



What We have Learned About Sensory Processing

Diana Henry, OTR, FAOTA

My husband Rick and I travel on ‘ateachabout’ searching for ways to share our piece of the sensory puzzle via our ‘Sensory Tools’ products and workshops for teachers, students, parents, teens, tots and pets. We now realize that collaboration is the key!

Our latest project *The Sensory Processing Measure* (SPM) includes not only the home and main classroom, but also the art, music, PE teacher as well as the recess and playground assistant, the cafeteria worker and even the bus driver into the team. Linking developmental optometrists, nutritionists, physicians, social workers, nurses, therapists and other health professionals together with the home and school community brings great results.

Lois Hickman, M.S., OTR, FAOTA

Therapy on a farm benefits individuals with sensory integrative or physical challenges in tangible ways. Therapeutic experiences in a truly natural setting emphasizes connection with the earth and nurtures all the senses: sight, smell, touch, proprioception. The functional goals of occupational therapy encompass work, play, and self care. As one child told me “At home, we have to make up the chores. Here, they’re real.”

“Real” chores can match a child’s or adult’s needs, whether strengthening balance, reducing tactile defensiveness, improving motor planning or memory, or improving modulation. A sense of self-worth naturally evolves with mastery of activities that matter in a real sense. Relating to animals and the garden foster self-understanding, empathy, and relating to others. As an adult client related, “Everyone needs this therapy!”

Kimberly Geary, OTR/L, Jumpstart Therapy, LLC

- Children and their presentation of sensory processing disorders are unique. We must use an individualized rather than a “cookie cutter” treatment approach, tailored to a child’s strengths and weaknesses.
- Sensory processing disorders rarely exist in isolation. All therapists must be vigilant for issues requiring referrals to other professionals.
- Therapists who say they have all the answers do not and parents who want someone else to fix sensory processing disorders are naive. No one has a magic bullet. We must be patient, persistent and willing to try new options.
- Treating children with developmental disorders is a partnership based on science, art, trust, communication and a willingness to persevere.

Sally Brockett, M.S., IDEA Training Center

While individuals with special needs have complex and challenging differences, the key to recovery lies in correcting the root causes of their problems. Usually these fundamental problems involve immune system dysregulation, an overload of toxins and nutritional deficiencies. In addition, the sensory systems are poorly integrated.

Treatments and interventions for sensory problems have advanced markedly in the past 15 years. Programs such as Berard AIT, vision therapy and sensory integration therapy can all be very successful. Identifying the root causes and obtaining appropriate intervention is key to achieving recovery.

Leonard J. Press, O.D., FCOVD, FAAO

The Vision & Learning Center, Fair Lawn, New Jersey

Through the past 15 years, the growth in optometric understanding of vision development has paralleled and contributed to the burgeoning knowledge in child development. The most important thing we have learned is that the earlier we identify, diagnose, and treat, the more promising is the outcome.

From an optometric viewpoint, this process involves the application of lenses, prisms, and more active forms of vision therapy. Ultimately developmental optometry should be an integral part of early intervention services, in addition to guiding development through the school years.

Sabra Gelfond, CCC-SLP

National Speech/Language Therapy Center

We know now more than ever before that there is hope for every child struggling with learning challenges. New, innovative techniques based on groundbreaking brain science shows us that given the proper stimuli we can change the way the brain looks and works. Neuropathways can be exercised and worked just like muscles, enabling children to learn faster and more efficiently. I would never have imagined this 15 years ago!

Georgia DeGangi, Ph.D., OTR

ITS for Children

Therapists must use a comprehensive, integrated model of treatment to address the constitutional problems of the increasing number of children with regulatory disorders. Effective intervention addresses the impact of problems such as irritability, hyper-reactivity, sleep disorders and eating problems on the family.

Everyday activities must incorporate sensory integration techniques to help children organize their attention, adapt to and tolerate a broad range of sensory experiences. When therapists combine approaches parents becomes more attuned to their children’s needs, and the quality of the parent-child relationship improves.

My new book, *Effective Parenting for the Hard-to-Manage Child*, co-authored with Anne Kendall, PhD provides specific strategies and techniques for children who are intense, highly reactive, and unable to calm themselves down. We describe key concepts and everyday activities that helps children take charge of their problems and parents face behavioral challenges successfully.

Hans F. Lessmann, O.D., FCOVD

Vision Development Institute

In the past 15 years I have had to do more movement work in my vision therapy sessions, because today’s children move less and less. They do not walk to school, as I did as a child. I even ran home for lunch, walked back for the afternoon, and then went back home again at the end of the day, covering two miles daily! Now car seats, buses, and parents cart kids to school. This practice creates a host of problems.

Kids need to move, move, move to learn how to effectively work their bodies and perceive their world. If they don’t move before or after school, then they will move during school. Then we end up labeling this “abnormal” ADD or ADHD, when in fact we have abnormally restricted their opportunities to move. We all need to move and if we did maybe, we could all have better attention.