

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS for TEACHERS

Q: Is there proof that SPD is real?

A: Following a hiatus after sensory pioneer Dr. A. Jean Ayres died in 1988, research into SPD has recently entered a massive growth phase. The sensory processing abilities of hundreds of children are being tested in multiple laboratories, providing the replicate data that are the cornerstone of scientific credibility. Research scientists from numerous, diverse disciplines are conducting primate studies, rat studies, anatomic studies, electroencephalographic, and other psychophysiological studies, plus studies of twins, other familial studies, and more. Results are being reported in refereed professional journals where research must meet exacting standards to be published.

Scientists are hard at work on questions such as these:

- What's going on in the brains of these children?
- How is SPD similar and different from other disorders
- What does SPD look like
- Does treatment work?
- How many people have SPD?
- Where does SPD come from?
- Is heredity a factor?

Many reports of the research being published can be found in Our Library at www.SPDFoundation.com.

Q: How is Sensory Processing Disorder treated?

A: SPD is typically treated with a program of occupational therapy (OT) conducted in a sensory-rich environment. Appropriate OT can change the neurological functioning in children with SPD so they can manage their responses to sensations and behave in a more functional manner. Successful OT enables them to take part in the normal activities of childhood such as



playing with friends, enjoying school, eating, dressing, and sleeping. Therapy can take place in a hospital OT department or in a private practice setting. The most effective treatment is tailored to the needs of the individual child.

Q: Can children who have an autistic spectrum disorder also have Sensory Processing Disorder?

A: A. Jean Ayres, PhD, OTR, who pioneered sensory integration theory and therapy, and another well-known occupational therapist, Lorna Jean King, believe that many children with autism also have Sensory Processing Disorder. The presence of SPD, they believe, contributes to many of the behavioral and learning problems experienced by children with autistic spectrum disorders, such as over- or under-reactivity to sensations and problems in making sense of auditory and visual input to understand and use language. Pilot research by the SPD Foundation indicates that as many as 80% of children with Autism also have SPD. (The reverse is not true.)

One talented family has chronicled its odyssey through sorting through the similar symptoms of SPD and Autism in a moving and highly informative documentary film entitled *Autistic-Like: Graham's Story*. The film is highly recommended for screening at parent-teacher meetings and in-service workshops. Information about the film is available at www.autisticlike.com.

Q: Are children entitled to Sensory Processing Disorder therapy in school by law?

A: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) guarantees a free and appropriate public education with peers, to the maximum extent appropriate, to all eligible children with disabilities (ages 3-21) who need special education and related services in order to learn in school. Children with disabilities can receive occupational therapy (OT) if they qualify for special education. In addition, a school team, including the parents, must decide if the therapy is necessary. (Some school districts will provide OT in other instances, e.g., to give teachers suggestions before referring a child to special education, called a pre-referral.)

There are no provisions in state or federal law that specify how OT, once recommended by the team, must be provided. This includes the service model, frequency of intervention, and the frame of reference.

Therapists who recommend school-based sensory integration therapy must show how the student needs this kind of occupational therapy in order to

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benefit from participation in the curriculum and specific school activities. Important issues to address include:

- The student's performance levels in educationally relevant areas
- How OT services using sensory integration would support team goals
- The specific instructional methods and materials (including those based on sensory integration principles) needed to assist the student in reaching specified educational goals

Q: Where can I go for more information about Sensory Processing Disorder?

A: The Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) Foundation is the leader in SPD research, education, and advocacy worldwide. Among many other services, the Foundation sponsors the largest and most comprehensive website about SPD on the worldwide web. You will find the website at www.SPDFoundation.com.

Lucy Jane Miller, PhD, OTR, founder and executive director of SPD Foundation, has written a groundbreaking book for parents, teachers, and health care providers entitled Sensational Kids: Hope and Help for Children with Sensory Processing Disorder. Available in paperback, Sensational Kids has been called "every parent's 'go-to' book for questions about their child's sensory development issues." The book describes and provides strategies for children with the major subtypes of SPD and also details the latest research on SPD. The book is available through the website, amazon.com, or from a bookseller where you live and work.

Dozens of clinical reports about SPD are available in Our Library on the SPD Foundation website. The Foundation also distributes a quarterly e-newsletter containing news and updates about SPD for which you can sign up by clicking Contact Us on the SPD Foundation website.

