

Occupational Therapy – Adult Learning Disability Service

Guidance for Activity and Sensory Integration

Sensory Integration difficulties can present when an individual's nervous system is very sensitive (**over-reactive**) or not sensitive enough (**under-reactive**). These individuals may react to harmless sensations as if they were painful or dangerous (over-reactive) or may not register to ordinary sensory input (under-reactive).

This can have an effect on everything an individual does every day.

Sensory Integrative difficulties are thought to be significant for many individuals with a Learning Disability and can be easily seen as a negative behaviour but in reality their behaviours are communicating to us what sensory input they require in order to function.

Intervention for sensory integrative difficulties could be via adapting the environment, provision of a compensatory strategy, **reviewing an individual's timetable to ensure a balance of alerting/calming activities** and/or developing strategies for the individual to self manage their sensory needs.

The five senses are...

- Olfactory – Smell
- Gustatory – Taste
- Tactile – Touch
- Auditory – Hearing
- Visual – Vision

Two additional senses are...

- Vestibular – Movement Sense
- Proprioception – Bodies Awareness System

It is important to be aware that appropriate sensory activities should not be limited to leisure activities only. There are many personal care and domestic tasks which can

also contribute to an individual's sensory needs. This is very important to remember especially in those individuals who can become over-stimulated as often they have already received sufficient sensory input for that period of time before what is considered the 'main' activity for the day has been introduced.

Everyday activity which provides us with appropriate sensory stimulation is important for everyone's mental and physical health as well as their wellbeing. This is even more pertinent for those who experience sensory processing difficulties therefore it is important and good practice that the following is taken on board.

Activity/Occupation

Activity is only beneficial to individuals if this is **meaningful to them**. Meaningful activity is an activity which is of value, interest and meets the skill level of the individual.

This could mean an individual completing small parts within an activity. For example, one person may be able to bake a cake from start to finish but others may only contribute to smaller steps such as stirring and icing the cake.

Motivation (values/interests/self belief)

Think about what the individual values within their life, what the individual wants to do, needs to do and self belief about their own ability to do an activity. This is quite a difficult balance to strike but with appropriate investigation and observation we can tune into an individual's presenting sensory behaviour and think how we can mimic this feeling in a safer way.

Relevance

Make sure all tasks are relevant to the individual; this includes consideration of needs, value and culture.

Roles and Routines

Structure each day to ensure it is balanced. The appropriate balance will be determined by the individual. For example, an individual who can be easily over

stimulated may require more down time than those individuals who seek out sensory input.

Environment

Make sure the environment is suitable for the activity, this includes equipment, space, environmental cues and that distraction is minimal. Remember the environment also includes the people supporting the individual during the activity.

Skills

Think about the individual's current skills within each activity and if they need to learn any new skills. Skills can be developed giving instruction, demonstration, participation, positive feedback and practice.

Active Support

Think how much support the individual will need. Support should be given in a way which promotes independence as much as possible. **It's about doing 'with' and not doing 'for'. Your role is to enable the individual to do the activity as independently as possible.**

Encouragement

Think about how you can encourage and praise throughout the activity. The more positive response an individual receives during a task, the more likely they are to want to engage again.

To view further information online you can visit You Tube and search "Active Support – Expand Someone's World".

To enable us to continually improve our service, please contact our Occupational Therapy team if this guidance has been successful or if you are still experiencing difficulties, please contact our Occupational Therapy Adult Learning Disability Service on **01383 565223**.