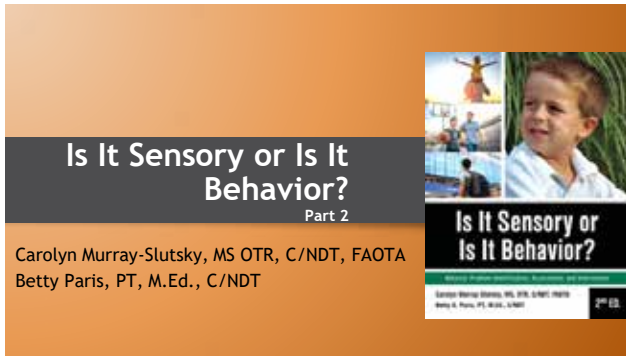


## Is it Behavior or Sensory? Part 2

presented by Carolyn Murray-Slutsky, MS OTR, C/NDT, FAOTA & Betty Paris, PT M.Ed., C/ NDT - June 13, 2023



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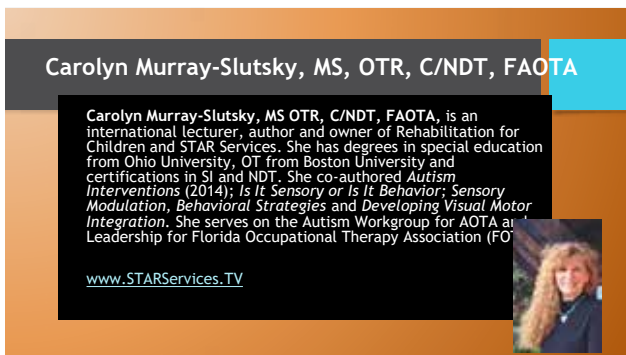
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## Is it Behavior or Sensory? Part 2

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**Betty Paris, PT, M. Ed, C/NDT**

Betty Paris, PT, M.Ed., C/NDT, is a SIPT and NDT certified private practitioner, specializing in autism. She has co-authored *Autism Interventions, Exploring the Spectrum of Autism, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, *Exploring the Spectrum of Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders: Is It Sensory or Is It Behavior*, *Sensory Modulation Strategies: Developing Visual Motor Integration* and journal articles. She lectures internationally on the topics of Autism, sensory integration, behavioral issues and intervention strategies.

[www.STARServices.TV](http://www.STARServices.TV)



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**Overview**  
Behaviors are Complex

- Individuals (children and adults) are dynamic.
- There are always multiple factors that contribute to why an individual behaves the way they do.
- We must look at behavioral problems from a non-linear viewpoint.

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**Overview**  
Behaviors are Complex-

- Problem behaviors are used to obtain or avoid something.
- It may serve a sensory need: to obtain or avoid.
- It may serve a behavioral need to communicate they want to obtain or avoid.

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## Is it Behavior or Sensory? Part 2

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**Overview**  
Behaviors are Complex

- Behaviors may serve multiple purposes and may function to obtain something while simultaneously avoiding something else.
- Do not stop when you find one thing: look for all functions.

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Is it really sensory? Or is the individual using sensory behaviors to communicate?

- Sensory based behaviors are often used to communicate what an individual wants to obtain or avoid, especially if they have decreased communication.
- Individuals with decreased communication skills are at risk of using behaviors to communicate their needs or want.
- Under stress and anxiety an individual's ability to communicate is believed to decrease by at least 10%.

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The Child Is Trying To

<b>OBTAIN</b>	<b>OR</b>	<b>AVOID</b>
•Sensory		•Sensory
•Communication		•Communication

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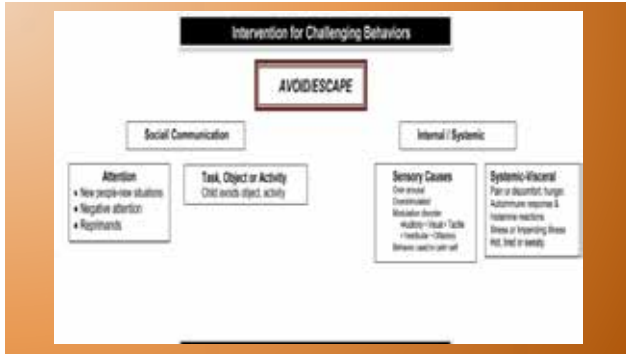
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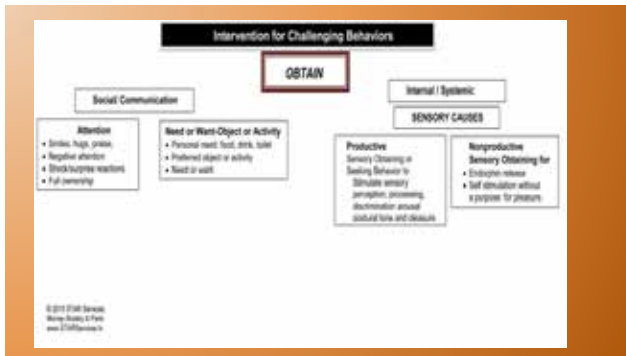
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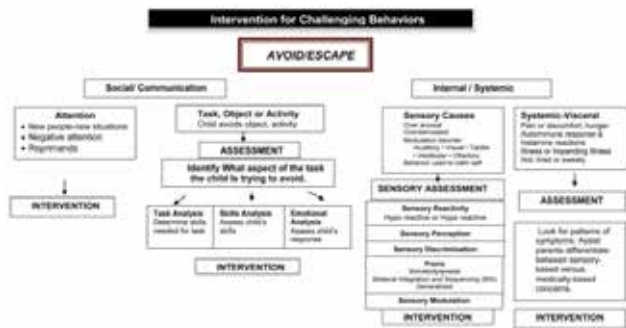
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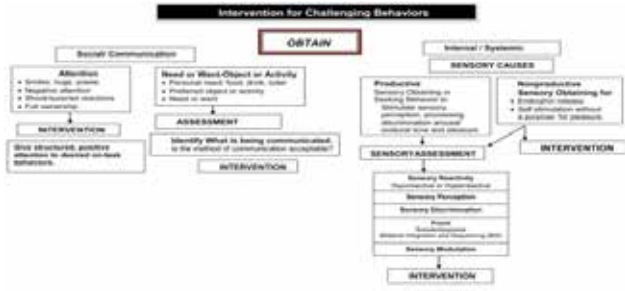
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### Sensory Modulation Disorder

- Over arousal
- Under arousal
- Sensory seeking

- Characterized by difficulty with:
- Attention
- Focus
- Registration
- Arousal
- Behavior or emotional responses

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### The Calm Alert State Is:

- The optimal level of arousal for an activity.
- The optimal level of arousal for learning.



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**Sensory**

Sensory Registration and Regulation.  
Its impact on Behavior.

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**Calm Alert**

High arousal levels-High sensitivity

Normal (optimal) arousal levels

Low arousal levels-Low sensitivity

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**Sensory Obtaining (Passive) Behaviors**

- Under responsive to sensory stimuli
- Has a low sensitivity

Normal (optimal) arousal levels

Passive-Poor Registration

Low arousal levels-Low sensitivity

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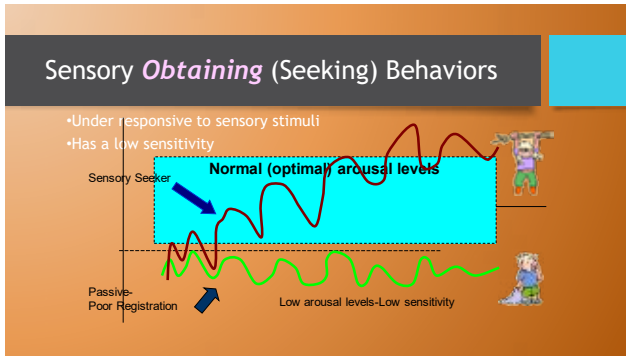
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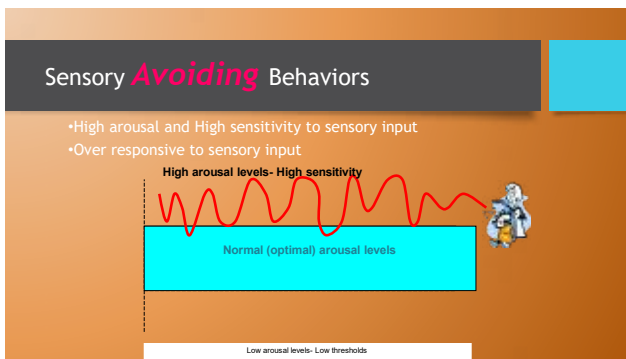
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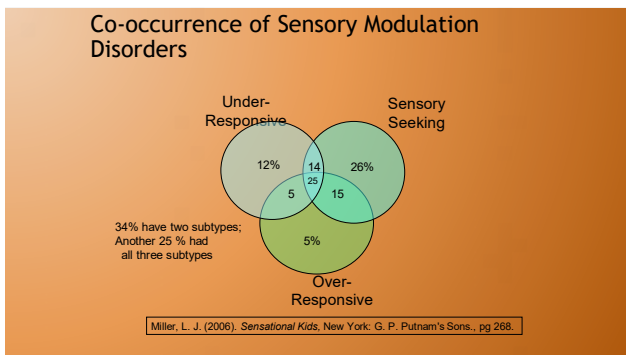
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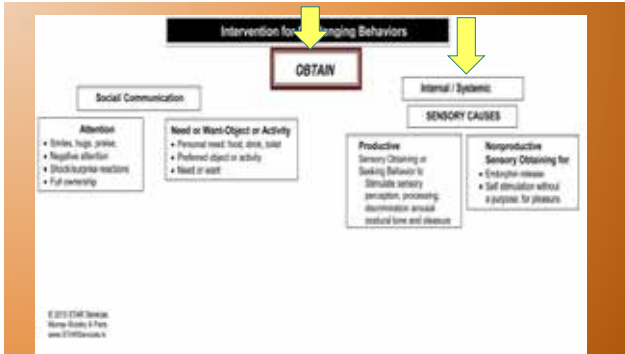
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**Internal Systemic**

**Sensory Obtaining**

Productive	Non Productive
Sensory seeking behaviors due to issues with sensory reactivity, sensory perception, discrimination, modulation or praxis.	Self stimulatory behaviors without a purpose.

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**Sensory Behaviors To "Obtain"**

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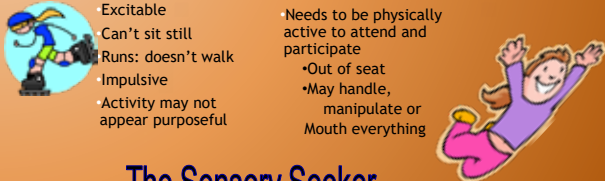
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**Sensory *Obtaining* (Seeking) Behaviors**

- Active or fidgety
- Excitable
- Can't sit still
- Runs: doesn't walk
- Impulsive
- Activity may not appear purposeful

Struggles to get homework done

- Needs to be physically active to attend and participate
- Out of seat
- May handle, manipulate or mouth everything



**The Sensory Seeker**

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**Sensory *Obtaining* Behaviors**  
**The Sensory Seeker**

- Disorganized
- Self
- Desk
- Assignments
- May be a safety risk
- Doesn't notice if dirty or hurt
- School work is messy
- Often tears paper when writing



**The Sensory Seeker**

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**The Sensory Seeker**  
"obtaining-productive"

- The under aroused, under responsive child may use sensory seeking, arousing behaviors to increase:
  - Arousal
  - Sensory registration
  - Sensory processing
  - Organization of behaviors-attention & focus
  - Sensory awareness of the extremities or body
  - Postural tone
- It serves a sensory purpose

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## Is it Behavior or Sensory? Part 2

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### The Sensory Seeker

(obtainer) might also display

- Task avoidance-
  - Task too difficult
  - Task may not be stimulating
  - Lacks self confidence
- Obtain social / communication
  - Obtain attention
  - Obtain and object or activity



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### Passive Under Responder

Passive Under Responder

Under responsive to sensory stimuli  
Has a low sensitivity



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### Passive Under Responder

- Uninterested, dull affect, withdrawn
- Passive
- Overly tired, apathetic
- Difficult to engage
- Won't answer when called
- Stays to himself, wanders aimlessly
- Compliant but doesn't seem to be learning
- Does not engage in tasks that are not stimulating (such as writing)



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**Child with Sensory Under Registration May Be Clumsy and Awkward**

- Bumps into people
- Falls and bruises self often
- May not notice bruises (until you call attention to it.)
- Knocks things off desks, shelves
- May not notice when he drops things or bumps into other
- Difficulty figuring out how to do new motor tasks
- May have difficulty imitating movements to songs.
- May be slow to learn new tasks



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**Behaviors a child with sensory under responsiveness might also display**

- Task avoidance-
  - Task may have no meaning
  - Task may be perceived as boring, not stimulating



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**Intervention: Sensory Under-responders**

<p><b>Passive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Identify productive sensory input to increase registration and engagement.</li><li>•Intersperse sensory-based activities within child's schedule to optimize function.</li><li>•Use vestibular/proprioceptive sensory inputs to increase arousal, processing, tone and endurance.</li></ul>	<p><b>Sensory Seeker</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Provide intense heavy work to increase behavioral organization.</li><li>•Intersperse sensory-based activities within child's schedule to optimize function.</li><li>•Use proprioception and vestibular combined with proprioception.</li></ul>
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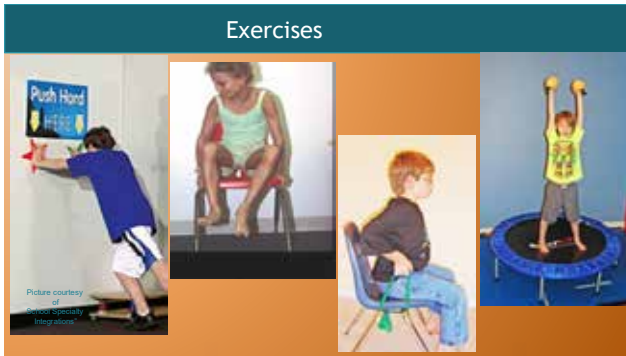
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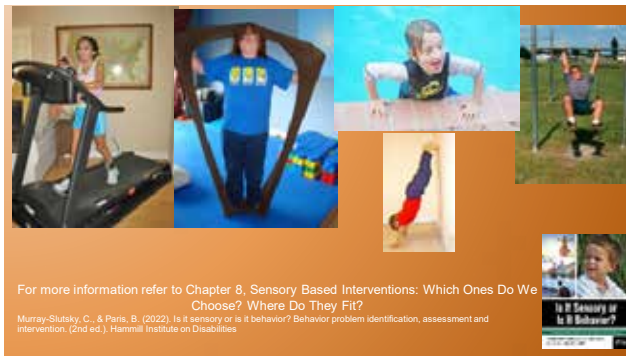
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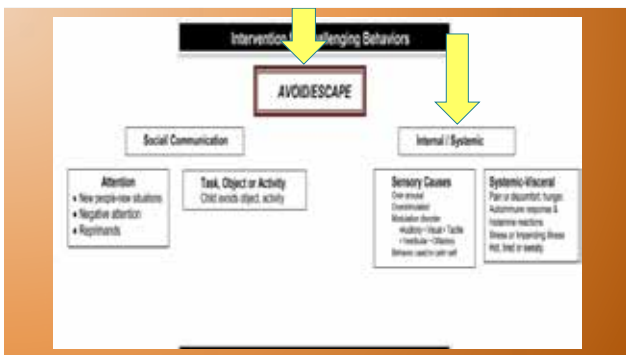
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**Internal Systemic**  
**Sensory Avoiding**

Sensory	Systemic- Visceral
Sensory avoiding behaviors due to issues with sensory reactivity, perception, discrimination, modulation or praxis.	Pain, hunger, illness, autoimmune.

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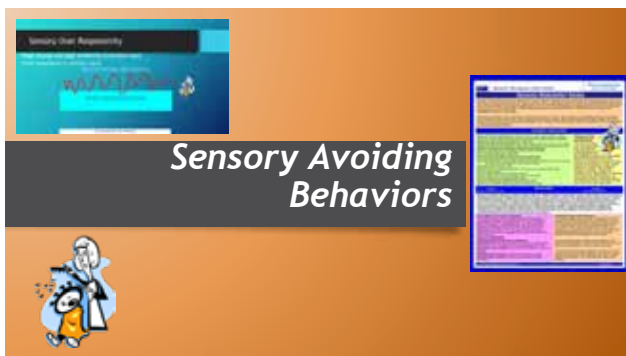
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**Sensory Avoiding Behaviors**



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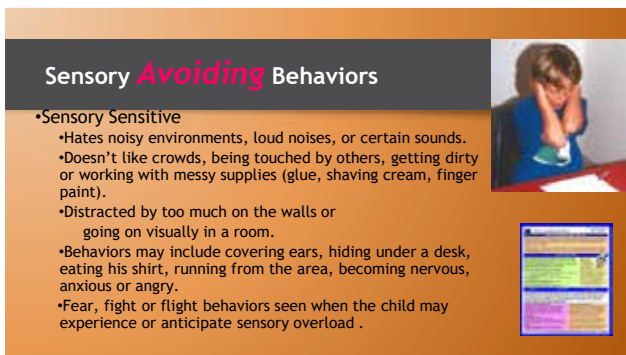
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**Sensory Avoiding Behaviors**

- Sensory Sensitive
  - Hates noisy environments, loud noises, or certain sounds.
  - Doesn't like crowds, being touched by others, getting dirty or working with messy supplies (glue, shaving cream, finger paint).
  - Distracted by too much on the walls or going on visually in a room.
  - Behaviors may include covering ears, hiding under a desk, eating his shirt, running from the area, becoming nervous, anxious or angry.
  - Fear, fight or flight behaviors seen when the child may experience or anticipate sensory overload .



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
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 **Cautious with Gross Motor Tasks**

- Won't go on the playground, especially if other children are there.
- Refuses to play on moveable equipment (merry-go-round, swings, teeter-totter)
- May have poor balance.
- Easily gets motion sickness, dizzy.
- If bumped or bruised, gets more upset than other children.



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 **Fear, Flight or Fight Behaviors**

- Fear- The child may:
  - Appear overly anxious
  - Eat his shirt out of anxiety
  - Be overly emotional, cry easily, has a difficult time regaining control once upset
  - May constantly ask questions to the point of being annoying;
  - Need to control.



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 **Flight or Fight Behaviors**

- Flight**- The child may:
  - Hide under the desk, cover his ears, head, face.
  - Run from the area,
  - Becomes increasingly disorganized with environmental stimulation. Child may start to run around for no apparent reason.
  - Become distractible and inattentive.
- Fight**- The child may:
  - Strike out- Push, hit or physically assault you or others.
  - Verbally lash out.
  - Tantrum.



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**Sensory**  
***“avoidance- escape”***



- The stressed, over aroused, over stimulated child may use sensory avoiding behaviors to:
  - Calm and organize himself
  - Decrease his arousal
  - Modulate his nervous system and thereby:
    - Improve sensory processing
    - Organization of behaviors
  - Escape from sensory input
  - Avoid sensory overload
- It serves a regulatory and modulation purpose

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**Behaviors a sensory avoider might also display**

- Task avoidance
  - Task may be overwhelming
  - May avoid a task due to a sensory component
  - May fear the task
  - Difficulty with transitions.
- Avoid attention
  - Avoid new people or situations.



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**Intervention-**  
***sensory avoiding behaviors***



- Bring down the child’s arousal level and his sensory threshold.
- Environmental modification: Identify the aspect of the environment or schedule that is contributing to the child’s overload and/or triggering the child.
  - Decrease environmental stimulation and modify/ adapt tasks as needed.
- Proprioceptive, heavy work, resistive exercises
- Honor the child’s need to limit unfamiliar input and gradually broaden his tolerance for sensory input.

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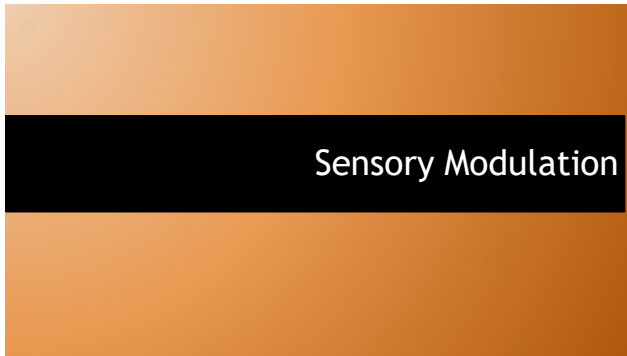
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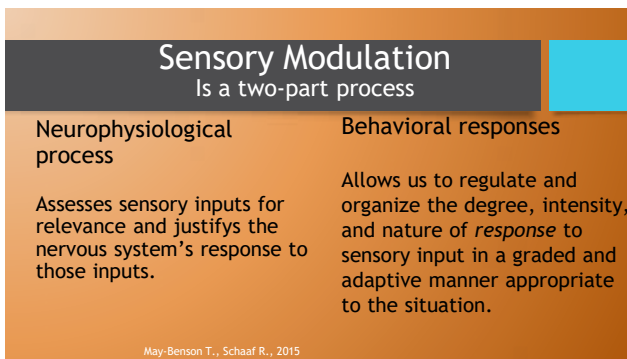
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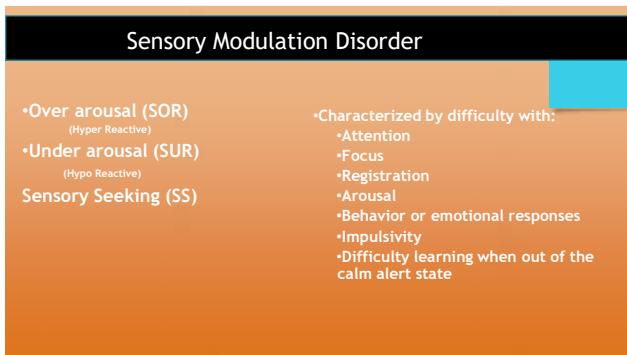
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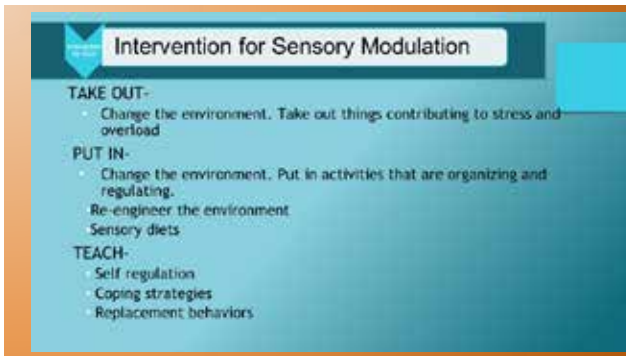
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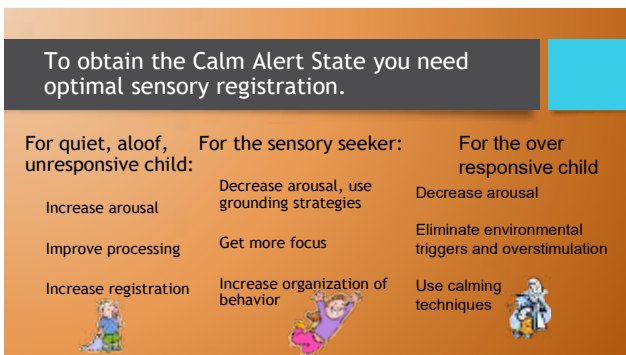
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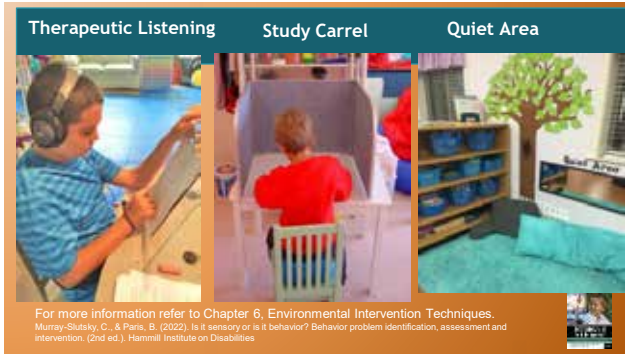
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## Is it Behavior or Sensory? Part 2

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**Meditation, Yoga, Thai Chi, Deep Breathing, Eliminating Distractions**



For more information refer to Chapter 8, Sensory Based Interventions: Which Ones Do We Choose? Where Do They Fit? Murray-Slutsky, C. & Paris, B. (2022). Is it sensory or is it behavior? Behavior problem identification, assessment and intervention, (2nd ed.). Hammill Institute on Disabilities.

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**Functional Resistive Exercises**

- Lift, push, carry activities
- Housekeeping jobs
- Movement breaks
- Exercise breaks
- Sport, extracurricular, recreation
- Play activities
- Fine motor activities
- Oral motor activities

Appendix E, Page 315-317.  
Murray-Slutsky, C. & Paris, B. (2022). Is it sensory or is it behavior? Behavior problem identification, assessment and intervention, (2nd ed.). Hammill Institute on Disabilities

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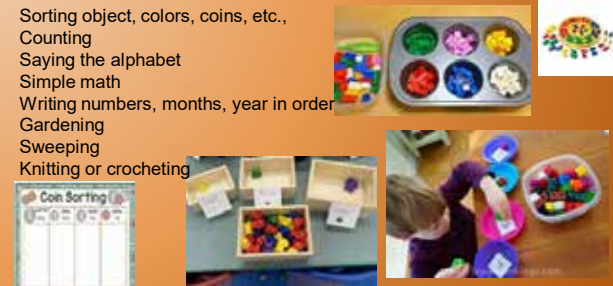
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**Repetitive, routine tasks can be relaxing, calming and organizing**

Sorting object, colors, coins, etc.,  
Counting  
Saying the alphabet  
Simple math  
Writing numbers, months, year in order  
Gardening  
Sweeping  
Knitting or crocheting



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**Teach the Child**

What does the Child Want or Need?  
Self Regulation Strategies  
Coping Strategies  
Replacement Strategies

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**Self Regulation Strategies**

- Self-regulation Training
  - The Alert Program®
  - Zones of Regulation®
  - Incredible 5-point Scale
  - Sensory Stories
  - Social Stories
  - Deep Breathing Exercises
  - Yoga, Tai Chi,
  - Meditation
  - Self Monitoring

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**Teach Self Awareness and Self Regulation**  
The Alert Program



**Kari Dunn Buron & Mitzi Curtis**  
Two Teachers from Minnesota

Goals:  
To help children understand and monitor alert level  
To help parents/ adults recognize arousal states  
*For ages 8 and up*

by Mary Sue Williams, OTR/L and Sherry Shellenberger, OTR/L

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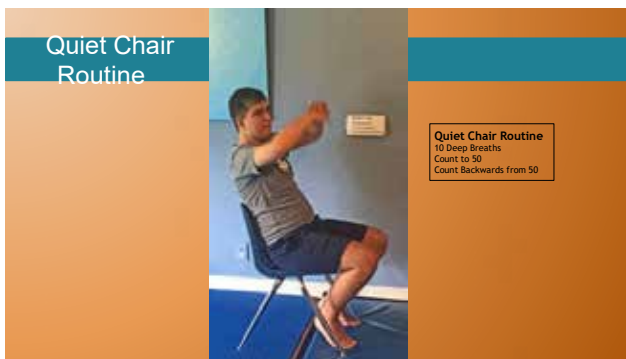
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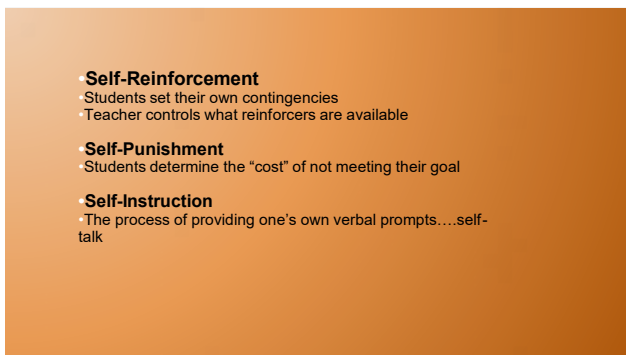
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Handout for the Therapro webinar  
**Is it Behavior or Sensory? Part 2**

presented by Carolyn Murray-Slutsky, MS OTR, C/NDT, FAOTA & Betty Paris, PT M.Ed., C/ NDT - June 13, 2023

For more information refer to Chapter 7, Behavioral Intervention Techniques. Murray-Slutsky, C. & Paris, B. (2022). Is it sensory or is it behavior? Behavior problem identification, assessment and intervention. (2nd ed.). Hammill Institute on Disabilities

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### Basic Rules of Intervention

Synthesis of existing literature, EBPs shows that Individuals with ASD perform best in environments that provide:

- 1) Structure and consistency
  - Clearly defined rules, routines and behavioral expectations
  - Boundaries (physical prompts, verbal reminders)
- 2) Transition Strategies
- 3) Priming to prepare the individual for work demands
- 4) Visual and structural supports
- 5) Active mental engagement\*
- 6) Communication (two way)
- 7) Management of stress and anxiety
- 8) Accommodations for sensory needs \*\*
  - Reduced environmental triggers (overstimulation)\*\*

**Preventatives**

National Autism Center. (2015). National Autism Center's National Standards Report: Addressing the need for evidence-based practice guidelines for autism spectrum disorders: Part 2. Retrieved from Washington, DC: Murray-Slutsky, C. & Paris, B. (2014). Autism Interventions: Exploring the Spectrum of Autism (2 ed.). Austin, Texas: Hammill Institute on Disabilities. \*\*Research available identifying sensory issues.

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## Keys to Success

Important Things to Consider

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Individuals (children and adults) are dynamic. There are always multiple factors that contribute to why an individual behaves the way they do. We have to look at behavioral problems from a non-linear viewpoint.

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Behaviors may serve multiple purposes and may function to obtain something while simultaneously avoiding something else. Do not stop when you find one thing; look for all functions.

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- Individuals with decreased communication skills are at risk of using behaviors to communicate their needs or want.
- Under stress and anxiety an individual's ability to communicate is believed to decrease by at least 10%.
- Sensory-based behaviors are often used to communicate what an individual wants to obtain or avoid, especially if they have decreased communication and/or are under stress.
- Identify what they are trying to communicate. That will be your solution.
  - Then give them a more effective method to communicate.
  - If they are using sensory behaviors to communicate, make sure to meet the sensory need while developing effective communication strategies.

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**Self Regulation is the Foundation for Participation and Learning**

To optimize an individual's ability to function they must be self regulated and in the calm alert state.

This requires the individual to:

- 1) Recognize their current arousal level,
- 2) Identify what strategies works to alter arousal levels
- 3) Implement them to change their arousal level, as needed, and to
- 4) Advocate for their personal needs.

The person working with them needs to be in that calm alert state and self regulated.

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Sensory-based strategies are often most effective when used as preventative. They must also be at the intensity and duration that the individual needs. Be sure to schedule them in before they are needed.

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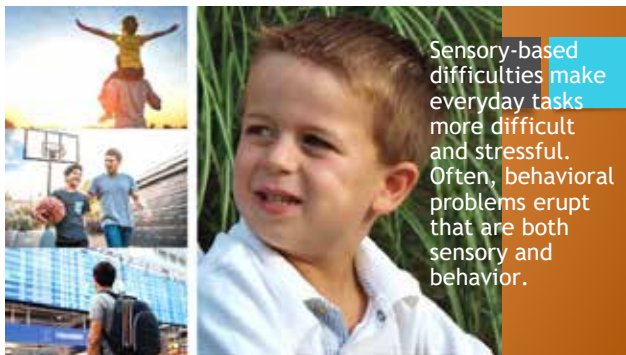
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Sensory-based difficulties make everyday tasks more difficult and stressful. Often, behavioral problems erupt that are both sensory and behavior.

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More information is available in our 2022  
edition of  
*Is It Sensory or Is It Behavior?*  
Available through  
Therapro

**Thank You  
Therapro**

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## Related Products from Therapro

*click the title or photo to go directly to the product page*



### Is it Sensory or is it Behavior? 2nd Edition (2022)

Sensory and behavior issues are often complex, intermingled, and pertinent to most clinicians and educators who work with children. This second edition provides updated information and strategies for distinguishing between sensory-based and non-sensory-based behaviors, as well as intervention techniques.



### Autism Interventions: Exploring the Spectrum of Autism

Autism Interventions provides the most current assessment and intervention techniques, based on best practice and up-to-date research, for children on the Autism Spectrum. This practical and valuable tool offers holistic, dynamic, and effective intervention strategies and treatment plans to improve the functioning of individuals with autism.



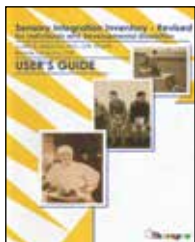
### Developing Visual Motor Integration

Children copy dot designs that progress from simple to difficult on laminated re-usable sheets. Developed by the authors who spent over 20 years re-working and refining the designs, this is one of the best visual motor integration remedial tools we offer. Includes 5 laminated workbooks.



### Sensory Modulation Laminated Card Series

Each front and back color card is packed with key concepts, strategies, and interventions for behavioral AND sensory modulation. The Positive Behavioral Strategies card includes categories such as Avert a Crisis or Meltdown, Reinforcers, Consequences, Molding Behavior and more. The Sensory Modulation Pack offers cards on Over-Responsive, Under-Responsive, and Sensory Seeking Behaviors.



### Sensory Evaluations

Early detection of sensory processing difficulties in children can prevent later learning difficulties.