are always naturally choosing techniques that calm and regulate us. We have learned that chewing gum during a staff meeting helps us to stay alert or to fall asleep at night we need to have a blanket on us no matter how warm it may be. These are those little things we do to feed our sensory systems. Every day we all use coping mechanisms despite not having a diagnosis that includes sensory processing concerns. From the time we were infants we began the process of trying to figure out what made us tick, but oftentimes it required the assistance of our parents. For example, it was our parents who figured out that wrapping us in a swaddling blanket or providing us with a pacifier would quiet our cries. Inherently we then began the process learning what our systems required.

For many of our children with Sensory Processing Disorders (SPD) or diagnoses that included sensory difficulties, figuring out what their bodies need is still very hard for them. And oftentimes when their systems become over stimulated, they communicate their discomfort with crying or with a tantrum. In addition, these children may exhibit an increase in activity demonstrating difficulty to attend and focus on more involved tasks. Therefore,

we are left with trying to find ways to calm, organize and allow them to increase their abilities to attend. It usually requires the teamwork of parents, therapists, teachers and aides. One successful technique for calming is to provide deep pressure. Deep pressure is input that is provided in a firm and strong manner.

It can be applied by simply giving a massage, providing hugs and squeezes, or a good roll up in a blanket. Other ideal ways to provide deep pressure include the use of wearable weighted items, the Steamroller, and various activities. Weighted equipment has expanded outside of just weighted vests, however, these are still ideal because in most cases the weight can be individually measured for each child. It is recommended that an occupational therapist be consulted when using one to ensure that the proper weight and time protocols are followed. Other weighted items include blankets which are helpful in providing deep pressure to the whole body. These are very beneficial for calming before nap and bed times. Hats, shoulder wraps, and lap pads are also available to fit both the needs and preference of a child. The same effect may be achieved by having a child carry a backpack with weighted items around the house. Another beneficial wearable item is a Bear Hug vest. This vest fits snugly around the trunk and shoulders providing deep pressure. Since it is made of

neoprene it moves easily with the child.

The Southpaw Steamroller is a fun way to incorporate providing deep pressure input during activities including obstacle courses. It can also be used as a preparatory mechanism to organize a child before tabletop activities. It is a great addition to any clinic or classroom.

Activities that provide deep pressure are often referred to as "heavy work". These include animal walks, wheelbarrow walking, burrito rolls, carrying and pushing weighted items. Simply adding heavy work activities and those that provide proprioceptive input into a sensory diet will help with maintaining a child's regulation level throughout the day.

As parents, teachers and therapists we need to take on the role of trying to learn what it is that makes our children tick. Paying attention to their stimulation levels and always knowing if it is sensory or behavioral is sometimes difficult. So the next time you are looking for something to calm and regulate your child, remember to look "deep" for an activity or equipment to help you out.

