

# Pediatric Development Center



~ Newsletter ~  
December  
2009

**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.integrationscatalog.com](http://www.integrationscatalog.com)

[www.sensory-processing-disorder.com](http://www.sensory-processing-disorder.com)

## **Inclement Weather**

Throughout the winter we will experience snow and ice. Our office is usually open unless the weather is extremely bad. It is unpredictable how the day will go, whether the roads will clear early or a storm will come in later. Your therapist or the office will contact you to determine the best route of action. It is very important that we have your current phone number, including a cell phone or other daytime phone number. In case of very severe weather we will list a clinic closing on WCSH 6. Also, please remember to call if your child is sick and will not be coming to the clinic.

## **Sensory Strategies for Surviving the Holiday Season** *Written by Jamie Levine, OTR/L*



Many children are either over-stimulated or under-stimulated by their senses, including sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, and/or movement. Everyone uses their senses to process and understand the world around them. When these senses are not integrated properly, the world can be a scary place, particularly during the holiday season.

A child who is visually sensitive may easily be overwhelmed by holiday lights and a sound sensitive

child can be over-stimulated by a noisy party with music. A child who is sensitive to touch may interpret a light bump as a push or shove and be rattled in a large crowd. In response, children with Sensory Integration Dysfunction often act out, demonstrating behaviors that may appear extreme and inappropriate for the particular situation.

Fortunately, a number of simple sensory strategies can help your child adapt to the intense stimulation surrounding the holiday season:

*Be Sound Sensitive:* Provide ear plugs for loud environments. Standard headphones with relaxing music may calm children in noisy surroundings. The Therapeutic Listening Program, which utilizes specialized headphones and formatted music, provides excellent relief for children with auditory sensitivities.

*Be Space Sensitive:* When attending a crowded event, identify a quiet, safe space your child can go to if over-stimulated. Indicate the location at the start of the event and encourage your child to ask to be taken there if a break from the crowd is needed.

*Be Movement Sensitive:* It is difficult for children to sit quietly for long periods of time. This is particularly true for movement seeking children. Encourage safe, structured movement

activities every 1-2 hours. Simple movement breaks can include jumping jacks, wall push-ups, toe touches, or “shaking the sillies out” of each body part.

*Be Touch Sensitive:* Allow your child to wear clothing he/she finds comfortable. Avoid pre-party conflict even if causal clothes may result in a few raised eyebrows. Uncomfortable clothing may ruin a child’s and your evening.

#### *Prepare for Food*

*Sensitivities:* Never expect party hosts to be prepared for your food sensitive child. Bring along something you know your child will eat to avoid meltdowns at mealtime.

#### *Dealing with Change:*

Prepare the child for holiday imposed schedule changes in advance. Use daily calendars or schedule boards listing upcoming activities. Add pictures if necessary. Activities can be listed hourly, daily, or weekly depending upon the child’s needs. Review the day’s activities with your child each morning.

One of the most important aspects of dealing with your sensory sensitive child is trying to relax yourself! Before a potentially challenging event, take some time to yourself to relax and rejuvenate. Children sense the moods of those around them. If you are already stressed with anticipation, the child may instinctively

become so as well. If you are relaxed and prepared, you will be able to remain calm if difficulties arise. Your child will react positively to your calm response.

Finally, remember the purpose of the holidays! Holidays are meant to be joyful, happy occasions. Enjoy yourself and just do the best that you can. You do not have to apologize for doing what is appropriate for you and your family. Take pleasure in the holiday season!

### **20 Simple Ways to Calm a Child** **“Bright Ideas” from** **Integrations**

- 1) Soften the lights
- 2) Bring the child to a less busy room
- 3) Have the child face a simple wall
- 4) Keep a “chill-out” space or relaxation space always available...and know the signs before someone needs it
- 5) Be aware of temperature and make sure the child hasn’t over-heated. If necessary, turn on a fan, remove a sweater, etc.
- 6) Provide soft, slow, rhythmic humming, song or music (no words) or metronome
- 7) Repeat an affirmation rhythmically, such as “it’ll be ok, it’ll be ok, it’ll be ok...” (no other talking on ANYONE’S

part until everyone is very calm

- 8) Dampen extraneous noises by closing the door or putting headphones on the child and providing calming music
- 9) “Swaddle” by rolling the child in a blanket
- 10) Cuddle or rub or rhythmically pat the back firmly
- 11) With child laying down, apply deep pressure with cushions or bean bag chairs
- 12) Have a child sit in a rocking chair, bouncy chair, or on a ball chair
- 13) Trampoline, or if not available, jump up and down 10 times
- 14) Wall or chair push-ups
- 15) Offer something to suck on, like a hard candy or a snack size applesauce, pudding, or yogurt to eat through a straw
- 16) Crunchy foods can calm. Try goldfish crackers, pretzel rods, or carrot sticks
- 17) Deep breathing
- 18) Blow whistles and march to music
- 19) Have the child blow bubbles
- 20) Chew on a “chewy”

