

The Secret To Happy and Helping a Child Find It

WE NEED TO REFRAME WHAT WE SEE

Change our perspective about this child

Affects our approach: will behavior programs work?

Affects our expectations- how is this going to end?

Affects our reaction to this child (crying/sad vs. anger/misbehavior)

YOUR EMOTIONS MUST BE IN CHECK no matter what the behavioral response is

WHAT IS A SENSORY SPONGE???

Why are our emotions important when dealing with a child??

They know how you feel about them

They know when you've given up

They feel your anxiety!

CAN THE PERSON RECEIVING THE COMMUNICATION DECIPHER THE BEHAVIOR????

What can we do?

Awareness of WHO this child is

Understanding for WHY they are behaving in a way that makes life hard

Strategies are the next step to finding success and happiness in life

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eCfnrGu5xo&t=22s>

WHAT IS YOUR PERSPECTIVE OF THIS BEHAVIOR?

HOW WOULD YOU HANDLE THIS SITUATION?

WHY?????

Is it BEHAVIOR or is it SENSORY?

Behavior Serves a Purpose:

Seeking something: attention, tangible, food

Escape or avoid something: person or task

Communication of a need or a want

Behavior Driven From Sensory Input can come from:

Interoception- Inside the body sensations

Environmental features: noise, visual stimulation, touch

Task demands exceeding skill of child: results in fight, flight, freeze

OUR PROCESSING OF SENSORY INPUT WILL AFFECT BEHAVIOR & LEARNING

If we can't adequately process the world around us, we can't regulate behavior or learn from it

If our interpretation of what is going on in our body is "off" it will affect regulation, fight/flight and ultimately, learning and participating

Sensory Issues need a different approach

Positive behavior program usually doesn't affect response

Can be very unpredictable- fine one minute, NOT the next with no clear antecedent

Function: To feel better in their "skin" Fight/Flight/Freeze

Recent studies indicate that 5-15% of general population suffer from sensory processing deficits (5 kids out of 30 in class)

(Sensory processing disorder: Key points of a frequent alteration in neurodevelopmental disorders **See resource page)

Other Conditions with Issues related to Sensory Processing (comorbidity rates)

ADHD: 60% of kids meet criteria for one type of sensory disorder (SPD)

Gifted: 35%

Autism Spectrum: 80-90%

Asthma 25%

DD (Developmental Delays) 40-85%

ANXIETY DISORDERS AFFECTS 1 IN 8 KIDS

Sensory Processing and Signals

Our nervous system needs signals to “read and respond”

Imagine multiple signals

What if NO signal comes in?

What should the brain focus on?

No clear picture of what is happening

No idea of what to do next, how to start, continue or even when to finish

This kid looks disorganized, frustrated at the littlest things, constantly moving or talking

Sensory Processing Disorders (SPD)

A person with SPD has a 4 times increased risk to develop emotional problems (anxiety)

3 times higher risk to develop external behavioral problems (such as aggressive conducts)

(Ben-Sasson et al., [2009](#)).

Problems derived from sensory processing difficulty (SPD):

Especially harmful to school-aged children

Generate chronic stress, low self-esteem and depression

Serious affects on development during childhood and their personal and professional life as an adult (Bar-Shalita et al., [2008](#); Chien et al., [2016](#); Gearhart & Bodie, [2012](#); Kinnealey et al., [2011](#)). It has also been described that SPD has a negative impact on the social participation of affected ones (Baker et al., [2008](#)).

Nervous system Responses

Parasympathetic Nervous system (PNS)-

rest and digest.....AND LEARN!

Sympathetic Nervous system (SNS)-

fight, flight or freeze (PROTECT)

Fight or Flight or Freeze: Threat Analysis: Amygdala directs a rapid response

DON'T GIVE SOLUTIONS, DON'T ENGAGE, DON'T DEMAND IN THE MOMENT THIS SITUATION CREATES SHAME DESPITE THE BEHAVIOR YOU MAY SEE

Some Signs of Fight, Flight or Freeze

(or an over-active Limbic System)

Red ears

Change in facial color: pale or red

Muscle tone changes: may go limp like a noodle or rigid (fisting)

Decreased performance in a short amount of time

Breathing Changes

Dilated Pupils (bigger)

Sweating

Dry Mouth

Toxic Stress

Cortisol is released when we are stressed

Affects digestion-acid

Affects B12-nervous system, energy, mood, and vision

Health issues-diabetes, heart conditions and decreased life expectancy

Background Information to this Puzzle

There are many reasons kids struggle with attention and behavior

INDIVIDUAL WIRING

NERVOUS SYSTEM THRESHOLD

HIGH OR LOW THRESHOLDS

NERVOUS SYSTEM RESPONSES

FIGHT OR FLIGHT

SENSORY PROCESSING

EXECUTIVE SKILLS

Embracing Individual Differences: Wiring

We can change our perception by trying to understand the reasons behind their behavior

Open communication about wiring related to personality and simply “who we are”

See child for their strengths rather than challenges

How it can cause problems for us (threshold)

Child development & building a brick wall: Why executive skills and sensory processing is vital

Everything that happens developmentally creates programs within the nervous system that can be used later for more complex skills similar to building layers in this wall- when basic skills are missing it affects all further learning & generalization

When bricks are missing in those bottom layers, the wall can still get taller, but the wall’s integrity is compromised as it gets taller

Working on symptoms can be like adding mortar to the top but the integrity will still be poor (i.e. handwriting)

Developmental Foundation

Like computer programs, our nervous system has basic programs that need to be learned or integrated before additional, higher levels of learning can occur

Reading foundation: starts before we can sit up

we need to be able to visually track our hand as we crawl or lie on our stomach

Picture walks

later we can scan a page for letters

read and comprehend

generalize the information we obtained

OUR NERVOUS SYSTEM THRESHOLD WILL AFFECT BEHAVIOR & LEARNING

Nervous system threshold - The point at which a child can make a response

As children grow, their nervous systems are evolving

Experience shapes how the nervous system will receive, interpret and respond to stimuli
(screen time vs. outside time or experience)

We all have a threshold we must reach to be able to focus, learn, respond and interact

Most of us have figured out socially appropriate ways to get this input without disturbing others

Low Thresholds

It takes very little input from the body or environment to register and usually over-stimulates which = meltdown

In the fight or flight state most of the time

This can look like:

Stand and watch at recess

Constant anxiety with new things

Sensitive to noise, busy environments, lights

Sensitive to movement: swings, slides, car rides

Behavior issues because they are in “melt-down”

High Thresholds:

More input is needed to even get child’s attention

They can’t reach their threshold so they can’t focus

This can look like:

Always active –seeking movement, crashing onto floor or into walls for “fun”

Lots of talking and noises-verbal processor

Drawn to swings, spinning, crashing, rough & tumble play

Wiggling in chair, can’t stay in chair,

Always getting a drink, sharpening pencil

Walking on toes, heavy steps, slapping hands

Why some kids can’t sit still and listen

Different thresholds affect how kids can attend to class work and actually learn.

Think about this threshold in relation to behavior

Are they reaching threshold??

Could they be beyond threshold??

Have we set them up to fail?

Are they constantly told to “sit still”, “sit down”, “look at me”, “don’t fidget”

Do they have the strategies and coping mechanisms built into their environment

COACHING

Using self-discover to find solutions

Child-centered: they pick the goal through a process of finding the unsolved problem

Need self-monitoring to identify signal and skill issues

Motivation and readiness to change happens with insight and the feeling of competency

COACHING IS ABOUT THE INTERACTIONS YOU HAVE WITH A CHILD

RELATIONSHIP

TRUST

THEM FEELING LIKE THE EXPERT VS. THE ADULT TELLING THEM WHAT TO DO

DRAGON PHENOMENON

Awareness, Communication and Regulation

Our warning system and how we process information

Sends signals

Gives us words to use

Gives us a problem to tackle

SELF-MONITORING: Figure out THE WHY of their behavior

SELF-REGULATION: Provides a toolbox with movement-based strategies

Is it defiance? Are they lazy? Unmotivated? Is our assumption of behavior affected by processing time?

Consider processing time and signals

Typical kids need 3-5 seconds to process

Kids with **signal** issues or **skill** issues can need 7-10 seconds

Self Monitoring

Stop

Reflect

Problem solve

BODY SCANS

FOR SELF-MONITORING

Body Scans: If you can imagine holding a magic wand and starting from the top of your head and moving down, paying attention to every part of the body the wand moves over.

Scans help them to figure out WHAT is wrong

It won't matter how many words your child can say if they can't figure out WHAT is wrong

If they are in fight or flight, they can't figure anything out until they are a different state where they can learn

THE DRAGONS:

COMMUNICATING what was discovered during the body and room scan

POSITIVES TO FIRE DRAGON- Too Many Signals

Signals something important is happening (studying, listening)

Signals for safety (butterflies you feel if you ride your bike too fast)

NEGATIVES:

Anxiety AND lack of control- switches the brain into "protection mode"

More stress hormones are released

Trouble reading signals

OCD behaviors because they are not sure of how something is going to feel in any moment

Behavior can be loud or aggressive- too much fire =take on fire traits

SLEEPY DRAGON -NOT DOING HIS JOB, SO NO SIGNALS ARE GIVEN

POSITIVES:

FUN, spontaneous, no flight or flight moments that turn the brain off

NEGATIVES:

Too laid back (homework, chores or hygiene)

Wait until the last minute because there are no signals

WHY EVEN TALK ABOUT A DRAGON or SIGNALS????

#1 REASON IS SELF-ESTEEM!!

WE AVOID FIGHT OR FLIGHT SO THE BRAIN CAN PROCESS SIGNALS!

Judgment-free way to discuss how the child is behaving

Gives a child words to use

It's no longer a flaw, there's nothing wrong with this child....they just have a dragon problem to solve

How do you support this child in school when they aren't wired for "playing school"?

SIGNALS CAN EXPLAIN BEHAVIOR AND GIVE DIRECTION FOR STRATEGIES

If signals aren't working:

INCREASE IN PROCESSING TIME REQUIRED

BEHAVIORS BECAUSE OF FIGHT, FLIGHT OR FREEZE

AGGRESSION, OUT OF CONTROL

HIDE, ELOPE, SHUT-DOWN

MILLION-MILE STARE, "DON'T CARE" ATTITUDE

What then:

ALLOW FOR WAIT TIME

USE PICTURES

TIMERS

FACILITATION vs. INHIBITION

TIME FOR A BREAK vs. PUSH

WHAT TOOLS: MOVEMENT vs. QUIET SPACE AND TIME

Strategies that work with Sensory Problems

Change YOUR perspective- this helps you point out the physical signs

Build in control- offering choices and remembering THEY are the expert

Utilize sensory strategies from the 3 main roots that affect SIGNALS: Proprioception is the magic – deep pressure, heavy work

Can we prevent episodes- offenders are usually auditory and tactile

Consider facilitation vs. inhibition techniques (create more input or less)

Adapt/consider the Environment- especially unstructured time and the CAFETERIA

Can we use a different space?

Can we try something during that time?

Can we introduce ideas they choose for transition back after recovery

Increase planning and coping SKILLS- coach them to decide what worked last time, what they could do this time: addressing skills!

How Can We Improve the Signals?

Any behaviors that are disruptive have meaning

Telling a child to "STOP" does not allow them to fulfill their NEED

WE NEED A TOOL BOX OF STRATEGIES WITH THE THREE ROOTS:

Prioprioception- Heavy work, deep pressure

Tactile- Touching texture, fidgets

Vestibular- Movement

Proprioception: Heavy work and Deep Pressure

These two tools work for any dragon problem

They also provide input that can last from 2-6 hr. in the nervous system

Implementing this kind of input into their routine is like having a snack when you are hungry

Prevention for next time: make a dragon training book

Draw your dragon or color the ones that are provided

Figure out what strategy works when you have each dragon visiting

Draw a picture of the strategy, write what it is, or cut out the provided strategies

Take notes or ask for help from your dragon community when you don't know what to do

Remember: the more prepared you are for dragon training BEFORE the moment, the easier it will be to train

Facilitation and Inhibition Techniques

Facilitation (+)

New (novel), unpredictable, and varied

Input that is rotational, tipping the head

Exciting area with upbeat music

Increased light or contrast

Cold drinks

Last minute activities, lots of change and movement

Inhibition (-)

Predictable, practiced and sustained

Linear movement (forward/back)

Quiet area

Low visual interest, dim lights

Warm drinks

Increased structure, utilization of visual schedules

Adapting the Environment

HOW CAN WE CHANGE THE ENVIRONMENT?

Consider what happens in an unstructured activity- can this be more structured? Can it be avoided entirely and replaced with something else?

Reduce distractions- use white noise, music etc.

Provide cues for task initiation- bell that signals time to begin/end

Provide a visual schedule- pictures are processed much faster than words so using a real life picture is very effective even for "readers"

Create a "dragon cave" or section of the room with tools and the opportunity to continue listening, but with less stimulation

Visual and Auditory are big "over-stimulators"

Seating – provide opportunities for peer tutor or influence, away from distractions or near teacher

Teacher notes - reduce stress and increase comprehension during times they must write AND listen

Allow for dictation or typing vs. writing

Change social environment- reduce complexity - fewer kids, more supervision

Build in opportunities for movement breaks that involve heavy work, movement and touch (3 roots).

Provide dynamic seating options like a ball, cushion or different position (lying on stomach, standing at board or desk)

Ideas for when we are in the Environment

Give your energy to the behavior you want

Try to ignore behavior (especially when a child ISN'T working) and catch someone doing something SPECIFIC related to your request

Control: Provide Choices

Kids who have trouble with behavior of don't feel good inside
Little control in their lives and NO self-control
Building in the perception of control can increase buy-in, motivation

Planning and Coping:

Having them come up with the plan

Don't get stuck on the behavior you don't want to see

For example:

"Don't hit" vs. "Do you think gentle hands could be fun?"

"No computer" vs. "Want to do something else? Maybe look at the book" or "First book, then computer"

Listen to what worked last time (or what didn't work) and work together to come up with ways to cope

This might mean making a plan when there is no one to play with at recess

It might be coming up with ways to manage the noise in a class space

Maybe it is a check-in so they can help come up with strategies for completing the work-cycle (lists, check in with special teachers, chunking work)

Visit www.SecretToHappy.com for more background information and strategies

"A single moment in time can change a person's life"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4p5286T_kn0 Be a Mr. Jensen

Resources

Apps, Equip, Etc.

360 thinking time tracker app- clock that shows "get ready, do done" colors

Dynamic seat cushions- isokinetics.com but also found at amazon

Snap Type app lets you take a photo of a worksheet and write or type on it First...Then app lets you take pictures and quickly put them into first then jargon but you can always just use your phone/iPod camera

Planner pro- Daily calendar. View month/week, track task, make lists, sync between devices

Forest app: forest-stay focused (\$1.99)

Books, Authors, Research

Dr. Greene: The Explosive Child, Lost at School, Lost and Found

Howard Glasser: Transforming the Intense Child Workbook (and all other Nurtured Heart Approach books)

Love and Logic

Sensory processing disorder: Key points of a frequent alteration in neurodevelopmental disorders:

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