

Sensory Meltdowns vs Behaviour Meltdowns

Do you know the difference?

Understanding the difference between a sensory meltdown and a behaviour meltdown is VITAL as the strategies to resolve are very different. You will need two very different plans. Let's take two situations and compare.

Situation One - Joshua arrives at school and he has a relief teacher for the day and his desk has been moved. These unscheduled changes are likely to cause a behaviour meltdown as they heighten anxiety. The solutions to this situation could include showing a visual that his teacher is away, moving his desk back or preventative break strategies. *These strategies and more will be explained in detail in page 3 – Anxiety & Power of Preventative Breaks*

Situation Two - Joshua leaves home happy, walks into school and children are playing recorder in the classroom. He covers his ears, screams and runs away. This is a sensory meltdown. It is usually '0-100 fight or flight' and you will rarely see it coming. I only wish that sensory meltdowns were always so obvious. Often it can be a change of perfume, chair scrapping on floor and many other subtle sensory issues that we are unaware of. This is why an understanding the child's sensory needs is so important. There are some great books that you can use to workout sensory triggers so you can successfully address these.

10 SENSORY ACTIVITIES for EVERYONE in the class & More information on page 2

The great news is, with understanding and a range of strategies in place both these meltdowns can be successfully managed. Many students actually use sensory activities to calm them in both situations.

**** Create Your Own Sensory Tool Box ****

I would encourage everyone in 2011 to create a Sensory Tool Box. We have some wonderful new ideas (*see link below*) and have added some great new resources to our 2011 range of products.

New Sensory Tools for 2011

Sensory strategies can wear off for our children and students, much like we can become bored with things. Also not ALL strategies and ALL sensory aids/tools work for all children. With this in mind I've introduced a whole new range of sensory tools in 2011 – offering a much wider variety for you to choose from. Feedback from these new sensory tools has been great!

<p>Twist Puzzle Key Chain</p> <p>Hours of FUN.</p> <p>CODE ST21 \$2.50</p>		<p>Frizzee Ball</p> <p>Amazing for meeting sensory needs.</p> <p>CODE ST20 \$3.00</p>		<p>Punki Wrist Band</p> <p>Pop on wrist or just use for fidget tool.</p> <p>CODE ST22 \$2.00</p>	
<p>Critter Caterpillar</p> <p>Excellent for meeting sensory needs.</p> <p>CODE ST24 \$4.00</p>		<p>Smiley Face Stress Ball</p> <p>Great for stress release.</p> <p>CODE ST23 \$2.00</p>		<p>Animal Stamp</p> <p>Great for fine motor skills.</p> <p>CODE ST19 \$2.00</p>	
<p>Frogs (Packet of 6)</p> <p>Great fidget toys for children who love Blue-tac.</p> <p>CODE ST04 \$2.00</p>	<p>Back in stock!</p> 	<p>Slinky Key Chain</p> <p>Excellent for children who process best when fidgeting.</p> <p>CODE ST07 \$3.50</p>	<p>Back in stock!</p> 	<p>Chewy Tubes with Handles</p> <p>Now comes optional with a handle.</p> <p>CODE ST11 \$11.00</p>	

Sensory Processing

Sensory processing difficulties are a key issue for many students with an ASD. It is vital to consider the possible impact of this and how to address these issues.

What is it Sensory Processing Disorder?

Sensory Processing Disorder or SPD (also referred to as Sensory Integration Disorder or Sensory Integration Dysfunction) is a neurological disorder causing difficulties with taking in, processing and responding to sensory information from the environment and within your own body (visual, auditory, tactile, olfaction, gustatory, vestibular and proprioception). This can be Hypo Reactive or Hyper Reactive. For example: one child may show no sign of pain when they hurt themselves whilst another slightest touch can cause pain.

People with an ASD tell us about their sensory difficulties

Temple Grandin (in her autobiography) writes:
*"Ordinary clothes itched and scratched. Behaviour Problems could have been avoided by simple clothing modifications."
 "My eyes are sensitive to light, and I squint."
 "Although my hearing was normal, noises overwhelmed me. I covered my ears to block out sounds."*

How does it affect learning?

For those with SPD, sensory information may be sensed and perceived in a way that is different from most other people. Unlike blindness or deafness, sensory information can be received by people with SPD, **the difference** is that information is often registered, interpreted and processed differently by the brain. SPD can affect not only how they move and learn, but also how they behave, how they play and make friends, and especially how they feel about themselves.

A Typical Child	A Child with SPD
Matt sits at his table, upright and reads the worksheet instructions. He understands them, picks up a pencil and connects the dots.	Jack sits slumped at his table. He twists on the chair, trying to get comfortable so he can read. He cocks his head this way and that. The words dance on the page.

Why undertake sensory programmes?

As stated above, SPD can have a huge impact on learning and behavior. By creating an appropriate sensory programme you can reduce fears, confusion and distress and provide long term change.

What to do?

Usually Occupational Therapists (OT) undertake specific sensory assessments and programmes for children with an ASD. However in my experience not everyone has access to an OT, and even if the child is having therapy these activities need to be followed up at home and school.

The great news is sensory integration activities are unbelievably fun and a necessary part of development for *any child*, whether they have a sensory processing disorder or not.

10 Sensory Activities for EVERYONE

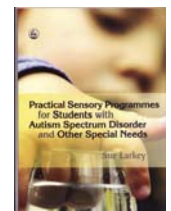
1. Play dough: hide objects or little wobbly eyes in the dough and get the kids to find.
2. Put on shoes and socks; find big ones that are easy to put on at first.
3. Chinese Whispers: just start with one word.
4. Play with toys which have sounds, vibrate or light up.
5. Marble works.
6. Pop-up books.
7. Target games.
8. Bean bag activities: throwing, catching, carrying etc.
9. Mirror activities: dress up, make faces.
10. Put out a range of textures on the ground: sand, bubble wrap, carpet, foam pieces etc. Start with shoes on then take off shoes and socks! Or even crawl over.

Great resources to support your sensory programmes

Practical Sensory Programmes: By Sue Larkey

Designed for families and schools to incorporate sensory activities into the home and school in order to address the significant difficulties students with an ASD often encounter. It shows how to identify sensory problems and develop programmes. Over 100 activities including all five senses and movement.

CODE B05 \$45 (incl P & H)

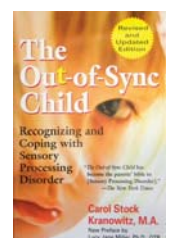


The Out-of-Sync Child: By Carol Stock Kranowitz

Recognising and coping with sensory processing disorder

The revised edition of the ground-breaking 1998 book that introduced Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) to parents, teachers, and other non-specialists. This new edition features additional information on visual and hearing deficits, motor skill difficulties, ADHD, autism, Asperger syndrome, and other related disorders.

CODE B42 \$40 (incl P & H)



Anxiety and ASD

Excerpt from the NEW Teacher Assistants Big Blue Book of Ideas by Sue Larkey & Anna Tullemans (due out in March).

Research has shown that more than 75% of all children with an ASD experience INTENSE anxious feelings. I believe for people on the autism spectrum their two biggest challenges in education today are their *anxiety* and *lack of problem solving skills*. When I went to school and pre-school the programme was very routine and structured, with very limited choices. Today education is full of choices, open ended tasks and constant changes. For most students this makes it interesting BUT for students with an ASD, ADHD, ODD etc this creates many challenges. The start of the year often sees increases in anxiety.

Anxiety can look like:

- Avoidance of new situations
- Preference for sameness
- Rigidity
- Social withdrawal
- Anger
- Meltdowns
- Repetitive noise, movement or sentence

What programmes can help manage anxiety?

- Emotional Education
- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (Tony Attwood Books)
- Relaxation Therapy
- Sensory Integration Therapy.

The Power of Preventative Breaks

Students self-regulating their anxiety is a VERY important part of their behaviour management programme. A student being able to request a break before a meltdown is a fantastic strategy.

You will need to teach them a range of strategies to calm themselves. When you are teaching them, you will begin to notice which ones are more effective at calming. You can then write social stories and use visual cards to help them remember what to do when they feel anxious.

Break Cards

Remember sometimes when anxious children with an ASD have difficulty communicating effectively, this is why we use visual cards to request a break. You can use in two ways:

1. The student requests the break.
2. You give the student the card as you see anxiety rising.

<p style="text-align: center;">BREAK CARD</p> <p>I can ask for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☺ Movement break ☺ Wall push ups ☺ Quiet place ☺ See Mr Jones 	<p style="text-align: center;">BREAK CARD</p> <p>I can</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☺ Take 10 deep breaths ☺ Count to 20 ☺ Hug myself ☺ Have a drink
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There are a range of strategies you can use for breaks and here are some to get you started:

Sensory Breaks

- Chewing (allowing to chew gum, chewy tube etc)
- Quiet area
- Listening to music
- Watching Liquid Timer
- Humming, rocking
- Sit under a table with blanket over it
- Carry heavy books, box
- Lying under a gym mat, weighted vest etc

Physical Breaks

- Mini trampoline
- Rolling on large exercise ball
- Star jumps, jumping
- Push up against wall
- Walk, run

Relaxation Breaks

- Counting
- Breathing
- Music
- Imaginary World (some students escape into an imaginary world, this is particularly common for girls on the spectrum)

Non Threatening Withdrawal: Diversion before Meltdown

- Send on an errand
- Get them to do a job for you

Solitude Suggestions

- Safe haven
- Special interest time
- Book to read
- Sit away from group. For example: If you are on mat let them sit at a table away from group or if you are doing group work and the room is noisy send their group outside.
- If you are lucky enough to have a small room off your classroom create a space for them to work there.

Matthew often needed time in his "little room". One day when I was in the classroom I observed him actually calling out answers from his room. He was still working just needed his own space.

Other Strategies

- Toilet, drink and/or food
- Talking to mentor

Remember: All of these strategies need to be taught to the child and practiced.