

# Sensory Behaviour in Everyday Living

# Purpose of the Workshop

The purpose of this workshop is to:

- Develop an understanding of the sensory systems
- Describe how the sensory systems can impact everyday living
- Develop some general sensory strategies

# Hello!

- 1) Introduce yourself and your child
- 2) In one to two sentences, share:
  - a concern that brought you to the workshop today
  - something that you hope to learn about your child's sensory behavior (e.g. "My child dislikes loud, unexpected noises and being in crowds")

# What is Sensory Behaviour?

- **Sensory Behaviour** is an action that we do in response to our sensory needs or threshold (e.g. adding hot sauce to a meal to make it spicy or covering our ears in response to a loud noise)
- The degree to which you react to various sensations depends on your sensory threshold or need
- Everyone has varying degrees of sensitivity
- Sensory sensitivities can fluctuate and change over time and can increase during periods of stress and illness

# When to ask for Help with Sensory Behaviour?

Sensory Behaviour should be addressed if it:

- Poses a danger to your child or others
- Limits the development of new skills
- Limits opportunities for social interactions
- Prevents a child from being included

# Sensory Behaviour in Everyday Living

- This workshop provides information specifically in relation to the *sensory* basis of behaviour
- If you are interested in obtaining more information on the functions of behaviour, additional information can be accessed via the Understanding Behaviour parent workshop
- Parents can sign up for workshops by registering online at our ErinoakKids website

# Defining the Sensory Systems

## Commonly known Senses:

- Auditory: sense of hearing
- Gustatory: sense of taste
- Olfactory: sense of smell
- Visual: sense of sight
- Tactile: sense of touch

# Defining the Sensory Systems

## Hidden Senses:

- Proprioceptive: sense of body position
- Vestibular: sense of movement



# What is Sensory Processing?

- Our brains constantly receive information from our eyes, ears, bodies and skin. Our brains then make sense of this information and tell us what it means
- “Our senses all work together to allow us to carry on our daily activities” (Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario, 2016)
- Some children and adults have difficulties making sense of this information which can lead to differences in how we respond to daily sensory experiences

# Common Challenges in Sensory Processing

- A threshold is the point at which there is enough sensory information to cause our brain to respond.
- When the sensory system responds too quickly to sensory information, we say there is a *low sensory threshold*
- When the sensory system responds more slowly than expected, we say there is a *high sensory threshold*

(Kandel, Schwartz, & Jessell, 2000)

# Sensory Threshold

Sensory threshold can impact how a child responds to his/her environment.

## **High Sensory Threshold:**

A child may prefer to *'seek out'* sensory experiences in order to meet their own high sensory threshold.

## **Low Sensory Threshold:**

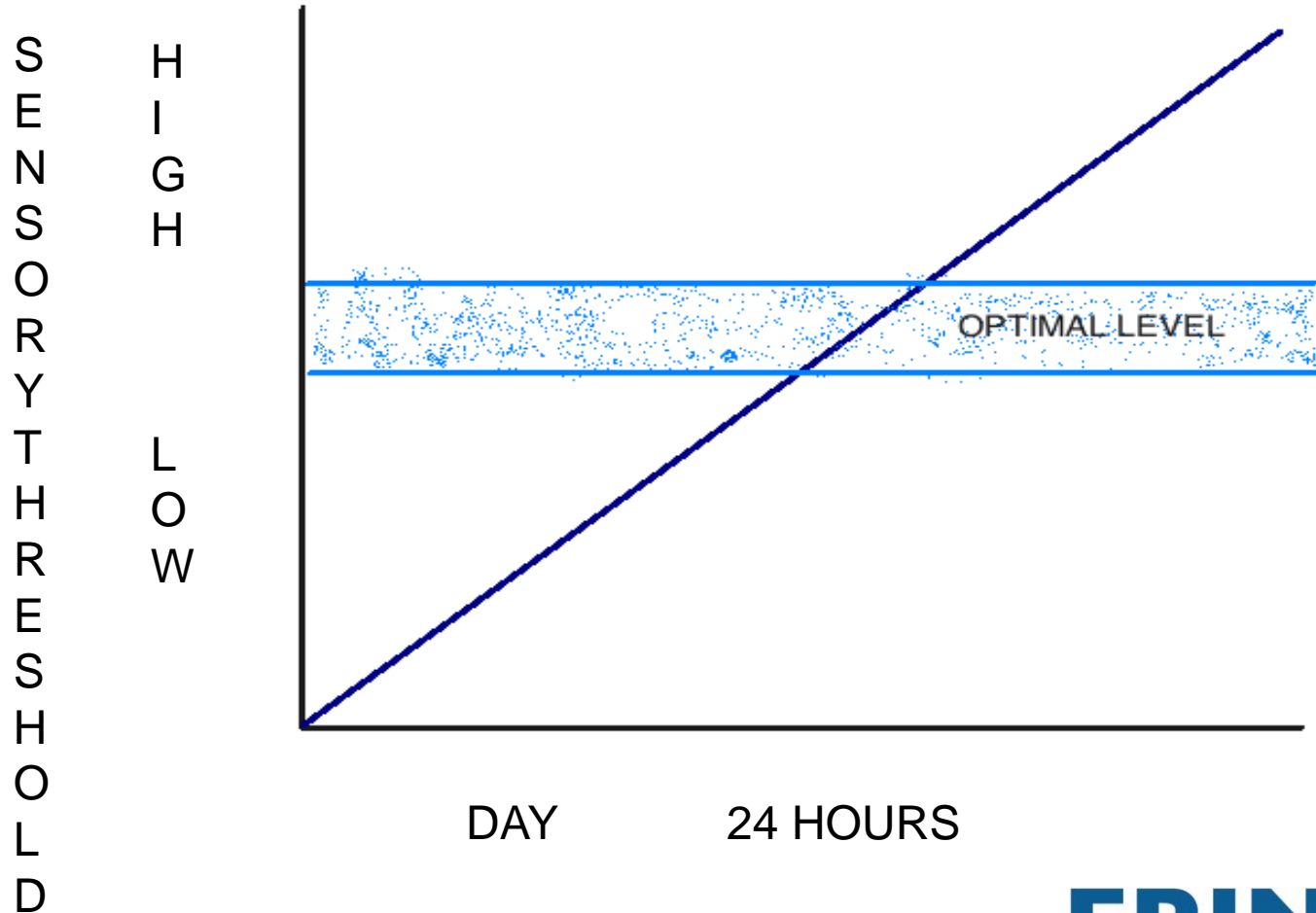
A child with a low threshold for sensory input may prefer to *'avoid'* sensory experiences in order to avoid overwhelming a low sensory threshold.

# Video

A Child's View  
of  
Sensory Processing



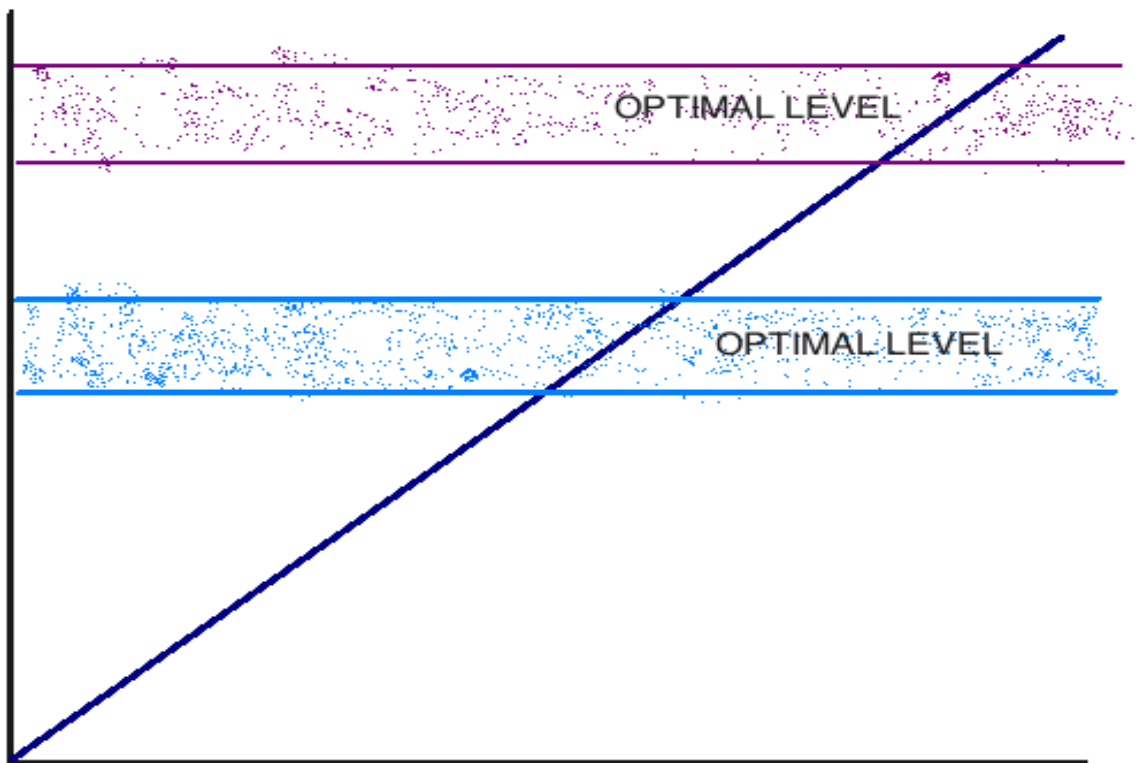
# Optimal Level



# Optimal Level

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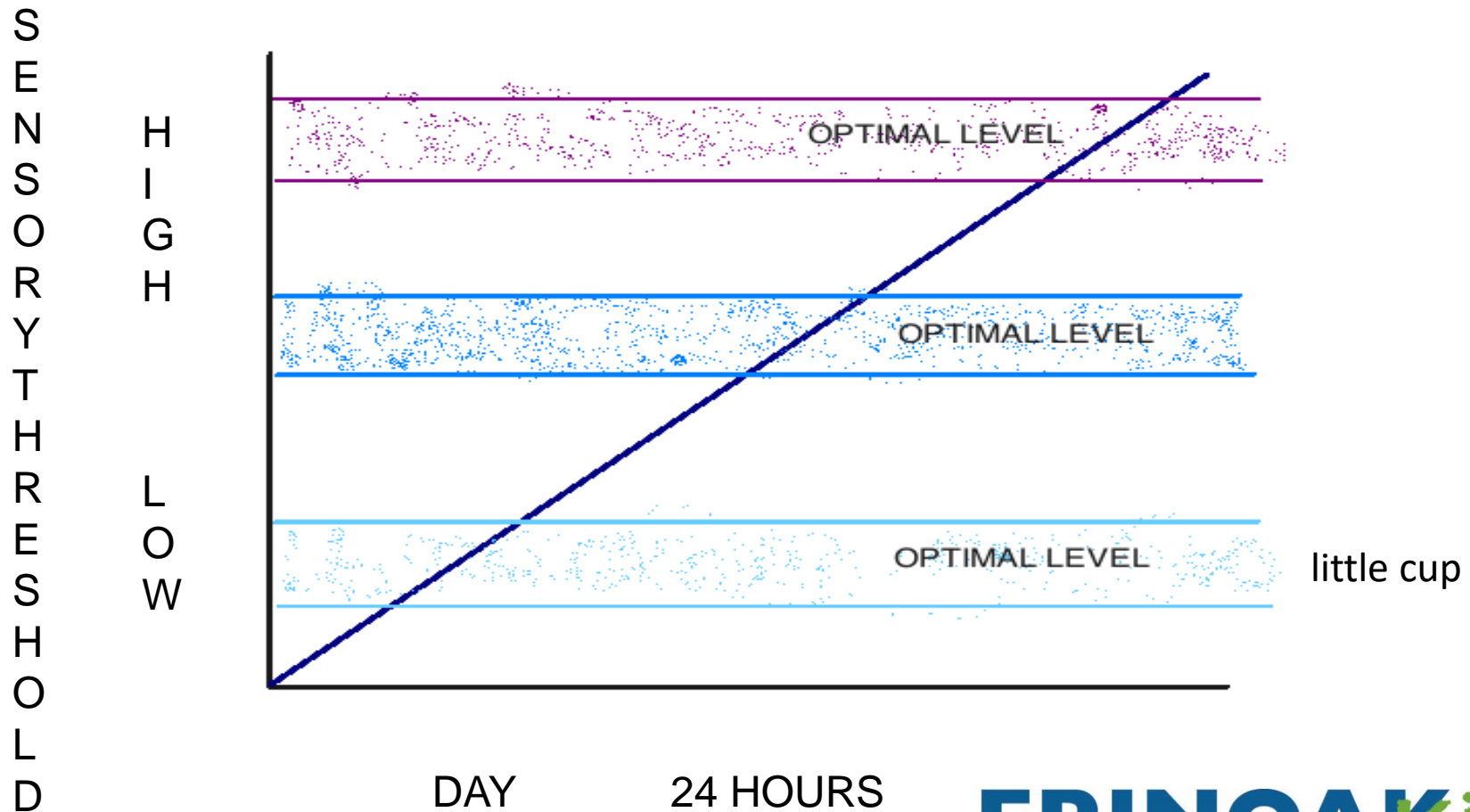


**BIG CUP**

DAY

24 HOURS

# Optimal Level



# Balancing Sensory Input in Daily Living

How we manage sensory experiences in our daily lives is based on our 'cup' sizes.

- Different 'cup sizes' for each sensation
- How we respond to different sensory experiences can help you understand your own and your child's cup size better



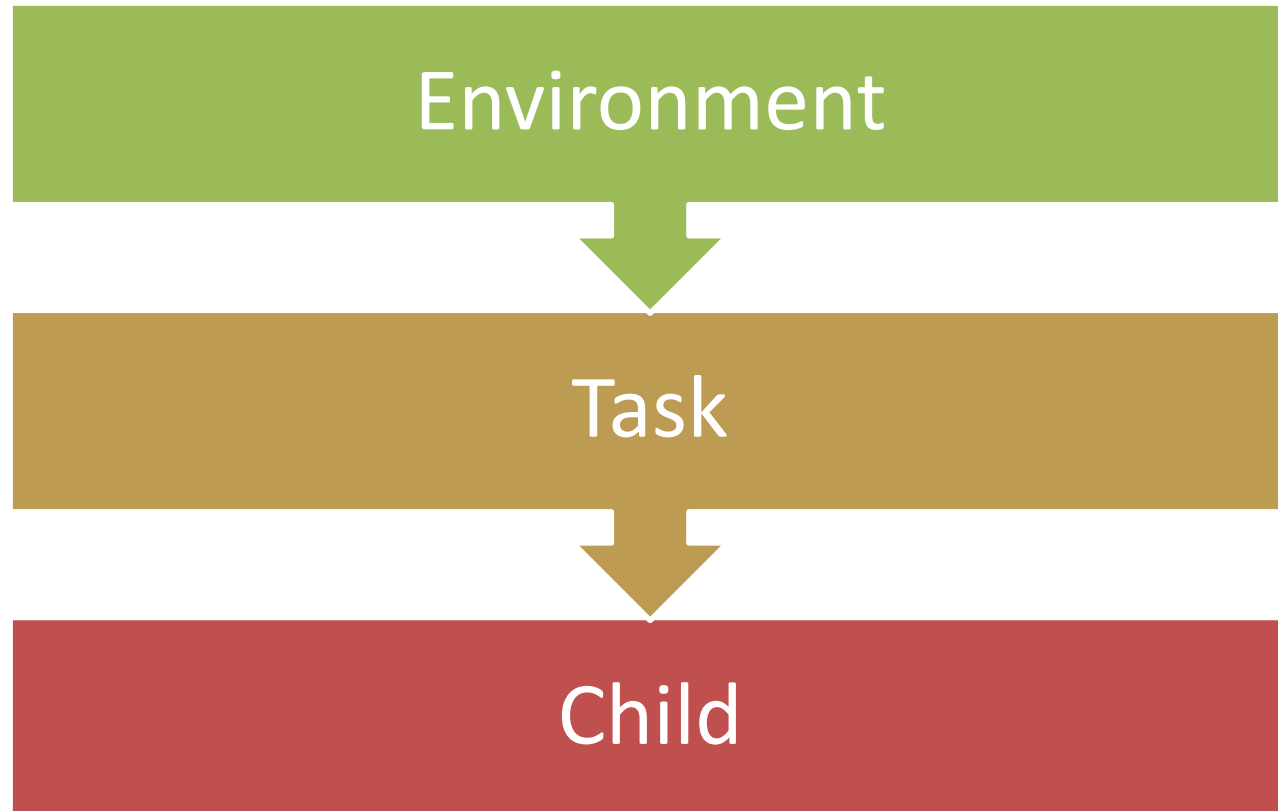
# Balancing Sensory Input in Daily Living Sensory Regulation

- Self regulation: the ability to adapt your physiological, emotional and mental state to the task at hand
- Some children 'seek out' more intense sensory experiences (e.g. loud music, +activity, fast rides)
- Others may find sensory experiences uncomfortable or prefer to avoid them

# Goal of Sensory Strategies

- Improve daily function
- The goal is *not* to 'fix' sensory behaviours, but to provide strategies which will ultimately support a child's independence in their daily routines and to improve participation

# Intervention Strategies



# S.E.N.S.E

**S** – Stop and assess the situation

**E** – Environment change

**N** – Notice a change?

**S** – Sensory strategy

**E** – Embrace

## Auditory

# Auditory

Big Cup	Little Cup
Bangs, shouts	Covers ears
Prefers loud music or sound toys	Wakes up easily with noise
Likes or creates repetitive noises	Easily upset by loud noise (i.e. fire drills, crowds, toilet flushing)

# Sensory Strategies: Auditory System

## **Children who have a big cup:**

- Use objects and items with sound and turn up volume in a controlled manner (e.g. music through headphones)\*
- Use music to help learn new tasks

## **Children who have a little cup:**

- Reduce volume of sound in the environment (e.g. noise cancelling headphones, ear plugs)
- Avoid unexpected noises (e.g. provide a warning before you vacuum)
- Remove from noisy room, provide a quiet retreat

*\*stay within safe hearing limits when increasing any sound volume.*

## Taste



# Taste

Big Cup	Little Cup
Preference for 1-2 'strong' foods	Gags easily
Licking objects	Prefers 'bland' food
Loves strong flavours	Eats a small range of foods

# Sensory Strategies: Taste

## **Children who have a big cup:**

- Provide a mixture of textures, spices, and temperatures during mealtimes for variety

## **Children who avoid sensation:**

- Avoid a mix of textures and temperatures
- Sips of water between bites

*\* Some scents and tastes can be overwhelming and distracting*

## Smell

# Smell

Big Cup	Little Cup
Prefers strong smells	Keeps distance from others (e.g. avoids smell of cologne, perfumes)
Smells hands	Avoids kitchen/ bathroom
Smells objects	Eating or toileting problems

# Sensory Strategies: Smell

## **Children who have a big cup:**

- Create smell opportunities (e.g. allow to smell the spice drawer, play with scented markers, crayons or stickers)
- Have child help with cooking and food preparation, yard work

## **Children who have a little cup:**

- Create scent neutral environments (e.g. no perfume)
- Allow to leave smelly areas (e.g. kitchen during cooking)

*\*Some scents can be calming for some and overwhelming for others*

## Vision

# Vision

Big Cup	Little Cup
Attracted to lights, light up toys	Difficulty with transitions from low light to bright light
Prefers shows and apps/books with visual interest	Avoids play with brightly coloured toys
Seeks out toys with bright colours and patterns	Difficulty focusing when visual distractions are present
Fascination with reflection and reflective surfaces	

# Sensory Strategies: Visual System

## **Children who have big cup:**

- Optimal lighting
- Offer toys with visual interest such as brightly coloured and patterned objects (e.g. pinwheels, kaleidoscope, toys with flashing lights or moving parts)

## **Children who have a little cup:**

- Provide a workspace that is free of visual clutter (e.g. no pictures of wall, neutral colour of paint)
- Use contrasting work surfaces
- Optimal lighting



## Touch

# Touch

Big Cup	Little Cup
Likes to explore objects by hand	Withdrawing from tactile stimuli or play
Prefers certain textures of clothing	Avoids certain textures in food
Prefers certain food textures	Dislikes tags and seams in clothing/ prefers tight clothing
Low reaction to pain or temperature	Dislike of hair cutting, bathing

# Sensory Strategies: Touch System

## **Children who have a big cup:**

- Fidget toys
- Stress ball
- Using touch to teach new tasks (e.g. tracing letters in sand and salt)

## **Children who have a little cup:**

- Avoid light touch
- Approach from the front to help anticipate physical contact
- Turn socks inside out to avoid seam, cut out tags
- Use tools for messy activities instead of hands

## Vestibular

# Vestibular

Big Cup	Little Cup
Prefers activities that involve rocking	Avoids excessive movement
Prefers activities that involve jumping	Fearful of elevators/ escalators
Prefers activities that involve spinning	Does not like head tipped back

# Sensory Strategies: Vestibular

## **Children who seek sensation:**

- Provide many movement breaks throughout the day
- Mini trampoline, rocking chair
- Outdoor play
- Move-and-sit or disc-o-sit cushion on chair

## **Children who avoid sensation:**

- Slow exposure to new movement activities

## Proprioceptive

# Proprioceptive

## Examples:

- Enjoying tight long hugs
- Seeks out bumping into or crashing into objects
- Leaning up against peers or surfaces
- Enjoying heavy work activities (e.g. pulling a wagon, pushing around furniture, squeeze/ knead playdoh)



# Sensory Strategies: Proprioceptive

- Stair climbing or any physical activity
- Stretching
- Rolling tightly in a blanket
- Squishing between pillows, exercise ball
- Sensory retreat (e.g. Squish box)
- Pressing down on shoulders, massage
- Sucking from a water bottle e.g. camelback
- Chewing sugarless gum
- Limit amount of verbal instruction given when teaching a new motor task

# So what?

1. Everyone's individual 'cup size' impacts how we engage in our environment and respond to sensory experiences
2. Everyone has different cup sizes and processes sensations differently
3. You may have an understanding of what sensations your child prefers and those that your child avoids
4. Adjustments can be made to most activities and environments to help your child function more optimally in their daily living

# So what?

5. Your child's sensory processing behaviours should be addressed if the sensory challenge:
  - Poses a danger to your child or others (e.g. self harm or aggression towards others)
  - Limits the development of new skills
  - Limits opportunities for social interactions
  - Prevents a child from being included

# In Conclusion

6. The overall goal is to help your child functionally participate in his/her daily activities while being aware of their sensory needs and limits
7. Use the SENSE strategy to help your children manage their own cup

# Summary

Please try these strategies at home on your own. If your child continues to experience difficulty with these approaches, and is *not* making progress despite consistent use of targeted strategies, please speak to your Lead Professional or call Scheduling at 905-855-2690 X3 who can advise you regarding additional support.

# Summary

We appreciate your participation and feedback.

Please fill out and hand in your Feedback Form.

# Websites

- [www.asensorylife.com](http://www.asensorylife.com)
- [http://www.comeunity.com/disability/sensory\\_integration/index.html](http://www.comeunity.com/disability/sensory_integration/index.html)
- <http://school.familyeducation.com/sensory-integration/parenting/36660.html>
- <http://www.out-of-sync-child.com>
- <http://www.sensoryresources.com>

# Recommended Reading

- “Building Bridges” by Ellen Yack, Shirley Sutton & Paula Aquilla
- “The Out of Sync Child” series by Carol Kranowitz
- “Parenting a Child with Sensory Processing Disorder” by Christopher Auer & Susan Blumberg
- “Raising a Sensory Smart Child: The Definitive Handbook for Helping Your Child with Sensory Integration Issues” by Lindsey Biel & Nancy Peske



# Articles

***Dunn, W., 2007: Infants & Young Children:***  
Supporting Children to Participate Successfully  
in Everyday Life by Using Sensory Processing  
Knowledge, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 84–101  
Copyright c 2007 Wolters Kluwer Health |  
Lippincott Williams & Wilkins:

If you have practiced the strategies provided today and would like further coaching/tips on sensory strategies, please reach out to to your Lead Professional or call Scheduling at 905-855-2690 x3 who can advise you regarding additional support.