

SENSORY PROCESSING & SENSORY MISMATCH

The Occupaytional Therapist



Image from:
"Spidey's Super
Stories" by
Steven Grant
(1981, issue 53)

Aiden & Luna are two students in the same class.

Luna is highly sensitive to noise, especially repetitive noises.

Aiden makes noise to stim, self-regulate, and focus.

Who "gets their way"?
Whose sensory needs get met?

Darius & Sophie are two kids in the same speech therapy group.

Darius tilts his chair back, fidgets side to side, or kicks his feet while he's thinking.

Sophie can't think when she's distracted, and movement is always visually distracting to her.

Who "gets their way"?
Whose sensory needs get met?

Summer & Apollo are two children in the same house.

Summer wants all the lights on in the playroom, including the twinkle lights and disco ball, or she says she "can't see".

Apollo wants all the lights off in the playroom and the curtain drawn over the window, or he says it's "too bright".

Who "gets their way"?
Whose sensory needs get met?

When there is a sensory mismatch, how can we possibly meet everybody's needs?

The grown-ups in each scenario might end up deciding...

Aiden & Luna's teacher is also annoyed by the noise, so she tells Aiden he has to stop.

Darius & Sophie's speech therapist also can't focus with the table shaking, so he talks about the rule that you have to have a calm body to do speech therapy.

Summer & Apollo's mom is also dizzied by the disco ball, so she decides "We'll have lights off today".

Grown-ups are part of the team.

Grown-ups' sensory needs are part of the consideration.

Senses

Visual

Auditory (Hearing)

Tactile (Touch)

Smell

Taste

Proprioception (Deep body sense)

Vestibular (Balance & Movement)

Interoception (Inner body sense)

- Emotional
- Biological

High Tolerance/Threshold

Sensory Missers

"Big Chill Vessel"

Sensory Seekers

"Tall Mug"

Passive

Active

Sensory Sensitive

Sensory Avoiders

"Small Handbuilt Mug"

"Little Tea Cup"

Low Tolerance/Threshold



Important to remember:

Real life is more complicated than this

Important to remember:

Sensory profiles stay constant over a lifetime

Some senses affect others by proxy.

Some senses only affect others if you seek them out.

Senses

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- Emotional
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A quick & easy mismatch question:

Can we make the “by proxy” senses more personal?

Just like a child can seek out their own personal movement by moving their own body, or their own personal touch by touching the textures they want to touch, can we figure out how to help them get their own personal sound they want to hear? Their own smells they want to smell? Their own visuals?

**(It's not
always that
easy)**

Managing Mismatch in Theory...

01.

SAFE
ESCAPE

Escape doesn't have to mean "completely physically leaving"

- Leave the building
- Leave the room
- Leave the area of the room
- Get into an enclosed space
- Put on headphones/earplugs
- Say "no"
- Demonstrate "no" with body and behavior

**When we are
[environment/activity],
if [triggering sensory event that
causes mismatch happens],
then you can [means of escape].**

Examples

When we are [environment/activity], if [triggering sensory event that causes mismatch happens], then you can [means of escape].

When we are playing together, if you don't like the sound that you hear, then you can always get your headphones out of the backpack.

When we are at our house, if you don't want to play running around, then you can always go play in a different spot.

When we are getting ready for bed together, if you don't want people in your space, then you can always say, "Go out of my room."

Escape doesn't have to mean "completely physically leaving"

- Leave the building
- Leave the room
- Leave the area of the room
- Get into an enclosed space
- Put on headphones/earplugs
- Say "no"

Demonstrate "no" with body and behavior

**Sometimes escape
is impossible (or
less possible)**

**This should be for
short amounts of
time, or unusual
events/major crises**

Managing Mismatch in Theory...

01.

SAFE
ESCAPE

02.

NEED \neq
BEHAVIOR

Understand that there is a
difference between
**a behavior that meets a sensory
need,**
and **the sensory need itself .**

If it's not one of the eight senses,
it's probably not the need.

It's the behavior the child is using
to meet the need!

Three-Step Problem Solving

"The child does X, in Y location. This isn't working, for Z reason."

A solution is going to follow three steps:

1. Child needs a time and a place to do X*.
2. Child needs a substitute need-meeter for Y location.
3. Child and adult need to be able to communicate about Z reason.

*assuming X is not inherently harmful.

Managing Mismatch in Theory...

01.

SAFE
ESCAPE

02.

NEED \neq
BEHAVIOR

03.

KNOW
YOURSELF

**What are your own
feel-good strategies?**

**Quick shorthand for finding feel-good strategies
to try out**

I want MORE of something

- More to look at
- More to hear
- More to smell or taste
- More to touch
- More movement
- More feeling what's going on inside of them
- More physical pressure
- More exertion of muscles

I want LESS of something

- Less visual overwhelm
- Less noise
- Less to smell or taste
- Less to touch
- Less movement
- Less having to feel what's going on inside of them
- Less physical pressure
- Less exertion of muscles

**What are your own
emergency coping
strategies?**

What is your instinct when your body is in crisis?

Yell? Flee? Shut down? Fight?

Now remember that **your** behavior is not the same thing as **your** need...

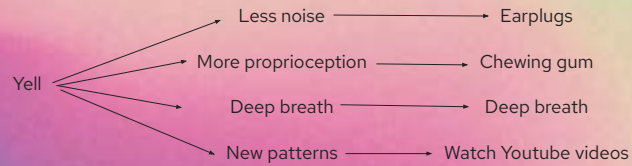
Find the underlying need.

Finding emergency coping strategies

My instinct in crisis

The underlying need

My coping strategy



**Not every
need is a
sensory need**

Managing Mismatch in Theory...

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KNOW
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04.

SET UP
ENVIRONMEN
I

Access

to sensory supports

Model

using the sensory supports

Novelty

brings visual attention back

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Luna is highly sensitive to noise, especially repetitive noises.

Aiden makes noise to stim, self-regulate, and focus.

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Darius tilts his chair back, fidgets side to side, or kicks his feet while he's thinking.

Sophie can't think when she's distracted, and movement is always visually distracting to her.

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**Mismatch doesn't inherently
mean competition.**

**Two different sensory needs can
sometimes simply coexist.**

Thank you!

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The Occuplaytional Therapist

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