**How sensory processing affects children’s behavior**

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Sensory presentation

Slide 1

I am so honored to be here speaking to teachers. I have so much I want to give over but I will try to stay focused. I want to start off saying that after working in the public schools for 7 years I see how much support services we are missing and how much falls on the teachers. I want to do anything I can to help your students because I want to be there for you as well. I know these kids are tricky and exhausting, and I believe that if I can help you understand what makes them tic, and help you stand in their shoes, then the strategies will be much more meaningful then a list of activities. I laugh sometimes when I think of a classroom that has bleachers in the first row because 10 kids are supposed to have the seat closest to Rebbe. I believe you are all amazing at knowing your kids, and if I can help you understand them, you will know how to help. And if I can help a teacher have a better day, because a child had a better day, I will be very grateful.

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>ADHD is inside out-SI is response to environment. Input gets misread and sparks incorrect response. ADHD causes impulsivity and shifting focus. The impulsivity is not as common from SI issues, tho ADHD does bring SI problems. So how do you know? ADHD behaviors are across all settings. SI behaviors are responsive, so they can disappear in some settings. When they are fidgety and disorganized, have they lost focus? Do they start things and then move on without finishing? That is less typical of the sensory child. They may *tire* before they finish, but they do not consistently leave things.

>Did they have to use too much battery to monitor their bodies, defy gravity, filter nonsense and perform? Or

>Is too much going in at once? Are there lights and movement and talking and directions and rules?

Other reasons to act out: Proud- don’t like being a failure, Frustrated - with inability to manage, Escape – anything to get out of work.

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What are the senses – touch, sight, sound, vestibular, proprioceptive

Everybody has some sort of “sensory issue”. Sensory problems are only problems if they are in your way. For some kids, the processing difficulties can be very painful or unsettling and just knowing it’s coming can bring behavior problems. For example, every Tuesday Morah teaches a song with motions. The singing and movement and inability to follow is overwhelming and the child will start getting anxious before she gets there, or as the time nears. Look for the patterns; “she does this every time we…”, “I knew it, every time we… he starts to…” (Commonly it’s dismissal, circle time, writing time, davening)

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For each of these we are going to use visualization or an exercise to learn what it is and what it means.

Decreased touch is very common but less behaviorally challenging. These kids are messy but don’t notice. Their clothes are twisted; they have food on their face. Their shoes are untied.

Visualize: You are wrapped in layers of gauze on your whole body, all your skin covered. How does it feel to not ‘feel’ anything? What do you think it would be like to turn pages, cut out shapes, find things in your backpack. Think about slipping papers into your folder or grabbing papers from your desk.

Give me an example of a classroom problem associated with this system

Let’s move on with each of these one at a time, stepping into their shoes, and then thinking about how it will effect their day. I believe that if you can “be” them, you will find it easier to help them.

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Decreased vestibular – what it means, how it looks.

Conservationists – things you wouldn’t even believe are using energy but their meter is running. Turning over the pencil to erase, closing the fridge and reopening it, taking out the folder and opening it and putting it back, getting up to throw something out instead of tossing it. But they seem to manage at recess, right? Think of a little super ball. Once it is in motion, it can stay in motion. But once it hits the chair, chest on table, head on arm, chin on desk. I call these kids the screen saver kids. If they don’t keep moving, the screen saver will go on. So they fidget, doodle, shred things, chew, rock, reposition, reposition. This is different than moving to calm or burn energy. It has a different intensity.

Their hearing and vision may be depressed as well or they could be over sensitive. They may not hear you if they are focusing on something else. They usually see only one thing at a time. Or at all.

Visualization Exercise: 1) Sit up in chair and put your feet together and knees together. Don’t move them for a minute. How does it feel to *need* to move? How distracting is it?

Give me an example of a classroom problem associated with this system

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The muscles send messages to the brain to give their position. Without this information, the body does not know where it is without moving.

>Vision guides hands and movement.

>They have no sense of midrange movement so they will throw full force, speak one volume, yank things, people, erase holes into their paper.

>Where am I? They won’t realize they swished a stack of papers to the floor – how would they know? What would tell them? Your limb would pull for a moment as it met resistance. How do you know you walked on something? Your ankles tell you. How do you know something dropped from the top of the pile you are carrying? How do you know your shoe is untied? How do you know your backpack is emptying itself as you walk down the hall?

>They don’t know what they did wrong because they didn’t experience it. They have no facts to compile. Tell them to look. Give them the pieces. “those papers were on that desk before you passed by”. Let them experience it in hindsight. Don’t use vague terms. Be specific - “That was very fast. We save that for outside.” Now they can put a name to that speed.

>Without defined space, they drift on their chairs because it’s like floating. They can end up ten inches away from where their chair started, moving slowly into someone else’s space. They need a wall to give them a point of reference. They will run their finger along the wall when walking.

>They do a lot of wrestling. Kids who crave pressure and deep touch will even start up with most aggressive out of control kid (or sibling) to engage in physical fight. And come up laughing.

Exercise: write help on line eyes open then eyes closed, connect the dots eyes open then eyes closed. Make a short verticle line with eyes open. Close eyes and make three more next to it. Move someone’s arm while their eyes are closed. Ask them to duplicate it.

Give an example of a classroom problem associated with this system.

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Hypersensitive to stimulus – high anxiety child. Bombarded with input and with worry about future input. Misreads touches of others. His daled amos are very big, people are always too close.

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Engine trouble – regulation. The new buzz word

Regulation is a thermostat. When you are in the playground you are loud. In shul you are quiet. What about in lunchroom? In class during discussion? What about library? There are levels. When a child cannot stay regulated, it means they are not able to match their body’s “arousal level” to the environment, or that they cannot switch between them on their own.

Meaning this – everyone is sitting in class doing seat work and he is loud. He is getting up and moving around, not because he can’t sit as much as because he doesn’t seem to be clued in that it is quiet time. The behavior is not necessarily wild, it is just not appropriate for the setting. More common is the child who is loud at the right times but cannot change to calm. After lunch, after recess, after class skits, after short breaks, he seems to be unable to shift to the change in environment. Everyone is laughing. Everyone gets quiet and moves on. He is still laughing.

These behaviors are very similar to impulsive, ADD behaviors but usually, once the student calms, he stays calm and can work. The problem is getting there. Some kids get disregulated (lose that just right state) from emotional input, from getting stressed by sensory input around them, like kids talking nearby, or their body needing a break.

Exercise: Imagine you just came in from recess and this kid is riled up. Everyone is going to their seats and he is still talking loudly and on the recess topic. You asked him to calm down but it didn’t help. What can we do next?

They need to learn this from the outside in. Show them the “meter”. Ask them where they are holding (low energy, just right or high energy). Ask them where they need to be holding for this moment. Ask them how they can get there. They should have two or three strategies to chose from at times like these. “Do you want to go get a drink, do some wall push ups, or get your stress ball?” Once they know the program, it takes only moments to do this with them - you hand them the meter, they point to a color, you tell them to pick a strategy.

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We can figure out what they need, and what we can change or provide. We can notice when it isn’t working and give them breaks.

Remove the obstacles – can the work be modified.

Change the environment – put things in place or take things away to make the environment work for them.

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These are modifications for sensory processing problems.

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I obviously don’t recommend fidgets that make noise or can be thrown.

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Addressing the behaviors they exhibit will be more effective. Can you tell what they are asking for? Can you provide it?

If they are antsy – music may not help calm them. They may need to take a sensory break. If they are working but loud and you keep asking them to quiet down then put on soft music, or ask for quiet voice instead of silence.

Hard work or hard day – is the work too hard? Is it a new concept? Did they spend the morning working extra hard and need a break? Or is it the day before break, the week before chanuka, the first day of spring? Look for the signs. Fill the needs.

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Describe how different movements address different moods.

Rhythmic movement will calm. Use it to channel energy.

Jolting/intense to arouse when distracted or sluggish. Also, when wild, use this to redirect. High tones is like fast movement. Use low keys to calm if playing music. The rhythm and tones will matter.

Slow movements will calm, fast will arouse. Don’t ask them to shake their sillies out if you are trying to calm them!

Fade out – do 8 jumping jacks, then 6, then 4, then 2, then 3 deep slow breaths. Then sit down.

Do exercise from the chair or near it so you can sit right down when done and avoid all unorganized movement.

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Sample exercises. Some elicit much movement. Some are just deep stretches. Big sweeping movements can distract wild energy and then follow with calming exercises.

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If the behavior of just one or two is really pulling down the class:

Is the task they have too hard for them? Are they acting out to avoid working? If their work is appropriate but they won’t cooperate, give them a preferred or easy task (even a book on tape) and separate them from the class. Don’t waste time trying to get them onboard and risk losing others.

Thank you.

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