



NEWSLETTER

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I'M A CHILD WITH AUTISM!

I'm a child with **AUTISM**. I see my environment differently. Look for my strengths and you will find them. If you take a glimpse into my world, you will see that I prefer **CONSISTENT, PREDICTABLE** and **FIXED** routines. Please keep it the same, right from the start. In case of any change, please show me what to expect. I may come across as **RIGID** and **INFLEXIBLE**, but any change can be **ANXIETY PROVOKING** for me.

I am a **VISUAL LEARNER**. I learn better by seeing things rather than listening. I almost always have a hard time listening to and following verbal instructions. Please **SHOW** me what you mean. When you provide me with **VERBAL INFORMATION**, please keep it **SHORT, SIMPLE, CONCRETE** and **PRECISE**.

I understand and **PROCESS** my **ENVIRONMENT IN A UNIQUE WAY**. Sometimes, my vision provides me with only snapshots of images about the things happening around me and hence I may seem lost to you. You may get frustrated with my speed of responding and I may be too slow, but please give me some extra time to string these snapshots together and make sense of the whole movie! I'm not a fan of "multi-tasking". It is hard for me to attend to more than one thing at any given time.

I organize and remember things **CONCRETELY**. Generalizing the skills that I have learnt does not come naturally to me. Therefore, I get anxious when I'm expected to perform an old task in a new way. Also, when you talk to me, please use simple language, because I tend to understand things **LITERALLY**. Instead of saying "Hold your Horses!" just say, "stop running".

The only special
needs I have is
to be loved and
accepted



I have difficulty following SOCIAL CUES and do not follow what my peers and adults around think of me.

I also seem to have limited VARIETY OF PLAY. This is not by choice, but because I don't know otherwise. It is for you to CAPTURE my MOTIVATION and INTEREST to help me enhance my play and learning.

I may feel OVERWHELMED by my surroundings. ONE THING AT A TIME PLEASE! I will learn best when skills are broken down into tiny "bite sized" pieces.

I REQUEST YOU ALL TO WORK WITH ME, VALUE ME AND LOVE ME.

Look for my strengths and you will find them!

SENSORY INPUT EQUALS FOOD

Most of our children require extra food! Rich sensory food that is stimulating to the brain, so as to allow sensory and motor skills to develop fully and functionally. This will help with efficient sensory processing, influence the child's attention and arousal levels through the day and promote optimal learning and behavior.

Just like eating a balanced diet is essential to stay fit and healthy, a sensory diet is food for those with sensory processing dysfunction (SPD) that allows their body to work well and function efficiently. The sensory diet provides the body with channelized opportunities to gain the sensory stimulus that the body is seeking, lacking or avoiding.

It is important that we understand each child and his/her sensory preferences before designing a sensory diet for them. To do so, we must watch the child and watch their actions closely. He/she may like play involving running, jumping, swinging etc. When upset they may hit, throw, scream, bite and when anxious they may rock, hum or cling and wrap themselves in their favorite blanket. Some children have a tendency to engage in self-stimulatory behaviors like spinning, rocking, moving fingers in front of eyes, hand flapping etc. which could sometimes have a sensory basis to it.

An Occupational Therapist can also use standardized assessments (such as; the Sensory Processing Measure,

Adult/Adolescent Sensory profile, Sensory Integration and Praxis Test) to identify the child's sensory profile.

A sensory diet needs to be performed at least after every 2 hours. It is a highly individualized plan and will vary from one child to another. It is also important to include it in all settings throughout the day, from waking up, before school, at school, after school and before engaging in a task requiring focus or attention and lastly before going to bed. The diet must contain playful, fun and inviting activities. It should be planned appropriately keeping in mind the "goodness of fit" i.e. the activities must suit the child's sensory needs. The sensory strategies are best used before as well as during the activities that are known to be challenging for the child. For activities, such as sitting and listening in a class, attending an assembly or playing in a settled manner, the child's nervous system needs to be in an optimum calm-alert state. In order to stay in a calm-alert state and attend to a task, it is helpful to use these strategies 10 minutes before beginning the task. These strategies can also be used in situations where the child is required to wait or when he/she is transitioning from one setting/activity to another.

The aim is to ensure that once a child obtains a "just right" state of attention and organization and maintain this state longer over the course of the day.



The aim is to ensure the “just right” state, and help maintain it over the course of the day

As established earlier, each child has a unique sensory profile and therefore will need a unique sensory diet. Although, a few general rules to keep in mind while planning the sensory diet are:

Choose the type of activities as per their requirement throughout the day. They could be calming, alerting or organizing activities. Involve activities rich in vestibular, proprioceptive and tactile sensory inputs appropriately and choose them wisely, in order to provide the required sensory input to your child. The sensory input can be alerting, organizing or calming depending on how it is provided e.g. fast swinging and spinning is alerting versus slow rhythmic swinging which provides a calming sensory input.

When the child is over-aroused, anxious or always on-the-go; use calming strategies. When under aroused, tired/sluggish; use alerting activities. And when in doubt always use heavy work or organizing activities!

With the help of your occupational therapist, design an individualized diet catering to your child’s sensory needs. This will encourage improved processing of sensory information, attention, behavioral and emotional regulation which will impact child’s participation in productive, meaningful activities across home, school, playground and various other settings.

The sensory diet is not just a treatment strategy for children with SPD, but also a preventive tool for specific challenging situations where we can anticipate a sensory meltdown such as a particular time during the day or in a stressful environment. If planned and executed effectively it promotes and supports the functioning to meet the expectations in various settings.

OBSERVE AND ANALYZE, BEFORE YOU INTERVENE

Does your child run, scream, shout, cry, or hit those around, when at a birthday party or at the mall? Do you wonder why? There has to be a reason for your child’s behavior. Is it just another tantrum or is your child having a Sensory Meltdown?

As caregivers it is important for us to be able to differentiate between the two.

A few things to keep in mind when distinguishing a tantrum from a meltdown would be to know that a **tantrum** always **occurs in anticipation to a stimulus** for e.g. a child at the birthday party may scream, shout or cry because he wants to eat the cake. On the other hand a **sensory meltdown** occurs **in response to a stimulus** such that another child at the same party, may be screaming, shouting or crying because he is sensitive to the auditory stimulus and cannot bear the excessive noise around him.

A **tantrum** is generally **goal driven** and **need directed**, it maybe to get the piece of cake immediately, whereas a **meltdown** is seen generally when the child is **overwhelmed or stressed** when the noise around him is just too much. Tantrum occurs either to get someone's attention, gain a tangible item or to escape and avoid a task or demand. The child having a **sensory meltdown** continues to remain in an over-aroused state of behavior and **will require assistance to calm down and gain control**. He needs to be taken to a quieter environment along with providing/withdrawing the appropriate sensory stimulus. A child throwing a **tantrum** will **perform for an audience** and will stop; **once his goal has been achieved** i.e. his screaming and shouting will stop when he gets the piece of cake.

Although the behavior for both the kids at the party looks the same, the underlying cause is different. Therefore, it is important to observe the behavior carefully and analyze it, as the intervention strategies differ accordingly.

Knowing this difference will enable us to help our children cope with sensory meltdowns or deal with them in the middle of a tantrum.

As caregivers it is important for us to be able to differentiate between a sensory meltdown and a tantrum, for which we must observe carefully, analyze clinically and then intervene.



For any question or concerns regarding the newsletter please write to us on: reachtherapycenterforchildren@gmail.com

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