

### Family Voice Bulletin – Issue 26 (Nov 30<sup>th</sup>) Sensory Assessment & Treatment

Summarized by KJ (Krystal-Jyl) Thomas, MSW, RSW

In this week's session, facilitators KJ Thomas, MSW, RSW and Tracey Kent, MSW, RSW were joined by guest presenters; Julie Basiliadis & April Stapleton, Occupational Therapists, of The Royal Ottawa. They spoke on Sensory Assessment & Treatment.

Let's begin with an understanding of occupational therapists (OT). OT's assist people in pursuing things in their life they would like to do, or need to do. Sensory processing is how we all make sense of, and engage in the world. How we process can differ from one person to the next, making it a continuum. Some people may find themselves having extreme processing differences which can become disruptive to their lives. In these situations, a Sensory Processing Disorder may be diagnosed. OT's can assist in establishing effective ways to process differences. Julie and April spoke to families in this presentation, sharing some tips on how family members can use some of the same OT tools to help better understand themselves, and their loved ones.

There are 8 sensory processing systems. Find videos below to help understand some of the lesser known systems. Some examples of an OT considering sensory processing needs could be, a person finding it difficult to tolerate loud noises, or if a person begins stimming (unusual or repetitive movements or noises) when they become excited. Our reactions to situations can be based on a number of things including sensory, behaviour, anxiety; the main thing to remember is, all of these are forms of communication. What we may consider difficulties, can actually be unique qualities within a person.

When trying new approaches for ourselves or loved ones, it may take several times before we understand the effect. Sometimes we need to become familiar and comfortable with an activity or engagement before we can determine if we find it useful. Lastly, not all strategies will work for every person or situation due to our differing needs. We are all highly individualized people, and this is part of the beauty of what makes us who we are.

#### Possible Strategies and Interventions based on the 8 Sensory Processing Systems

- **Vestibular Input:** if a *seeker*, provide access to movement (swing, rocking chair, etc). If an *avoider*, avoid balance challenges, e.g. stairs, elevators, or escalators.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueDQjhJDqIg>
- **Proprioceptive Input:** if a *seeker*, provide access to weighted blankets, tight clothing, deep pressure (hugs). If an *avoider*, avoid heavy work activities, and constrictive items.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oquc160D1dw>
- **Introspection:** It is helpful to integrate in other self-awareness strategies.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJ8rtjHUcNk>
- **Tactile Input:** if a *seeker*, provide enjoyable textures/fabrics, sensory kits. If an *avoider*, avoid initiating physical contact, be aware of personal space.
- **Auditory Input:** if a *seeker*, provide music, loud environments. If an *avoider*, avoid noisy places- try noise cancelling headphones, provide quiet spaces and times throughout the day.
- **Visual Input:** if a *seeker*, try bright lights, colour, and visual stimuli. If an *avoider*, try dim lighting, removing fluorescent lights, tinted glasses.
- **Gustatory/Olfactory:** If a *seeker*, try essential oils, pop rockets, scents. If an *avoider*, try to create scent free environments.