



Does My Child Have a Sensory Processing Problem?

What to Look for and How You Can Help



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“To change the way you move, is to change the way you think, thus interacting with the world in an entirely different way.” - Julia Grover OTR/L, CHT

SIGNS OF SENSORY DYSFUNCTION

The following is a list of some of the signs and symptoms of sensory dysfunction/disturbance which can be signals of a stressed neurological system and atypical development. Keep in mind every child is different and they may present with different combinations of symptoms, as well as different intensities of these symptoms.

- Difficulty sucking and feeding as a baby.
- Poor ability to self-soothe and/or be soothed.
- Delayed developmental milestones, or skipping of milestones, such as progressing to walking without crawling.
- Prefers to use only one hand when holding bottle or reaching for toys, and does not use two hands together at the midline of the body.
- Does not enjoy tummy time, or demonstrates distress when placed on tummy.
- Is easily stressed by noises in the environment, or dynamic environments such as a family gathering, or grocery store.
- Delay in talking, and/or difficulty following directions.
- Does not copy behaviors such as clapping, waving goodbye or peek-a-boo.
- Enjoys crashing and pushing into objects and other people.
- Often viewed as “rough” or “aggressive” with peers.
- Not interested in potty training, or scared to potty train.
- History of digestive problems with negative findings upon testing.
- Moves from one play object to another, often not using toys for the purpose for which they were intended.
- Sleep disturbance or ritualistic sleep routines.
- Late emergence of hand dominance or switching of dominance after age three.
- Difficulty learning to swim, ride a bike or perform other activities requiring reciprocal movements of the extremities.
- Gives only fleeting eye contact, or looks beyond the person they are interacting with.
- Thematic conversation, frequently using scripted clips from TV programs or movies.
- Is not aware of personal safety.
- Rule oriented.
- Tends to slouch when seated and has difficulty holding head up, prefers to rest it on the table.
- Difficulty with spacing and use of consistent size when writing. Teachers often complain about hand writing issues and poor legibility.
- Child is described as inattentive and hyperactive.

MOVE - USE IT OR LOSE IT

Our overall philosophy is that in order to develop a good thoughtful brain one must first conquer their own body by using it in a variety of ways, and competently.

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~ Julia Grover OTR/L, CHT

SACOTA staff encourage the following:

- Engage in physical activity and work tasks with your child, sticking with the task even if the child only watches you.
- Get into the rhythm of the activity or work task whether that be raking leaves or mesquite beans, folding laundry or stacking wood.
- Have the child perform “heavy” work such as lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling. Development of core muscles is important to neurological maturation.
- Allowing for safe exploration of the environment which is age appropriate to the child.
- Limit the use of media in the home.
- Spend as much time outdoors as possible.
- Allow the freedom to run in open spaces.
- Do not over schedule your child in organized programs.
- Provide play things that encourage imagination and do not have a set use. For example, smooth stones, wooden blocks and pine cones are all natural materials which can have a variety of uses.
- Encourage safe, but rough house play which includes spinning, climbing, jumping. All of these movements require a variety of body and head positions. Positional changes of the head in relation to the rest of the body help to stimulate higher centers of the brain.

USE OF MEDIA

SACOTA encourages parents/caregivers to limit the amount of media in the home and used by children for the following reasons:

- TV, computers and video games do not encourage reciprocal communication between people. Difficulties in relating is a profound problem for the children we treat, and use of media only compounds this social isolation.
- Sensory development is retarded via passive viewing and participation, and the child's unique rhythm is disrupted by means of the artificial and canned visual and auditory input.
- Unless a child is using their hands and their bodies they are not developing.
- Electromagnetic frequencies given off by media devices interfere with the child's own frequency causing stress, irritability and addiction to the media device.
- Media can provide negative images and themes which can negatively impact the developing brain of the young child.



YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

Right up front...we **are not** nutritionists, dieticians or experts when it comes to prescribing proper nutrition. The following is a list of suggestions based on best practices we have discovered to help promote healthy physical and neurological development and maintaining appropriate levels of attention and arousal for engaging in life. These suggestions are not radical changes, but please do discuss nutrition with your child's pediatrician.

- Provide lots of whole foods to your child, the fresher the better as they contain more nutrients and enzymes to encourage a healthy digestive system. Whole foods are not processed and include fruits, vegetables, sprouts, seeds, nuts, grains.
- Give a variety of different raw or steamed vegetables and fresh fruits as opposed to canned or frozen.
- Limit processed foods as they contain chemical additives and stabilizers.
- Limit refined sugar and white flour, especially wheat products containing gluten protein. These foods are difficult to digest and make the digestive system sluggish, often causing generalized fatigue and poor attention.
- Serve alternative grains such as buckwheat noodles, quinoa, brown rice which are easier for your body to process, contain higher levels of protein and do not contain gluten.
- Make healthy substitutions such as using buckwheat flour instead of white flour when making muffins and pancakes.
- Use agave syrup instead of sugar as a sweetener. You can substitute agave syrup for white sugar even for baked goods.
- Serve foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids such as good quality olive oil, cold water fish and some nuts. Our nervous system and our brains are mostly fat, so good quality fat is important for good neurological development.
- Unless supplements have been prescribed by your child's pediatrician, nutrients found in foods, along with the enzymes contained in that food are the most effective way to ensure getting and absorbing necessary vitamins and minerals.
- Serve, when possible, poultry and meats raised free of antibiotics and additional growth hormones. All animal products contain naturally occurring hormones, however, investigate the products you and your family are consuming to ensure they are raised naturally.
- Probiotics, which can be purchased at local grocery or health food stores, are naturally occurring bacteria the intestinal tract needs to assist in breaking down waste for regular elimination. Taking probiotics is not harmful and can be taken daily to assist with good digestion and bowel function.
- Provide lots of fresh water to drink and limit or dilute all sugary drinks.
- Routine meal and snack times keep blood sugar levels stable and help to avoid melt-downs.
- A diet higher in alkaline foods, as opposed to acidic foods, helps control inflammation in your body and makes for a healthier, better running system.

HOME SWEET HOME

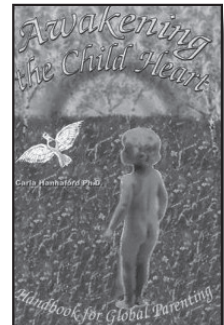
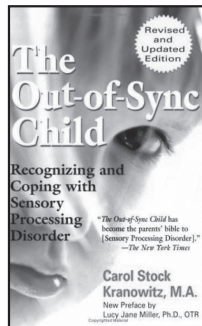
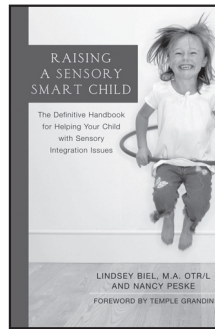
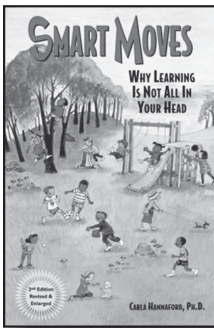
Here are some things you can do around the home to provide a healthy environment for your child to develop and explore while maintaining a calm system.

- Get rid of clutter. Too much visual input and too many choices can make a child with a stressed system even more stressed and confused.
- Provide lots of different, but soft and smooth textures for your child to play with. Pillows, soft dolls, silks, sanded wooden objects are good play things.
- Provide a corner in the living room, or child's bedroom which has a bean bag chair or large soft cushions and blanket for self-soothing and calm time.
- Use non-toxic cleaners in the home such as vinegar and water, baking soda, and use sliced limes for a natural deodorizer.
- Shut down computers not being used and keep TV's turned off when children are present to protect them from the electro-magnetic fields they emit, and to keep the child's attention on healthier forms of play and interaction.
- Children love routine and feel safe with routine because they know what to expect. Keep a routine schedule as much as possible to avoid unnecessary stress.
- You do not need to spend lots of time entertaining and playing with your child. Children do not need adults help to play, it is the natural talent of the child and it is their job to play. While your child plays, work beside them.
- Sing to your child, even if you don't sing well. Providing natural auditory input stimulates the brain much better than listening to CD's and or the radio. Singing while performing a task, especially a task your child does not enjoy will provide auditory input that can make hand washing, teeth and hair brushing more enjoyable, as well as promote language development.
- Told stories at bedtime are recommended as it limits the visual images a child processes at the end of their day, and promotes a better night sleep as a result.

GOOD READS

There are lots of books out there. Here are some of the titles we have enjoyed and have found helpful for the information they contain:

1. ***Smart Moves: Why Learning Is Not All in Your Head*** by Carla Hannaford, PhD (2005)
2. ***Raising a Sensory Smart Child: The Definitive Handbook for Helping Your Child with Sensory Integration Issues*** by Lindsey Biel and Nancy K. Peske (2005)
3. ***The Out-of-Synch Child: Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Processing Disorder*** by Carol Kranowitz and Lucy Jane Miller (2006)
4. ***Awakening the Child Heart: Handbook for Global Parenting*** by Carla Hannaford (2002)



LISA MURPHY

Lisa Murphy has been a licensed Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant since 1997. Lisa has over 12 years of experience in the areas of upper extremity rehabilitation and Occupational Therapy for children of all ages in community, school-based and clinical settings. Lisa completed a two-year training program on Autism Spectrum Disorder and has provided training on this topic. Lisa is involved with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) providing tools for early detection of emotional disturbance and mental illness in school-age children.



Lisa married her high school sweetheart and they have been together for over 30 years. Lisa and her husband, Randy, have two grown sons, two lovely daughters-in-law and three grandchildren who reside in Colorado.



JULIA GROVER

Julia Grover graduated from the Dalhousie University School of Occupational Therapy in Halifax Nova Scotia in 1990. She worked in several eastern Canadian provinces working in burns and plastics, physical rehabilitation, outpatient hand therapy and case management for the Workers' Compensation Board. Julia started a private practice contracting with the Department of Health and Community Services to provide Occupational Therapy to children with special needs transitioning to inclusion programs within the public school system.



Julia relocated to Tucson Arizona in 1994 opening Central Hand Therapy, PC in 1998. Julia also became a board certified Hand Therapist in 1998. Her primary specialty has been the treatment of upper extremity conditions and post operative rehabilitation.

After adopting her daughter Maya, Julia revisited her desire to help children with special needs and pursued her interest in neurodevelopmental facilitation and sensory integration. Southern Arizona Community Occupational Therapy Associates, SACOTA, became a dba of Central Hand Therapy in 2007 committing to the development of programs to serve special needs children.

Today SACOTA serves many children of Southern Arizona providing Occupational Therapy support in school districts, as well as an outpatient clinical program.

Julia is married and lives with her husband Chris and their 2 daughters in Tucson Arizona. Julia is an animal lover and has a small hobby farm with horses, a mule, goats, chickens, dogs and one cat. Julia enjoys riding, exercising, cooking and most of all spending time at home with her family. Julia is committed to the children of Pima County and has served on the Foster Care Review Board 21 for Pima County from 2006-2010.

Julia regularly attends continuing education courses in her areas of specialty and shares her extensive knowledge by providing courses to other therapists and medical professionals.