Sensory Strategies for Kids

November 12, 2009
Presented by:
Phyllis Barrett Semara OTR/L,
Erin Ellis OTR/L
of the Barrett Family Wellness Center

Learning Objectives

- Gain a basic understanding of sensory integration and why it is important
- Gain understanding of how sensory processing disorder affects participation in daily life
- Learn how to incorporate sensory activities in the classroom and at home

What is Sensory Integration?

- Sensory integration is the naturally occurring process of noticing, taking in, interpreting and responding to sensory events in our environment and in ourselves.
Understanding Sensory Integration

- Input
- Output

What we:
- see
- hear
- touch
- taste
- smell

How we experience:
- movement
- gravity

Situation:
- Environmental knowledge
- Academic learning
- Capacity for abstract thought and reasoning
- Intense with others

Specialization of the sides of the body and the brain
- Motor, posture, balance, muscles, tone, gravitational security, motor planning
- Sense self - Tension
- Sense body control

Express Feelings
- Modulate activity level
- Use movement

Sensory Integration is Our “Foundation”

Integrated and Responsive Sensory House

- Somatic - Cognition, executive skills, academic learning, daily living activities, behavior
- Second Floor - Perception, eye hand coordination, visual spatial perception, attention, center functions, auditory language skills
- Ground Floor - Reflex integration, postural security, motor planning, awareness of two sides of body
- Foundation - Sensory input (visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, vestibular, proprioception)

Sensory Processing Disorder

- Consists of 3 main subtypes:
  - Sensory modulation disorder
  - Sensory based motor disorder
  - Sensory discrimination disorder
Sensory Modulation Disorder

- Difficulty regulating responses to sensory input, achieving and maintaining an optimal level of arousal
- Sensory over-responsive
  - Responds too much, too frequently or too long to sensory input. Can be irritable, moody, cautious, or have difficulty with change/transitions
- Sensory under-responsive
  - Less aware of sensory input than most. Can be passive, quiet, tied, "lost in their own world", slow to respond to directions
- Sensory seeking
  - Needs more sensory input than most. Constantly moving, loud, plays rough, poor turn taking, interrupts, explosive/angry, excessively affectionate physically/poor awareness of social norms

Sensory Based Motor Disorders

- Dypraxia
  - Inability to plan and execute novel motor tasks. Clumsy, poorly organized, difficulty with sports/gym/play, prefers sedentary activities/fantasy games
- Postural Disorder
  - Low muscle tone, difficulty with motor activities, appears lazy/weak, tires quickly, gives up easily on motor tasks

Sensory Discrimination Disorder

- Difficulty interpreting sensory stimuli (what is that???)
  - Cannot make sense of information, therefore response is not appropriate
  - Difficulty with locating touch on body, judging force, organizing, writingspacing letters, needs directions repeated, needs more time, gets lost easily
Arousal Chart

How to Lower Arousal:
- Structured Quiet Time
- Work Rewards (only if great enough)
- Deep Pressure
- Less Light/Darkness
- Soft Music
- Slow Music
- Small hideout
- Repetitive Activities

How to Help

- Best way to help a child is to use top down and bottom up inhibition
- Midbrain takes in information and decides if it is important or not, then sends signals out to the autonomic nervous system and brain to initiate fight/flight/fright (F/F/F) response if needed.
- Top-down inhibition consists of trying to cognitively suppress this reaction (consequences, rewards, reasoning)
- Bottom up inhibition consists of seeing movement and heavy work from the body as a way send calming signals through the brainstem up to the midbrain and decrease the F/F/F response
- When in doubt, do heavy work!

How Do You Respond To Sensory Input?

- Adult sensory preference checklist
- What do you see in your student/child?
The Alert Program

- The Alert Program for Self Regulation is an excellent tool to use with children to help them understand how to self-regulate.

- We will give you a brief overview, but courses are offered throughout the year and are recommended to help you understand the program fully.

Speedometer

- Low
- Just Right
- High

5 Ways

- Move
  - Desk activities
  - Movement activities
- Touch
  - Tactile activities (art, etc)
  - Fidgets
- Look
  - Change lighting (brighter, sunlight)
- Listen
  - Rhythm, music, quiet environment for tasks
- Put something in the mouth
  - Food, water, oral motor toys
Add In a Minute For Sensory Play!

- Basket of fidgets
- Chewy snacks/oral motor activities
- Lighting
- Visual use of space
- Seating
- Quiet space/secret hideout
- Turn off the TV!

Add In a Minute For Sensory Play!

- Move furniture
- Hold doors
- Carry heavy books
- Take stretch/movement breaks
- Office helper/classroom jobs
- Recess
- Carry groceries/laundry
- Vacuum/household chores
- Crash mats

More Sensory Play

- Multi sensory opportunities to practice skills:
  - Handwriting
    - Write in clay, sand, salt
  - Make letters out of playdough
  - Cutting
    - Cut textured papers, sandpaper, fabric
  - Coloring
    - Textured papers, rubbings, etc
Activities

- Drive Thru Menu, Brain Gym
- Brainstorming

All children benefit from sensory activities!

When in doubt...... Do heavy work!!!!
Thank You!!!
Phyllis Samara and Erin Ellis
P.B. Samara OT Assoc
d/b Barrett Family Wellness Center
76 Otis Street
Westborough, MA 01581
508-888-2688
www.BarrettFamilyWellness.com