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Sensory needs

Parents' coffee morning with the school's Occupational Therapist

November 2018

Presented by Eleni Zachmanoglou (OT)

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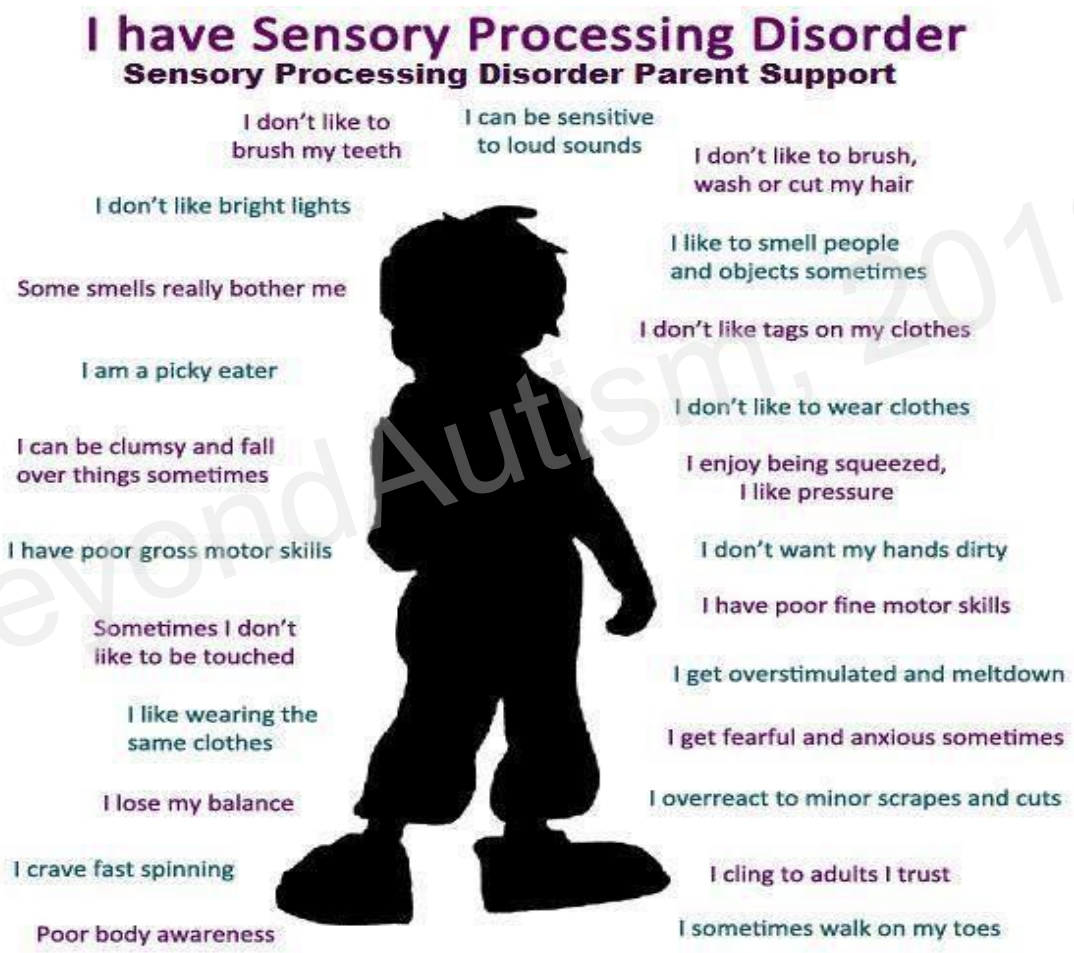
Do You know Me?



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Citation: https://sensoryprocessingdisorderparentsupport.com
(Website and Facebook Group set up by Jeanette Baker-Loftus)

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Important things to remember:

- Our sensory sensitivity can go up and down throughout the day
- Our sensory challenges/preferences may be more noticeable if tired, sick, busy or in stressful situations
- A child's sensitivities are REAL. When a child gets distressed or overwhelmed, it is often because their sensory experience triggers a horrible feeling. It is not that that they are being defiant!

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- Challenging behaviors may also be driven by anxiety, attention seeking, task avoidance, or wanting something.
- All behaviours develop to meet a primary need (e.g. avoid uncomfortable sensory input; compensate for an underactive sensory system) and then are maintained by the success encountered in the environment (e.g. feel calmer, feel OK and able to handle surroundings)
- **SO we can't eliminate a behaviour without teaching an appropriate <u>replacement behaviour</u>**

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Under-sensitive

A lot feels like little

Seeker*

Child **enjoys sensory experiences**. Because these children enjoy sensory input you might notice that they **move more**, touch and feel things throughout the day.

Low Registration

Child **notices things less** than other children. More 'easy-going' than other children.

Over-sensitive

Little feels like a lot

Over-sensitive

Child **notices things more than others**. More easily **distracted** and bothered by things others may not even notice. May notice changes in surroundings very quickly.

Avoider

Child more sensitive and **notices and is bothered by things much more than others.** Withdrawal when environments are too challenging.

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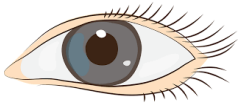
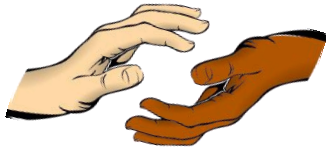
The primary senses

The common 5 take in information from our environment

- Smell (Olfactory)
- Vision 
- Hearing (Auditory)
- Taste (Gustatory)
- Touch (tactile) 

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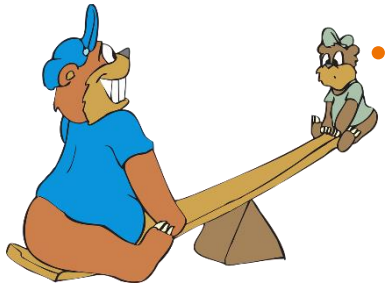
2 internal senses

Where information may be understood as coming from within our bodies; these are:



- **Movement and Balance (vestibular):** information is received from the inner ear, and relates to movement, gravity and balance.

- **Body awareness (proprioception):** where information is received from the muscles, tendons and joints, and provides us with an awareness of our bodies position in relation to our environment, gravity and space. Proprioception (deep pressure, weight bearing) is a child's friend.

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Sensory Processing

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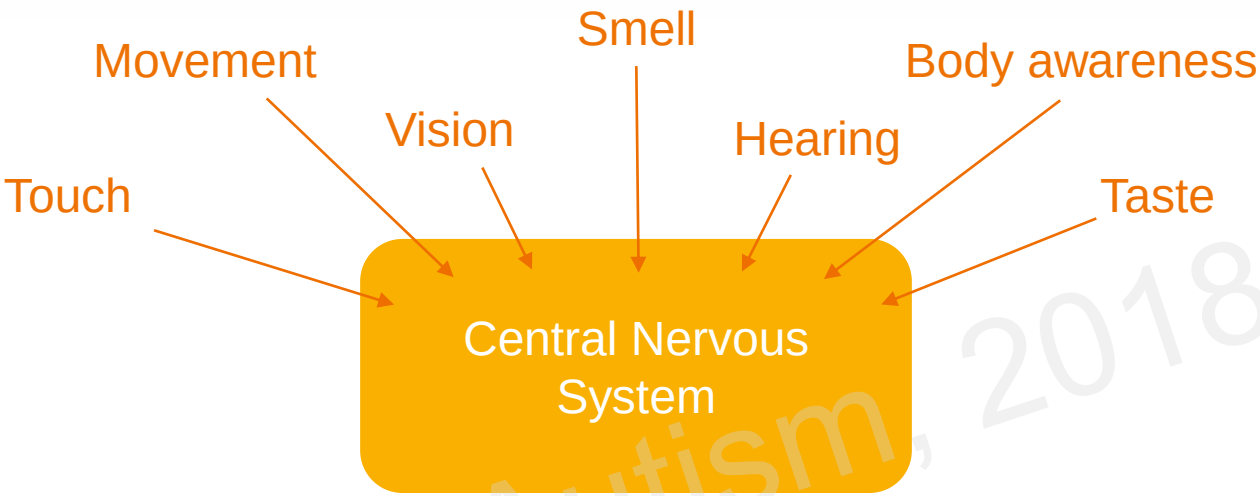

Understanding

Adaptive Responses

Interaction with environment and others

Development

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Vestibular, proprioceptive systems to learn how to balance on the bike

Eventually, child integrates sensory information efficiently enough to make the appropriate weight shifts over the bike to maintain balance

This **adaptive response** and others to follow, enable the child to balance effectively to ride the bike

Vestibular, proprioceptive and visual senses must accurately and quickly detect when beginning to fall and then must be rapidly integrated with each other to produce motor reactions that counteract the fall

The child's nervous system has changed in how it **integrates multi-sensory information** to produce dynamic balancing

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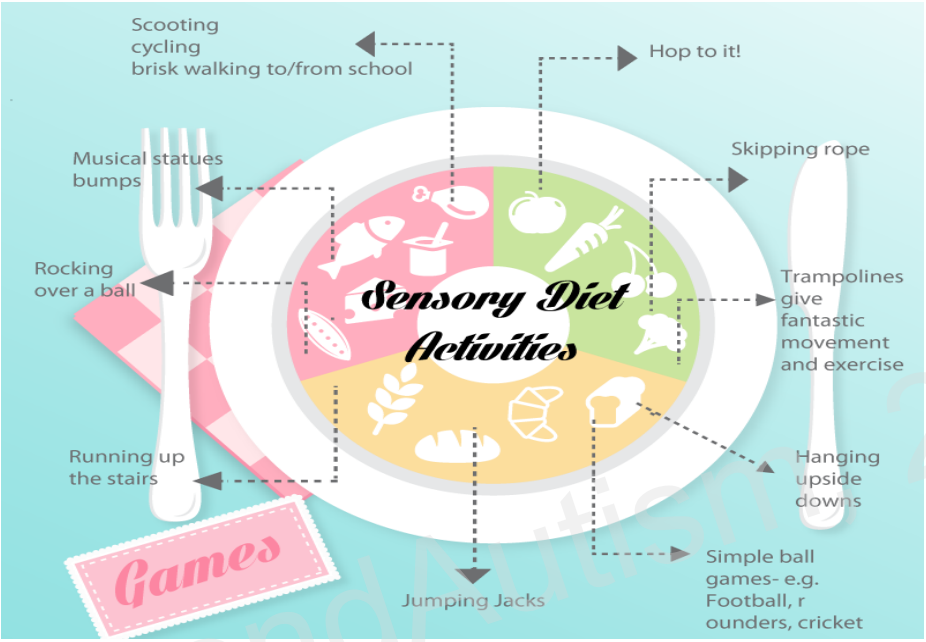

Citation: www.mymodulator.com

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- An arousing activity when the child wakes up in the morning
- A proprioceptive activity before commencing work at a table or before transitions (e.g. moving from one activity to another) to help provide better body awareness and to prepare for work
- A calming activity after playtime if the child is over excited or before bedtime to help them get to sleep
- A tactile activity before transitions

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What is a sensory diet?

- A combination of sensory experiences
- Planned and Structured programme
- Sensory input to excite or relax
- Provides optimal arousal level
- Involves modification and organisation of the environment

Citation: www.toolstogrowot.com

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Useful resources

- www.growinghandsonkids.com
- www.toolstogrowOT.com

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Managing difficult times in the day

Knowing a child's triggers or times of the day (routine mapping)

Choice and Control

Calm down spots

Calming sensory input- heavy work activities

Recognising when behaviour is escalating

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Sensory seeking

Occurs for diverse reasons including:

- Regulating arousal levels, for example fast changes in head positon or movement through space has a generally arousing effect. Child may be engaging in vestibular seeking to reach levels of alertness that help reach optimal performance.
- Over or under responsiveness, for example child who looks at flickering lights as a way to deal with sounds of the environment
- Difficulties with praxis, child typically performs jumping, throwing, hitting as the only movement strategies available to him/her given the limited repertoire of play skills or because they have difficulty in trying something new.
- Sensory interests, repetitions and seeking involving visual, tactile and auditory seeking behaviours such as fascination with flickering lights, repeatedly rubbing textures or wanting to listen to the same sound over and over.

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Sensory Seeking

Child may:

- Have difficulty with new activities, learning new activities results in frustration
- Difficulty concentrating during daily activities
- Daily living skills need lots of practice
- Appear clumsy and un-co-operative, disengaged
- Difficulty imitating gestures, signing
- Seek firm pressure, leaning onto others, rough play, stomping, jumping forcefully, grinding teeth
- Wander aimlessly
- Perform simple repetitive actions such as patting or randomly pilling objects with no apparent plan
- Uses little or excessive force
- Break toys
- Misjudges personal space

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Sensory Seeking

Provide more opportunities, organised input

- Goal of intervention is to increase intensity of sensory experiences in daily activities.
- This will help the child to use more appropriate ways to get the sensory stimulation that their bodies are seeking.
- Provide with regular opportunities to run and play throughout the day, equipment for home!
- Increase awareness

Citation: Autism storms and rainbows
(Facebook group set up by Sarah Alderson)

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It is important for sensory seeking children not to use sensory loading as a reward as these children **need this input to function optimally**, therefore you must facilitate/provide it to *enable* performance!!!

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Under-responsiveness and Low Registration

Child may:

- Lack of response to social signals
- Be oblivious to touch, pain, movement, taste, smells, sights or sounds
- Have little inner drive to practice childhood and daily occupations, prefers sedentary activities
  - Poor attention
  - Uninterested
  - Withdrawn
  - Overly tired
  - Apathetic
- May lack sensory registration but react with extreme sensory over responsiveness to other situations
- Over focus on irrelevant stimuli
- Safety concerns-

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Under-responsiveness and Low Registration

Provide more intensity

- **Movement activities:** encourage jumping, dancing, movement breaks between tasks, running, changing body positions (e.g.: sit to stand, lie down, roll over) and vary the speed of movement to keep interest (e.g. slow and fast walking between rooms or to the car)
- **Visual strategies:** brighter lighting, highlight important information on a work page, place bright coloured items on blank surfaces (e.g. clothes to be worn on a white bedspread), use bright colours sparingly to draw attention to important details of information (e.g. a red frame around a daily visual schedule)
- **Auditory strategies:** play more upbeat music with varying rhythms throughout, use a more animated voice (e.g. with changes in tone, cadence and volume), sing through steps of an activity (e.g. “everybody dressing just like me”) and ring a bell or clap hands to get attention
- **Touch strategies:** light touch (e.g. gentle tapping, tickling), water spray, vary the temperatures hot/cold stimuli (e.g. iced drinks, ice cubes, hot chocolate). Apply touch for short duration to get attention (e.g. touch child on their arm to get their attention before giving them an instruction, tap around lips with fingertips before eating)
- **Taste/smell:** Use strong smells in foods, scented pens for drawing, provide a varied diet of different flavours, smells and textures to maintain interest

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Over-sensitive and Over-responsiveness

Child may:

- Over-react to touch, movement, sounds, odours, tastes, that are often associated with discomfort, distractibility, avoidance, anxiety.
- Be overwhelmed by ordinary sensory input and reacts defensively to it often with strong anxiety. (this may occur as a general response to all types of sensory input, or it may be specific to one or a few sensory systems).
- Have melt-downs when changes in routine
- Approach new tasks with caution or may not accept new task at all
- Have difficulty staying asleep
- Seem fearful of movement activities

FIGHT OR FLIGHT

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Over-responsiveness

Provide more familiarity, give warning when changes are about to occur

- Place important objects (school supplies, school bag) in the same place each day.
- Use lists, visuals, reminders, calendars etc. as cues.
- Talk self through tasks to make sure awareness of all steps
- Grade the sensory experience, adapt.
- Visit places that have a variety of sensory experiences, parks, museums, interactive exhibits
- Adapt activities that children enjoy to include a sensory component, if a child enjoys playing with cars make a car track in the sand; introduce sensory play using a motivator such as favourite character
- Smelling soft scents
- Snuggling up in big blanket or sleeping bag
- Soft, low level lighting,
- Speaking softly in whispers
- Soothing, rhythmic music

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Tactile defensiveness

- Ordinary routines become traumatic
- Light touch is aversive
- Does not want to take shower, get dressed and/or removes clothes at home
- Difficulty to concentrate due to touch sensations
- Dislikes crowds, groups of children in case of being bumped
- Difficulty tolerating hugs, kisses signs of affection
- Child is stressed when realises others do not share same defensiveness
- Child can be misinterpreted for being aggressive, rejecting or simply negative

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Tactile defensiveness

Make less input available – Provide structured input

- Slowly introduce texture through play
- Provide a timer so child knows how long the activity will take.
- Use favourite motivators in the bath, take it on step at a time
- Use unscented soaps
- Be conscious of sensitivities regarding texture, buy clothing you know your child will likes
- Wear socks inside out and wash clothes to make them soft prior to wearing them
- Cut labels of clothing and organise clothing the night before
- When having to touch, touch with firm pressure rather than light touch
- Use other forms of sensory feedback, such as a mirror for tooth brushing or hair washing
- Help child prepare for sensory experiences in advance, explore pictures of haircuts, showering sequences. Take it easy and give time.

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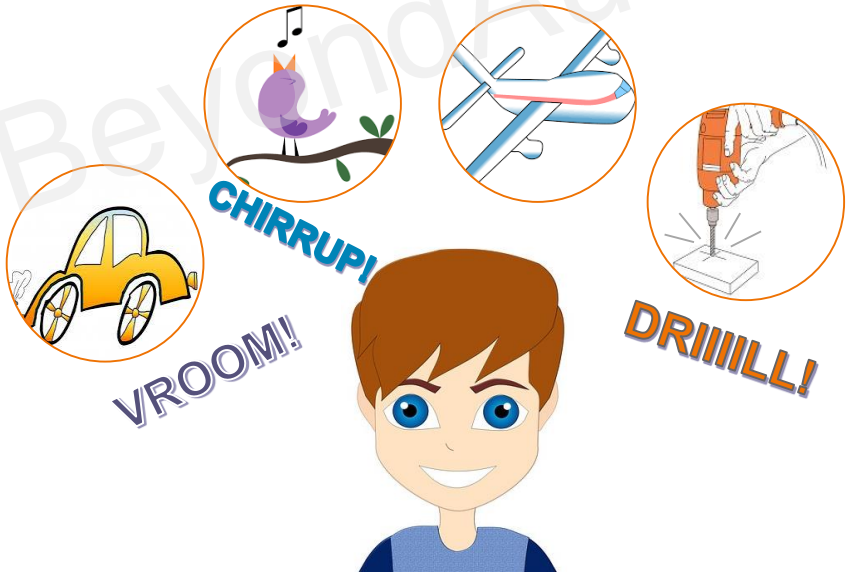
Auditory Defensiveness

- Sounds are overwhelming and distressing: community, parties, playgrounds
- Hands block ears



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Auditory Defensiveness

Make less input available – Provide more structured input

- Develop routines for outings to familiar places.
- Limit large unstructured time in public.
- Select non-peak times for outings and errands
- Incorporate routine and repetition in movement activities.
- Listening based interventions
- Self-regulation strategies, “I want to go”; noise cancelling headphones
- Calming activities
- Predictable activity schedule including specific rest time ritual and creation of an arousal reducing environment for example after meals.

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It is unlikely that a child with sensory sensitivities will be sensory defensive to all sensory inputs.
Are there sensory systems that are helpful to the child's participation?
Avoiding patterns, also represent adaptive behaviours, the child understands that situation is likely to be overwhelming and try to protect themselves.

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Developing your Sensory Box

- Movement breaks
- Posture preparation activities
- Fidget Toys
- Variety of textures- Feely Boxes
- Playdough activities
- Messy Play
- Outdoor gross motor activities
- Include Animal Walks as part of your routines
- Quiet space/ hide-out

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Case Study

Joe Bloggs: Aged 6 years

- Fidgets with everything, touches other children's hair and hugs others, covers ears with loud noises
- Always on the go, wriggles in his chair, bumps into objects, clumsy
- Frequently distracted especially by visual information e.g. people walking past
- Enjoys messy play and eating is a messy job

What is Joe's behaviour telling you?
What strategies would you use?

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Few tips to support Sensory Play

- Sensory experiences need to be enjoyable for children. Encourage children to try sensory activities, but do not force them. Try making a game out of the activity – don't make it a chore!
- For children who are oversensitive to sensory stimulation, grade the sensory experience.
- Try not to take the child away from an activity they really enjoy to do one that is challenging for them, as this may reinforce their negative feelings towards that experience.
- Provide opportunities for children to satisfy the sensory input they are seeking, e.g. if a child needs to wriggle during dressing, incorporate action songs.

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Few tips to support Sensory Play (continued…)

- Try to make what the child is seeking an appropriate activity otherwise they will find their own ways, which will probably be even less appropriate!
- Use sensory activities to regulate the children's alertness levels.
- You can use sensory activities to relax children. e.g. deep pressure through hugs or having firm pressure can calm children down in preparation for a table top or quieter activity.
- If you regularly use the same activity to calm or alert the child, they may begin to use these activities themselves when they need to change their alertness levels.
- Make a list of calming and/or alerting activities that help your child.
- Feel free o discuss with OT so they can support you with specific sensory challenges at home or in the community.

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Useful Resources

- Stair Case Climbing
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nPK6cAQ6-I
- The Out-of-Sync Child: Carol Karnowitz
- The Out-Of-Sync Child Has Fun: Activities for Kids with Sensory Processing Disorder, The Out-Of-Sync Child Grows Up: Coping with Sensory Processing Disorder in the Adolescent and Young Adult Years Paperback
- Understanding Your Child's Sensory Signals, Keep it Real. Keep it Simple. Keep it Sensory, Angie Voss (2011).
  www.sensoryintegration.org.uk
  www.spdfoundation.net

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Thank you for reading

If you have any questions, contact info@beyondautism.org.uk

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