Practical Tips for Meeting the Sensory Processing Needs of Children and Youth

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Learning Objectives:

- The Dental Professional will be able to:
  - Describe Sensory Integration
  - Describe Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)
  - Identify how Sensory Environment may impact child with SPD
  - Describe at least 3 ways to Adapt the Sensory Environment to help clients with SPD
What is Sensory Integration (SI)?

- Neurological process of organizing sensory inputs for function in daily life.
- Brain takes in sensory information and sends signals to the body as to how to respond.
- How many senses are there???
EIGHT!!!

- Vision
- Auditory
- Tactile
- Taste
- Smell
- Vestibular (Movement and Balance)
- Proprioception (Body position)
- Interoception
What is Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)?

- A neurological problem with Sensory Integration

- Person is unable to respond effectively to sensory inputs (from one or more of the 8 senses)

- Daily life activities are impacted

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Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) vs. “typical” sensory problems

- All of us have little sensory problems.

- A person whose sensory deficits cause him to be unable to function in daily life, has a SPD.
Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) Incidence Rates

- At least 1 in 20 typically developing children has a SPD
- > 93% of children with Autism have a SPD
- 40-60% of children with ADHD also have a SPD
What causes SPD???

- **Risk factors:**
  - low birth weight, prematurity
  - prenatal complications
  - maternal illness or stress, maternal drug use (NAS-Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome)
  - low socioeconomic status
SPD may be related to problems with learning, motor development or behavior

- Coordination problems
- Poor attention span
- Academic-related problems: handwriting or cutting with scissors
- Unusually high or low activity level
- Problems with self-care: tying shoes, zipping, buttoning, feeding
- Low self-esteem
- Poor social interaction
- Oversensitivity to touch, sights or sounds
2 Categories of Sensory Processing Disorder (most recognizable by dental professionals:)

- Sensory Avoiders (Over-responders):
  - RESPOND TOO MUCH!

- Sensory Seekers:
  - Crave More and More
Sensory Avoiders (sensory system responds TOO MUCH...so avoids input)

- Over-responsive to sensations from one or more sensory system.
- Child may respond to certain sensory input as if it were irritating or painful.
- FIGHT-FLIGHT-FREEZE
Sensory Avoiders

- Children may avoid one or more of the sensations:
  - Vision
  - Auditory
  - Vestibular
  - Tactile
  - Proprioception
  - Taste/Smell
How does it feel?

Sensory Seekers (sensory system craves more and more input)

- Craves excessive stimulation from one or more of the sensory systems.
- Child seeks more stimulation than other children.
- Child seems like he has ADHD.
Sensory Seekers

Children may seek one or more of the sensations:

- Vision
- Auditory
- Vestibular
- Tactile
- Proprioception
- Taste/Smell
Many Children are Seekers and Avoiders

- Common for a child with SPD to be a Seeker of one sensation and Avoider of a different sensory input.
- Child can’t avoid and seek the SAME sensory input!
Red Flags for Sensory Processing Disorders REMEMBER:

- No two children are alike.
- Sensory processing can vary from day to day or moment to moment.
- Child will probably have difficulty with more than one input.
Helpful Hints for Sensory Avoiders
BEFORE YOU BEGIN Treatment:

- Remember Child or Youth with SPD will likely be OVERWHELMED by New Situation
- Prepare child and family BEFORE visit
- Ask parents questions and LISTEN to input
- It is easier to PREVENT Sensory Avoidance than to correct it
Offer Social Story to Read BEFORE visit: This helps prepare child.

My Trip to the Dentist
Provide Emotional Check-In Chart
Allows child to tell you feelings

- I am hurting
- I am sad
Sensory Environment Adaptations for Dental Settings

Focus on Sensory Avoiders
Visual Environment: What do you see?
Visual Environment: What do you see?
Visual Environment

- Avoid Bright Lights
- Calming Colors: light blue, tan, gray-warm tones
- Cover blinking lights

- De-Clutter
- Organize work space
Visual Adaptations

- Child wear sunglasses or eye masks
Visual Adaptations: Picture Schedule

- Helps with Routine
- Easier Transition
- Builds Independence
Visual Adaptations: Picture Schedule

- Light
- Look
- Tools
- Suction
- Brush
- Floss
- Rinse
Auditory Environment

- Sporadic loud sounds from various sources - Overwhelming
- Background music is not always a good choice
- Fluorescent lights buzz - turn off?
- Towel under tray for tools

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Auditory Adaptations

- Child with SPD may be slow to process and respond to language
- Use fewer words - short phrases
- Give time to process
- Use QUIET and CALM VOICE
Auditory Adaptations

White Noise Machine

Noise Cancelling Headphones
Tactile Environment

- Make external environment less stimulating
- Decrease lighting
- Decrease noise: Lower your voice, turn off extraneous equipment and TV
Tactile Adaptations

- Prevent unexpected touches when possible
- Tell the child before a touch is going to occur
- Briefly explain what is going to happen
- Be patient with child
Tactile Adaptations

- Use Firm Touch
- Add extra weight to body to CALM:
  - Weighted Vest (Xray)
  - Weighted Blanket
- Child bring own blanket/toy
Smell/Taste Environment

- Avoid wearing products with scents
- Avoid chewing gum/breath mints with strong scents
- Give child choice of 2 flavors for toothpaste
Chairside Sensory Checklist

Visual: □ Turn off overhead lights
         □ Turn on Lamps
         □ Ready visual display equipment (pattern projector, lava lamp, waterfall fountain, LED Bubble machine, etc.)
         □ Ready sunglasses/Night mask in case patient prefers
         □ Remember to avoid sudden movements, hand gestures, and prolonged eye contact with client.

Hearing: □ Turn off unneeded equipment to reduce noise
         □ Place a towel between instruments and tray to reduce contact noise.
         □ Ready sound machine (Set to calming sounds)
         □ Ready ear plugs/ noise-canceling headphones
         □ Put cell phone on vibrate

Touch: □ Add soft cover to chair
         □ Ready assistive equipment (weighted blanket, fidget toys, vibrating mini massagers, exam gloves for patient to wear/hold, etc.)
         □ Check for jewelry such as rings/ watches that may make abrasive contact with patient
         □ Avoid using soft touch with patient (use firm touch)

Smell: □ Check area for strong smells
         □ Use unscented cleaning and wash off strong smelling lotions or perfume

Taste: □ Ready fluoride and pumice paste flavor choices. Use light favors if available
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More Information on SPD:


[www.SPDStar.org](http://www.SPDStar.org)
Questions:

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