

# SENSORY FOCUS

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE DEDICATED TO IMPROVING SENSORY ISSUES

SPRING 2013

## QUESTIONS ABOUT CONNECTICUT SHOOTER ADAM LANZA, ASPERGER'S SYNDROME & SPD

TEMPLE GRANDIN, PhD

... and articles by

Lucy Jane Miller, PhD, OTR with Sarah A. Schoen, PhD, OTR

Carolyn Dalglish

Jennifer McIlwee Myers



ALSO IN  
THIS ISSUE:

*Focus on Diet: Listen to Your Food*  
Bobbi Sheahan

*PlaySense: Don't Rush Arnold*  
Barbara Sher, MA, OTR



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*Hello and Happy Spring to everyone!*

You may have noticed our new name. When *S.I. Focus* was created by Kathleen Morris, “sensory integration” was the term universally used to refer to the way the nervous system receives messages from the senses and turns them into appropriate motor and behavioral responses. Since then, many people have started referring to this process as “sensory processing,” and difficulties with this function have been termed *Sensory Processing Disorder*, or SPD.

Some still refer to SPD as “sensory integration dysfunction,” and some use the two terms interchangeably. For some therapists, the difference is political and even, at times, polarizing.

Therefore, the name of this publication had to be changed. *Sensory Focus* seems to convey exactly what you get in each issue, without taking sides. Frankly, we are far more interested in education than politics!

The staggering figure of one in six children having sensory issues strong enough to affect their everyday lives still floors me. These kids, and their parents, need to know what types of information and resources are available to them. One glance at our new title should tell them they have a valuable resource in their hands.

So, now that we are done chatting about terms, what valuable resources are YOU going to enjoy this lovely spring?

We are bringing you some wonderful articles, the first of which is Dr Temple Grandin’s article about the Newton, Connecticut, shooter having Asperger’s syndrome and SPD. What repercussions does this have in our community? Dr Lucy Miller and Dr Sarah Schoen have contributed a great article on playground systems, while Carolyn Dalglish writes about organization. Jennifer McIlwee Myers, a woman with Asperger’s syndrome, tells us how best to self-advocate for our sensory needs in everyday life.

As always, our regular columnists come through with some helpful ideas. Bobbi Sheahan writes about food and sensory issues, while Barbara Sher talks about the power of NOT rushing advancements.

So sit back, grab a cup of your favorite coffee or tea, and enjoy these wonderful resources.

**Jennifer Gilpin Yacio**

*Vice President of Future Horizons, Inc./*

*Editor in Chief of Sensory Focus*



# QUESTIONS ABOUT CONNECTICUT SHOOTER ADAM LANZA, ASPERGER'S SYNDROME & SPD

TEMPLE GRANDIN, PhD

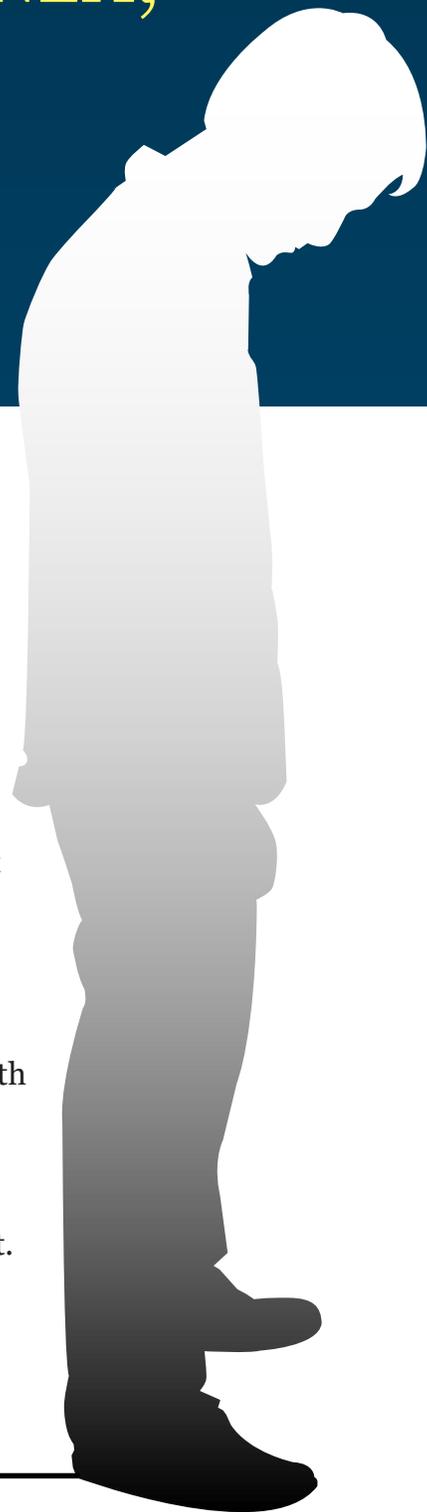
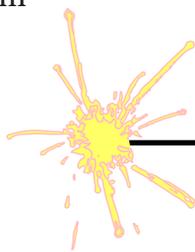
**M**any people in the special-needs community are concerned about news reports that indicate Adam Lanza, the gunman who killed the children and teachers at the school in Connecticut, had Asperger's syndrome and perhaps Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD). They fear that this information will make the public think that individuals with these disorders are inherently violent.

There is a wide range of people on the autism spectrum. They range from prodigies—the likes of Einstein, Mozart, and Steve Jobs—to individuals who remain nonverbal. Half of the computer programmers in Silicon Valley may have some signs of autism. However, the vast majority of folks on the spectrum are peaceful and nonviolent.

SPD affects an even wider variety of people. Individuals who have SPD and many different diagnoses or labels may have sensory issues such as sound sensitivity, difficulty screening out background noise, or visual sensitivity to fluorescent lights. SPD can occur in conjunction with autism, dyslexia, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, speech delay, and learning problems.

I have read extensive articles about Adam Lanza on the Internet. Here is some of his history that may be pertinent to his violent outburst.

When Adam was attending his local school, he was super shy and would not allow his picture to be put in the yearbook. During his years there he showed no violent tendencies, and he was really good with computers. His life rapidly went downhill after his parents' divorce.



Adam stopped attending school and became a recluse in his mother's basement. He spent all day playing violent video games and did not participate in any activities except for shooting a gun at a local firing range. He had no other interests.

The gun he shot at the range was the same gun he shot in the video games he played. In my opinion, he was probably visiting some really horrible Web sites, because prior to the shootings, he completely destroyed his computer's hard drive so investigators could not determine what he had been doing on his computer or what sites he had been visiting prior to the school shooting.

What should have been done to help Adam before the shooting occurred?

First and most importantly, Adam Lanza's parents should have forced him to get out of the house and find a job. Whether he liked it or not, he should have been working to develop other interests. He was good with computers, and he could have been working at a local computer store. There is a tendency for some people on the spectrum to become recluses. They have to get out into the world. Video-game playing needs to be restricted to 1 hour a day, as it draws people away from reality.

Second, boys need a good male role model. A good male role model would have dragged this kid out of the basement before he descended into his sick world and began shooting people.

Third, people on the spectrum get obsessed with their favorite things. Teachers and

Lanza been encouraged to develop his talents and interests, socialize with others, and turn his skills into being able to earn an honest living, perhaps he could have made a life for himself that turned out very differently. ♦

*By themselves, autism and the sensory issues that go along with SPD do not make a person violent.*

parents must direct obsessions toward positive things that can translate into building careers and fulfilling lives.

There are some individuals, like me, who have extreme problems with anxiety and panic attacks. Taking a small dose of an antidepressant worked wonders for me. There is further information on this in my book, *Thinking in Pictures*.

When I was in high school, I had anxiety and tended to be a recluse. Both my mother and teacher did NOT allow this. They made me get out, be with other people, and develop my own interests and talents.

By themselves, autism and the sensory issues that go along with SPD do not make a person violent. Had Adam

*Temple Grandin, PhD, is an internationally respected specialist in the design of livestock handling systems. She is also the most famous person with autism in the world today. She was recently named one of Time magazine's 100 most influential people and is the subject of the award-winning 2010 HBO biopic. Temple has authored several books on autism and is a worldwide speaker on autism topics. Her website is [www.templegrandin.com](http://www.templegrandin.com).*

# Listen to Your

# FOOD

FOCUS  
on  
DIET

Bobbi Sheahan



## When trying to figure out a sensory issue, you might reconsider which senses are involved, even if it doesn't seem to make sense at first.

**W**hen trying to figure out a sensory issue, you might reconsider which senses are involved, even if it doesn't seem to make sense at first.

When you think about the sensory issues in your family, what's at the top of the list?

For many of us, it's food. Sure, there's the way that neither my husband nor I can bear to wear scratchy blue jeans. There's his sensitive hearing and my acute sense of smell (like a dog) and my daughter's imperviousness to pain. There's my klutziness and lack of fashion sense and the way that none of us knows how loudly we are really talking.

But in my family and in my informal survey of other families, those aren't the main event. *Food is.* Food keeps coming up again and again. Food is nourishment and comfort and entertainment. It is celebration and consola-

tion. It can involve multiple senses—taste, touch, and smell. I used to choose foods primarily on the basis of the way they felt. My tastes run toward things that are cold and sweet—I blame my chronic sore throats from sinus allergies. But recently, I learned from my daughter that, at least for her, food involves yet another of her senses. If I'm smart—which is sometimes debatable, I know—I can use this information to expand her limited menu even farther.

For years, my daughter didn't really want to try anything unless it was sweet, smooth, and room temperature. When we did finally get her to branch out, it was first to fruits and then to vegetables. Some of her vegetable choices surprised me because they didn't seem to fit the pattern—until I came to understand that she was focused on the sound of the food, rather than the

taste. For years, she would eat raw cabbage, and I rejoiced, while completely missing what was motivating her to eat it. Not long ago, we got Grace to try lettuce. Now, she insists on calling it “cabbage,” and she has asked for it at dinner 3 nights running.

There was just this one thing I didn't get, though—she scrunched up her face and put her hands over her ears when she ate it. I was afraid to ask her what was wrong and risk losing a food that she would eat in her sparse repertoire, but, finally, on the third night, I couldn't stand watching her eat it like that anymore. It would be so unlike her to eat a food she didn't like, and yet she seemed to be grimacing.

So, I asked her why she made that face when she ate it. She said, “I like the way it sounds when I chew it. It sounds like cabbage, but different.”

I think of this as The Lesson of the Lettuce; in short, maybe I'm missing the point by assuming that I know what is objectionable to my child.

Her siblings were delighted, and they all began to fill their mouths and listen to the sounds of chewing their lettuce together, with their hands over their ears.

So, "lettuce" put all this together. (See how I did that?) When you're dealing with sensory issues, things may not always be what they seem. You may think that your child is rejecting a food because of its taste, when it's actually the texture he finds objectionable. I think of this as The Lesson of the Lettuce; in short, maybe I'm missing the point by assuming that I know what is objectionable to my child.

Maybe it's not just my kids; maybe all of us have our own Lesson of the Lettuce. Your child may be uncomfortable in his classroom because there is a bully in class, or the bulletin

boards are too busy, or it could be something else entirely: the buzzing of the fluorescent lights, a particular smell in the classroom, a temperature issue, or even (as was the case for my husband) the sound of the other kids' pencils scratching along on their papers.

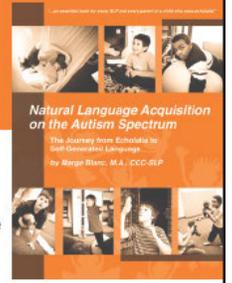
If your child isn't eating her lunch, maybe it's not the food at all; maybe there is something about her lunchbox that she finds intolerable. I still remember the desk that I had one year in elementary school because it was missing a caster on the bottom of one of its legs, and it wobbled. In retrospect, I could have stopped the distracting wobbling with a sugar packet or some duct tape, but it never occurred to me or anyone else to even try.

I hope that we can all use The Lesson of the Lettuce in a broader context: Don't ever hesitate to ask questions about every one of your kids' senses; some solutions may be right under your nose. Or your eyes. Or your ears. ♦

*Bobbi Sheahan is the co-author of What I Wish I'd Known about Raising a Child with Autism (Future Horizons, 2011).*

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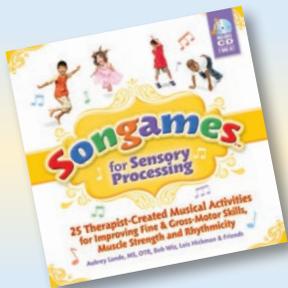
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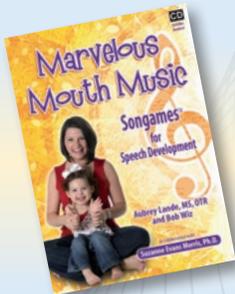


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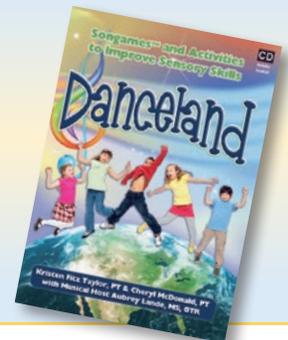


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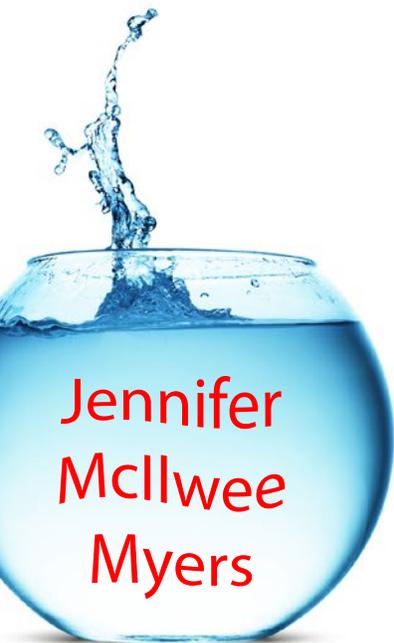
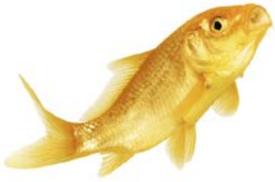
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# Self-Advocacy in SPD: Knowledge Is Power

**H**aving lived with varying degrees of Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) all my life, I have developed some tricks and tools to help me negotiate the world with my sanity at least partly intact. Two main things my parents taught me in particular have done the most to make SPD a manageable (if sometimes inconvenient) part of life. The first is a piece of knowledge my parents gave me, and the second is something possessed by practically everyone reading this. You can give both to your child—starting now.

First, my parents taught me that I could change situations, and they helped me learn how to do it. It is all too easy to overprotect a child who has SPD and Asperger's syndrome, and even though neither of those things had a name when I was growing up, my mom noticed early that I tended to hide behind adults and try to get them to handle problems for me. My folks weren't having any of that.

When I was as young as 7, I had to stand up for myself in simple ways. For example, whenever I went into record stores, I couldn't always handle the music playing in the background. (Some store employees take the term "background" very loosely, you know.)

But when I went to my dad and asked him to fix it for me, instead he said, “What you need to do is go up to the front counter and tell the guy working there that we are shopping and need him to turn the music down. Be polite.”

Initially, I was a bit upset that my dad wasn’t going to make the problem go away. But, I was reasonably game, so I did what I was told. And guess what? The guy behind the counter turned the music down!

This was awesome! I didn’t just learn to make a simple

you can’t eat a certain food or tolerate a certain sensation. Food was, of course an issue. SPD plus Asperger’s? Food was definitely an issue!

I was coached from the earliest age to order food the way I wanted it. I had to state my request politely and clearly. Mom knew it was within my power to say, “I’d like a hamburger with nothing on it, just the meat and the bun, please.” So I learned to say that, distinctly, politely, and with a smile.

My natural tendency was to order what I wanted pretty

assumptions that the average server or cook might make. For example, many people in the restaurant industry have the bizarre belief that it is possible to eat mashed potatoes that have come into contact with gravy. I had to learn to respond to such situations calmly and get what I wanted without hurting feelings or getting huffy.

Sometimes, the lessons came out of the sensory problems my mother or my other relatives had. When we went shopping, my mom talked to me about how we were going

*“The fact that I was taught skills and given information that gave me some control over situations and environments some of the time was huge for me.”*

request—I learned that I could make things happen. Over time, I learned that this doesn’t work perfectly all the time or in all environments, but knowing that I have an option, that I do have some control over things, made me feel much better.

My parents kept working on what they saw as the main issues: the need to teach me independence and to get me to go after what I needed without having an outburst or breakdown or coming to a dead stop. They didn’t know what SPD was, but they knew there are things you can do when

harshly and to have a fit if the food had something “wrong” with it when it came. Realistically, it was hard for me to understand the idea that there are people who can stand to have a pickle on the same plate as other food. But the fact that I didn’t really understand typical food preferences did not exempt me from being polite, friendly, and clear.

And, yes, there were tears when the wrong food arrived sometimes. It took a lot of coaching and encouragement for me to learn to cope with and work around the strange

to go early and on a weekday so there would be fewer people and less noise. She talked about how going to a store when it wasn’t crowded meant being able to stay calmer and get the shopping done faster.

My mom taught me other useful things, like the art of avoiding perfume samples on your way into a department store and the idea that sometimes shopping requires a “surgical strike” approach. This involves figuring out what you need and where it’s likely to be, going in and getting it, and leaving immediately.

The fact that I was taught skills and given information that gave me some control over situations and environments some of the time was huge for me. I cannot overstate how much having a sense of self-efficacy helps!

After all, the pain and distress a child with sensory issues experiences comes in two parts: The first is the physical pain or discomfort, which is no fun and can be difficult to avoid completely.

And that's where the other key element that has made my SPD manageable comes in. Knowledge is power.

When I first received a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome, I picked up some books that had sections on SPD. I started reading about how sensory problems could make normal experiences difficult and what those sensory problems look like.

Very quickly, I realized this meant that most of the people

There was no way for me to guess at this vital difference; I had to read about it to understand it.

"To understand all is to forgive all." I could forgive and forget a lot of pain when I saw that there is no way for any of us to magically read others' minds and adjust our behavior to fit everyone's sensory needs. Instead of being angry that people didn't understand, I realized that I had to figure out what I needed from people. My

*"I can't overemphasize how revolutionary and profound it was for me to have a decent overview of what sensory issues are and how different 'normal' people's sensory experiences were from mine."*

The other part of distress is the emotional weight of the pain, and that is something that can be changed. Fear, anxiety, and depression make pain significantly worse. The more helpless you feel, the worse it is. When you can, at least to some extent, change what is happening or make the pain less intense through your own actions, it's a very different sensation. When a child learns skills to be able to deal with (or even prevent) tough sensory situations, this gradually erodes the fearful, anxious part of the pain.

around me were experiencing a very different world than I was. Furthermore, it dawned on me that when friends, relatives, and even strangers did things that seemed obviously hurtful and even mean to me, they were not *trying* to be hurtful and had no way of understanding how much they were asking of me!

I can't overemphasize how revolutionary and profound it was for me to have a decent overview of what sensory issues are and how different "normal" people's sensory experiences were from mine.

parents had given me the skills to be able to ask questions in a friendly, polite way, so it wasn't too hard to start applying my newfound sensory knowledge pretty quickly!

Learning how to ask for what I needed was great, but learning about sensory issues meant having a much better idea of what to ask for—and being able to dramatically change my own life for the better.

When I had managed to dig up a good chunk of information about sensory issues, I started looking at my habits and problems in a different

light. I used to be in the habit of going to the mall on most Saturday mornings to do errands (like pick up a pair of socks, buy a birthday card, or get a pair of shoes fixed).

It wasn't until I learned more about sensory issues that I really started thinking about how painful and distressing the mall was for me. To some extent, I assumed I had to live with that pain. In fact, I thought that everyone who went to the mall just toughed it out, since there seemed to be no way to modify the experience.

So, I figured out how to get the same stuff done while

completely avoiding the mall. It was awesome.

And, suddenly, after almost 10 years of marriage, I stopped having fights with my husband on the weekends. The change in my stress level meant I could negotiate a small disagreement or misunderstanding without experiencing anger or frustration. My whole understanding of anger and emotional management changed, as well.

Knowing how to ask for what I needed in the world was only step one. Being aware of what was going on inside me was an incredibly important

step two. I hope that someday, every kid with SPD gets a chance to learn both steps. Then, self-advocacy will come naturally. ♦

*A woman with Asperger's Syndrome, Jennifer provides countless tips to improve the lives of those with sensory difficulties. She is the author of How to Teach Life Skills to Kids with Autism or Asperger's (Future Horizons, 2010).*

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<b>May 3</b>	<b>Cincinnati, OH</b>	<b>Carol Kranowitz, MA Paula Aquilla, DO, BSc, OT</b>
<b>May 17</b>	<b>Boise, ID</b>	<b>Carol Kranowitz, MA Beth Aune, OTR/L Jennifer M<sup>o</sup>llwee Myers</b>



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# PlaySense



**A**RNOLD is a child with Down syndrome. He's 3 years old but is very small for his age and has those loose joints that are often seen in children with Down syndrome. As a former dancer, I can't help but envy Arnold's ability to effortlessly do the splits.

Arnold has another skill that Gandhi would admire. Arnold is the master of passive resistance. Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, and other proponents of peace would advise protesters to not fight or add to the violence that was being perpetrated on them. Instead, they would advise resisters to show their resistance by going limp. A limp body is difficult to move.

Every day, Arnold's mom would bring him to the Head Start Centers for school, and every day he would be invited to join his classmates in doing the "morning circle." His response was to go to another part of the room, turn his back to the circle, and play quietly with a toy. Participating in the morning circle is usually not optional at this Head Start Center, so several times, the teacher attempted to pick Arnold up and carry him over to the circle. That's when we found out that Arnold could turn his body into a limp deadweight, so he could slither away. He would return to his spot, with his back to the group.

by Barbara Sher, MA, OTR,  
The Gameslady

Arnold had the same passive-resistance response to games. Trying to guide him along the balance beam in an obstacle course activity or jump from square to square was like trying to get mercury to hold its shape. Everybody was having fun, but Arnold would not join in.

We gave up. Then, slowly, Arnold's behavior began to change. He stopped turning his back and began watching the group from a distance. Little by little he got closer, until one day he actually joined the group for good. We were singing "The Itsy Bitsy Spider," and Arnold watched everyone as if they were friendly aliens. It didn't occur to him yet that he too could imitate what the others were doing.

However, we were floored by the fact that Arnold actually sat in the circle! We took a video that morning, and when we showed it at a workshop later on, someone commented that the child with Down syndrome wasn't joining in. We said, "You have no idea what it took to get

him into that circle—that was Arnold really joining in."

As the year progressed, Arnold got braver and braver and eventually joined in all the activities. He laughed and smiled and enjoyed being a part of the group.

At the end of the school year, the "graduating" class went over to visit the kindergarten program at the elementary school next door. We wondered how Arnold would do in the new setting. We walked into the classroom, and the children were all sitting on the carpet in a circle. Arnold was the first to walk over and sit right down, as if he'd been comfortable doing it all his life.

Arnold taught me an important lesson: Everyone has their own pace, and their own timing. My job is to honor their choices and trust their process. ♦

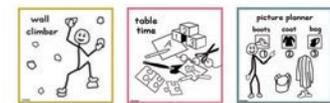
*Barbara Sher, an occupational therapist and author of 10 books, believes in using children's natural love of play to promote key skills.*

Her books include *Early Intervention Games*, *Self-Esteem Games*, *Attention Games*, and *Spirit Games*. To receive a free game designed for your child's needs, visit her Web site at [www.gameslady.com](http://www.gameslady.com).

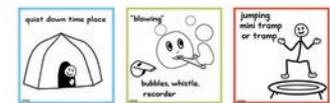


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# **Bring out the Best in Your Sensory Child: Embrace the Power of Organizational Systems**

**Carolyn Dalgliesh**

**K**ids with sensory issues, such as those with Sensory Processing Disorder, autism, Asperger’s syndrome, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and anxiety disorder, have a unique way of interacting with the world around them. Our kids with sensory challenges are smart, perceptive, and connected when they feel loved and understood. However, owing to sensitivities around how they absorb and process information, these kids often have to work very hard to hold it together and are constantly navigating situations that feel overwhelming to them.

Through my work as a professional organizer and as the parent of a child with sensory challenges, I’ve learned how basic organizational tools are at the heart of supporting the day-to-day life experiences of our rigid, anxious, or distracted kids. At its most basic level, organization is the process of understanding our environment, taking the big and making it small, focusing on function, embracing the power of small changes, and accepting that consistent maintenance will be needed. As seen through the lens of a sensory child, the application of these simple principles can be truly life changing.

### *The Environment Matters*

Beginning with a true understanding of the environment is the core starting point for every organizational client I’ve worked with, but it is especially important for kids with sensory difficulties. Our children often find themselves in environments and situations that

**There are so many situations in daily life that can be too much for our sensory kids. We can use organization to take almost any challenging experience or task and make it manageable.**

feel overwhelming to them. We can counterbalance these experiences by creating a home environment, especially in their bedroom and play spaces, that truly “speaks” to them and the way they process their surroundings. These kids need simple spaces that limit stimuli, have calming activities built in, support their fascinations, and have a predictable physical setup. Understanding this one concept will help increase

your child’s level of comfort at home, allowing him to decompress and regroup, putting him in the best possible frame of mind for that next challenging out-of-home experience.

### *Taking the Big and Making It Small*

Almost any organizational project seems big and overwhelming, and, often, getting started is the hardest step. One of the main supports a professional organizer provides is the roadmap to get from big and overwhelming to small and manageable. There are so many situations in daily life that can be too much for our sensory kids. We can use organization to take almost any challenging experience or task and make it manageable. When we do this at home for transitions, chores, or undesired tasks, the overwhelming can become routine. When this happens, we’re supporting and bringing a sense of calm to our children, as well as to our entire family.

For example, homework can seem like an unwelcome and arduous task for many rigid, anxious, or distracted kids. Here are some ways to use organization to break down the big chore of doing homework.

Create a portable homework caddy that holds everything your child needs for doing homework in a visual, organized way. You might include pencils, erasers, blank paper, markers, a ruler, a few favorite graphic organizers, glue, and a dictionary.

Next, create a visual homework plan that has a few built-in break times on it. Sit with your child and have him help make the homework plan—get him invested in what comes first and when to schedule the breaks (you could even determine what he will do during the breaks, if that helps). In the planning process, reinforce with your child the “small” blocks of time that define each step and the “rewards” that come with each break.

With one simple sensory organizational approach, we’ve taken an overpowering pile of homework and broken it down into smaller, manageable pieces that can help smooth out the transition to having your child start his homework.

### **Organized = Functional**

One of the most common misconceptions people have about organization is that organization and neatness are one and the same. In reality, it’s *orga-*

*nization and function* that are one and the same. Often, people will get stuck on having the right bin instead of focusing on creating the right *system*. This is also a common misconception around creating organization for rigid, anxious, or distracted kids. For these kids, the power of organization does not come from a neat room but from the power of a mindful, functional room design, visual guides to help with a difficult task, and routines that support challenging transitions. An essential mindset is to focus on what will work best for your child, not for you or for anyone else’s child. We can’t get hung up on what a child’s bedroom is “supposed” to look like; we have to focus on how our child will perceive and navigate it. Like traditional organization, it’s not the neat, the pretty, or the expected that matters—it’s the function and support that sensory organization gives our kids that makes the difference.

For example, I worked with a family to create some organizational systems for their son’s bedroom. Their son had sensory issues, and we were organizing his action figures and trying to think of a way to categorize them. For instance, we could put rescue heroes in one bin, superheroes in another bin, and so on. We invited



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the boy to share with us his idea for organizing his action figures, and he suggested that we arrange them “by eye color.” So, we drew five “eye” labels, which he colored in red, yellow, green, orange, and blue, and he put one label on each bin. Now, these were not the neatest labels out there—and sorting the figures by eye color didn’t meet conventional expectations around how to organize his toys—but they very clearly supported this sensory child’s way of experiencing his toys, and a very successful organizational system was born!

## ***Embracing the Power of Small Changes***

The largest, most powerful shifts I've seen with sensory organizational clients often start with one small change. People often come to me ready to tackle a big project or a big organizational challenge with their sensory child. Usually, my work is done when they begin to see the power of the small changes. For example, when someone creates a system to find their car keys easily, they reduce a daily stress point in their life. This same concept has an even bigger impact with a sensory child. When we bring the power of organization and having clear systems to the small but very challenging times of day for sensory kids, we can significantly limit their anxiety and emotional meltdowns. This enhances our ability to feel more connected and helps them (and us) feel more in control.

Research has proven that when someone creates a successful shift or habit in one small area of their life, it will ripple out to other areas of their life, as well. So the small changes can be the catalyst for bigger things to come! This is certainly true for our sensory kids, where the confidence that comes from one small success

can lay a positive foundation for the next change.

## ***Successful Organization Means Maintenance***

The last core sensory organizational tool is understanding that successful organization comes with long-term maintenance and adjustments. It is not a one-time event. Many sensory kids do well with structure, routines, and visual aids as a part of having an organized daily life. These core tools will often be a part of their long-term experience, and taking time each week to maintain or tweak the systems we have in place for them will be instrumental to having long-term success. But, as a sensory parent, you know there is no magic bullet, and we are never "done." At times, a system we put in place will only be effective for a certain period of time, and, as our child grows, it will need to grow with him, and we will need to create new plans and adjust old ones.

The fundamentals of organization give us wonderful roadmap for supporting our sensory kids at home. By understanding that the environment matters and by breaking things down, organizing for function, recognizing the

power of small changes, and accepting that maintenance and adjustments will be necessary, we can begin to create a new experience for our sensory child. We can counterbalance the innate challenges sensory children have out in the world by creating sensory systems at home that truly "speak their language" and that make them feel loved and understood. ♦

*Carolyn Dalglish founded Systems for Sensory Kids to help parents create practical, in-home solutions for rigid, anxious, and distracted kids. A member of the National Association of Professional Organizers, Carolyn is also the president of Simple Organizing Strategies, a professional organizational service for homes and small businesses. Carolyn's first book, The Sensory Child Gets Organized: Proven Systems for Rigid, Anxious, and Distracted Kids (Touchstone/Simon & Schuster), will be published in September 2013. Learn more at [www.thesensorychildgetsorganized.com](http://www.thesensorychildgetsorganized.com).*

# PLAYGROUNDS:

A NATURAL OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY OPPORTUNITY

## *The Use of a Natural Setting for Therapy*

“That family is *noncompliant!*”

In the not-so-distant past, a family would be given a multiple home therapy program and be expected to carry it out at home. And woe to the family that was too busy to see it through. “What? You didn’t follow the program? Johnny will never make progress unless you...” went the conversation. But with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1994, reauthorized in 2005, came what some called a “Copernicus Revolution” (Fig 1). No longer did patients orbit around the medical personnel situated in the center of the universe—instead, the client became the virtual center of the system, with all the helping professionals orbiting around him or her.

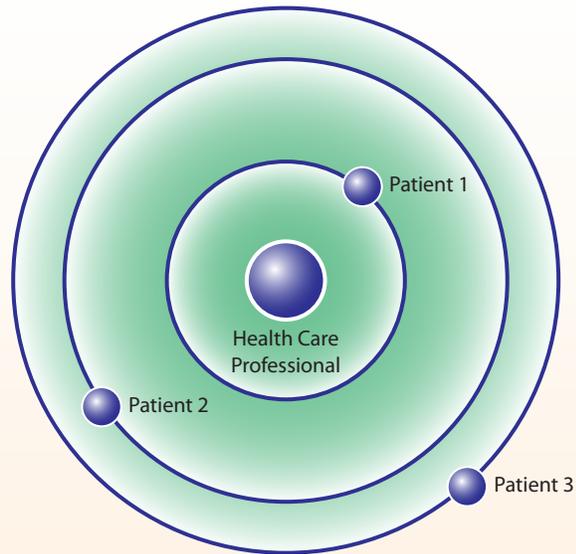
The system is evolving, and there are many holdovers from days past. In fact, still today, some parents ask, “When are you going give me Johnny’s sensory diet?” And when we answer, “We don’t provide sensory diets for children,” at

**Lucy Jane Miller, PhD, OTR & Sarah A. Schoen, PhD, OTR**

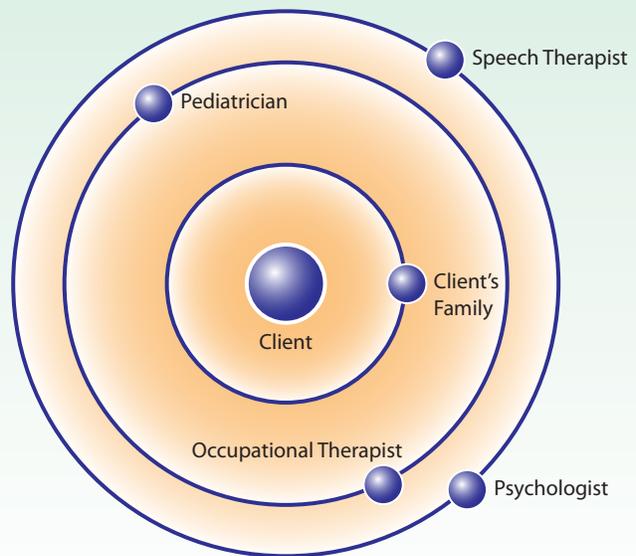
first the parents look at us in amazement or disbelief. “It’s not about a specific sensory diet you must do with your child every two hours or two days,” we say. “It’s about re-framing your child’s needs to incorporate remediation for his or her physiologic sensory needs. It’s about a *sensory lifestyle*, not about a sensory diet.” And, as one mom said to us, “It’s not a sprint, it’s a marathon.” If the marathon required families to provide remediation activities for a lifetime, however, many would be discouraged.

Instead, advanced practitioners have come to realize that the best (and sometimes the only) home program is one that fits naturally into a family’s lifestyle. For babies, what can be done while changing a diaper or taking a bath? For preschoolers, what can be done while getting out of the house in the morning? For school-aged children, what can be done while accomplishing homework after school? For adolescents, what can be one while preparing for a social event at someone else’s house? The challenge now comes in fitting therapy into the natural course of a day, so that as family members go about their daily routines, a child is able to obtain and participate in the

**FIGURE 1.** Diagram illustrates the “Copernicus Revolution” in client care.



*The healthcare professional was situated at the center of the “universe,” with the patients revolving around him or her.*



*The client is now located at the center, with the healthcare professionals revolving around the client and his or her family.*

types of stimulation he or she needs the most.

Occupational therapy (OT) facilitates participation

in everyday activities or “occupations.”<sup>1</sup> To be valued by the individual for whom they are intended, these activities must

be meaningful for the individual client and his or her family. Determining the importance of specific activities depends on how the activity is appreciated in the context of the family's individual priorities and the importance of those activities for others surrounding the client, such as neighbors, people at school, and coworkers (if one has a job).

One major “culture” or setting where a child spends a large percentage of his or her waking time is school. For children with disabling conditions, IDEA mandates that services and supports occur in the least restrictive environment—whenever possible, in “natural environments.”<sup>2</sup> Another reference to the use of activities in natural settings is the “Occupational Therapy Practice Framework,”<sup>3</sup> which references a focus on a client's participation and wellness through engagement in occupations, including leisure and play. However, environmental issues often prevent children from participating fully in daily life activities.<sup>4,5</sup> Although therapy services in the past have emphasized daily living skills, research suggests that parents' hopes for treatment outcomes are often related to social and emotional functioning, including play with peers,

self-regulation, and self-esteem and confidence.<sup>6</sup>

At the Sensory Therapies And Research (STAR) Center, near Denver, Colorado, we focus on creating developmentally appropriate relationships for children with Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD). We coach families to participate in *developmental strategic play*, with an emphasis on experiencing *magical moments*. A *magical moment* is that instant in which the child experiences an unexpected success and shares the joy of mastery with the play partner, who *scaffolds* the child (meaning the play partner supports and assures the child that the experience is a success). When the child realizes that he or she *can do* something that was seen as a challenge previously, it enhances her self-esteem and builds a capacity for future successes.

In our role as family coaches, we support interactions between parents and children as the preferred method of “treatment.” Inherent in the philosophy is the knowledge that a child's parents are her primary resource, and therapists provide only a brief series of encounters for the family. While the results we get as therapists can be long lasting, we are not members of

the family; thus, our “help” can only be long lasting if the family truly understands the principles underlying our therapeutic assistance, so they can create a *sensory lifestyle* for their child and family.

In fact, in response to parents insisting that therapists have magic tricks to help their children maximize their potential and offering pleas that they just don't know what to do as parents, the book *No Longer a SECRET*<sup>7</sup> was written to turn these “secrets” over

**“... children with disabilities, including SPD, often do not naturally know how to interact with playground equipment.”**

to parents. We say, “It's only a secret when you don't know it! As soon as you know it, *it's no longer a secret.*”

Natural environments help parents feel more comfortable in accomplishing their personal goals for their child, because the environment is familiar and safe—such as the neighborhood playground or the play yard attached to a family's own home. The problem here is that children with disabilities, including SPD, often do not naturally know how to interact with playground equipment. In particular, they rarely know

the typical rules of engagement when playing with others in this type of natural setting.<sup>1</sup> Typical behaviors observed in a child with SPD include aggression, withdrawal, anxiety, controlling behavior, and impulsivity. The common denominator is frequent temper tantrums and/or meltdowns of some sort.

***A PROCESS for a Successful Outdoor OT Session***

Outdoor playgrounds provide an ideal environment for addressing the problems of children with SPD and many other conditions that include sen-

sory challenges.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, occupational therapists are uniquely qualified to guide the therapeutic process at the playground, ensuring access and safety and maximizing opportunities for play.<sup>8</sup> Play is central to development, providing opportunities for exploration, mastery, problem solving, motivation, and competency that will carry over to other aspects of life.<sup>9</sup> Thus, we have designed a method of teaching and coaching families to succeed in supporting their child on the playground. This involves training the family to reframe

play as a “PROCESS” that produces meaningful functional outcomes for the child and family. The important ingredient of this approach is not the *activity* or the *product* but rather the *process* by which the child engages, interacts, and experiences the environment. By focusing on the PROCESS, the components that elevate the playground experience to a developmentally appropriate and strategic method for interacting with a child are highlighted. The PROCESS focuses on each of the elements in Table 1.

**TABLE 1.** Elements of a PROCESS to Support Children’s Interactions in Natural Environments

PROCESS DOMAIN	DEFINITION
<i>Problem Solving</i>	Finding individualized solutions for specific issues
<i>Relationship</i>	The interactive social partnership of two or more people
<i>Organization of Behavior</i>	Active participation of the individual in planning, sequencing, and executing patterns of action in a logical and systematic manner
<i>Community</i>	The extent to which the individual knows how to and is able to perform in a culturally and contextually appropriate manner (eg, understanding shared values of individuals in a specific setting within which one works, plays, and lives, such as in one’s community)
<i>Emotional Regulation</i>	The ability to maintain socially appropriate behavior in the context of challenging environments and/or tasks (such as at school, in a busy mall, or while doing homework)
<i>Social Participation</i>	Focusing on appropriate roles and actions that include others in appropriate shared work and/or play
<i>Sensory Solutions</i>	The ability to use sensation to self-regulate or accomplish a whole project or event rather than having sensory input be a source of dysregulation and emotional escalation

When supporting a child and family members in a play-ground environment, we teach parents about what the child needs by reviewing the elements of the PROCESS. A little later, we will discuss the thinking process that leads to cooperative and independent play, to demonstrate the PROCESS for obtaining positive outcomes in a natural environment.

The Omni Spinner is a rotary device (an innovative improvement on the old-fashioned “merry-go-round”) for children 5 years old to adult-

to use it to make it fun. You may have to prompt him with questions, such as:

*Hmm ... How can we get into the spinner? Okay, great. Now how is it going to move around? How can we make it go the just right speed? What would make it more fun? Should someone else get in with us?*

Teaching problem solving is much more difficult than just doing the therapeutic activity yourself. Think about what questions the child would have to ask

*It looks like someone is on this spinner with us. I wonder who this is ... (if necessary, say, “Can you ask him/her what his/her name is?”)*

*How can we find out who is on the spinner with us? I wonder if she likes to go fast or slow?*

*We need to make a deal, so sometimes we spin and sometimes we push. How should we make a plan with the other person on the spinner?*

- **ORGANIZATION OF BEHAVIOR.** Behavior must stay organized to be productive. A natural opportunity for working on organization of behavior exists on the Omni Spinner. Play games that require response inhibition (eg, “stop vs go”) and movement discrimination (eg, “go fast vs slow,” “spin left vs right”).
- **COMMUNITY.** A sense of community is engaged whenever two or more children are playing. On the Omni Spinner, as many as eight children can play at a time. Ask questions that you know should be a part of the community-based goal for the child and/or family, such as:

**“Behavior must stay organized to be productive.”**

hood to use on the playground. The spinning equipment has high back supports and side-walls for maximum safety, as well as a speed limiter to control the speed of operation. The spinner can be used by up to eight people at a time and provides great opportunities for social interaction. It provides endless opportunities for children to have fun and engage in a wide range of developmentally appropriate play.

The PROCESS components that can be addressed on the Omni Spinner include:

- **PROBLEM SOLVING.** As a child approaches the equipment, let him figure out how

himself when encountering novel play structures if no adult were there.

- **RELATIONSHIP.** The structure of supported sitting when positioned to face another person inherently enhances opportunities for relationship. In addition, since movement often increases language output and facilitates spontaneous verbalizations, there is a greater likelihood of reciprocal interactions taking place.

Coach the child (or parent, who can then coach the child) to notice and engage with one other child on the Omni Spinner.

*Look, there are three children on the spinner. What do you think the “rules” of the other children are? These are not written rules, but they are how the children know whether to go faster or slower. How do kids on the spinner figure out what other kids want?*

- **EMOTIONAL REGULATION.** Emotional regulation is a feature inherent in all activities. The Omni Spinner often provides a sense of comfort and confidence in movement that is new for the child. This in turn can increase feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem.

Make sure to notice and acknowledge feelings of success and mastery. Talk about how doing fun movement activities makes your body feel bubbly inside, like you want to laugh. Ask, “What else makes you feel this way?” “What is the difference between how you feel when the spinner is moving fast, versus when it is moving slowly?” The goal is to have the child begin to identify his feelings himself, instead of acting out his emotions. Over time, you should be able to transfer these introspective types of questions over to the child so he can work them out for himself.

- **SOCIAL PARTICIPATION.** Because the children are in close proximity to each other when they use the Omni Spinner, social participation is facilitated naturally through engagement with groups of peers. Since multiple people participate together, the Omni Spinner tends to be a shared joyful experience, and, once children share that experience, it can open up bonds that can be reinforced with other activities.

- **SENSORY SOLUTIONS.** Sensory solutions abound with this piece of equipment. One of the most important opportunities is the chance to obtain functional proprioceptive input as children provide the “manpower” to make the spinner move in a circle. The effort required to push it can have a calming influence on the child, while still being fun and functional. Additionally, the vestibular input acquired by using the Omni



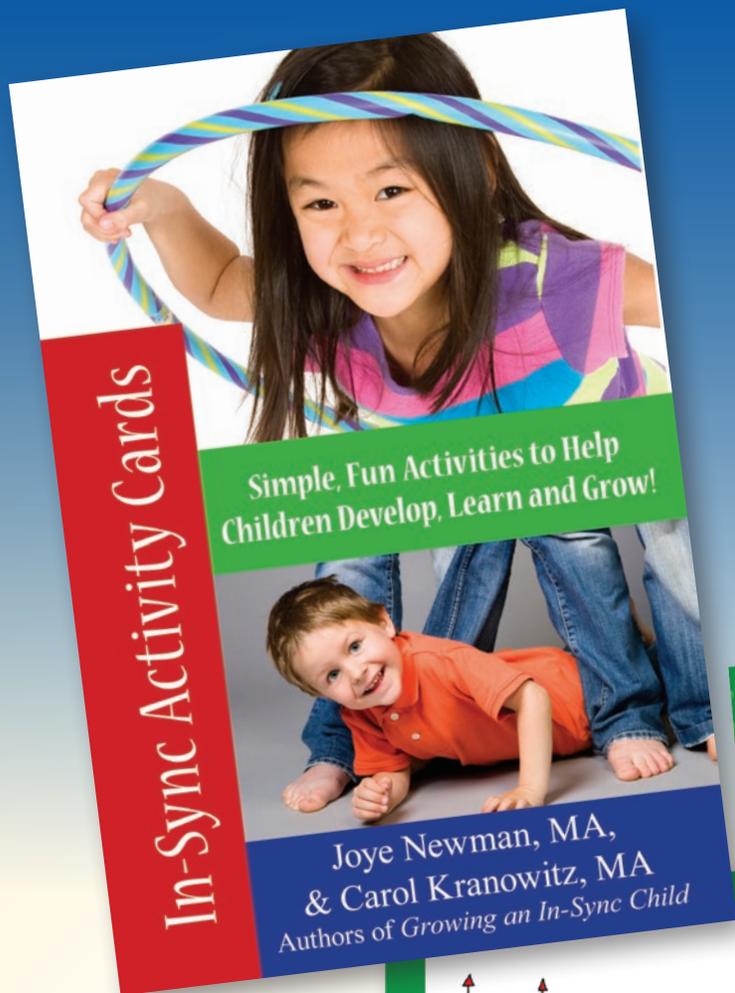
Be sure to pick out and call attention to verbally shared moments of joy, such as:

*Wow, look at Sally’s face. She looks like she’s having fun. I wonder how she feels inside? Maybe she’ll want to play with us again (or on another piece of equipment).*

**FIGURE 2.** Children playing on the Omni Spinner on the STAR Center sensory playground. (The Omni Spinner is made by Landscape Structures.)

Spinner influences a child’s arousal level and his state of alertness, which affects his attentional abilities (Fig 2).

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1. Say, "Show me how you reach all the way up to the sky." Demonstrate as you stretch your arms as high as possible.
2. Say, "Now, put your hands on your toes, like this. Let's 'walk' our hands up to our knees, up our thighs, over our tummies, up our chests to our chins, across our mouths, noses, and eyes, up our foreheads and all the way up to the sky."
3. Say, "Let's stretch WAY up to the sky, stretch, stretch. Now, be a floppy noodle! Bend at your waist, letting your upper body flop and bounce."

Beginner 5

4. Say, "Put your hands on your toes. Now let's 'jump' our hands up to our knees, up our thighs, over our tummies, up our chests to our chins, across our mouths, noses, and eyes, up our foreheads and all the way up to the sky."

5. Repeat step #3, stretching up and then becoming a floppy noodle.

6. Repeat steps #2 and #3, using these movement words:

### Helps Your Child Develop and Enhance...

- Bilateral coordination (for breaking up dry spaghetti to drop into the pot)
- Proprioception (for getting the cooked spaghetti onto her fork)
- Vestibular processing (for tilting her head back to suck in long strands of spaghetti)

### Ways to Make It More Challenging

- Use only one hand at a time.
- Ask your child to be a "floppy noodle" all on her own.

### What to Look for

- She moves her hands appropriately.
- She stretches way up high.
- She flops easily, relaxing her upper body and head.

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Carol Kranowitz and Joye Newman, experts in child development and co-authors of *Growing an In-Sync Child*, have learned the best ways to help children learn and grow using their motor development skills.

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The Mobius Climber is another interesting piece of playground equipment that can provide a developmentally graded way to gradually engage in play with peers. It is an enticing piece of climbing equipment for children that specifically targets those aged 5 to 12 years old, but it is useful for all ages, including adults. The climbing structure is wavy, and the unique design provides multiple places for children to move their hands and feet as they plan both the direction and height of their movement. The challenge level can be graded on the basis of the child's strength, endurance, and problem-solving abilities. Handgrips help children climb safely, and the equipment provides infinite combinations of movement patterns as it helps develop coordination, core stability, and upper- and lower-body motor control. Children of all developmental levels can build confidence in their motor skills, while having fun with their peers (Fig 3).

• **PROBLEM SOLVING.**

The Mobius Climber offers multiple opportunities for problem solving, as the child figures out different ways to move along the climbing structure. The small successes on this piece of equipment

reinforce the child's willingness to persist through more challenging tasks.

- **RELATIONSHIP.** A sense of relationship can progress from simply being together on the equipment, to having exchanges with others



**FIGURE 3.** Children climb on the Mobius Climber on the STAR Center sensory playground. (The Mobius Climber is made by Landscape Structures.)

that are promoted merely by sharing the space. A natural progression from individually motivated affect (eg, a sense of mastery bringing a feeling of joy) can easily progress toward reciprocal interaction and communication with others (shared goals that bring pleasure).

- **ORGANIZATION OF BEHAVIOR.** The Mobius Climber also requires more complex organization of behavior. Successful play is dependent on the ability to plan and sequence body movements up, down, over, under, and across the climbing structure. Once a plan is in place, even the most distractible, highly active, and impulsive child can develop a repertoire of goal-directed play. Organizational abilities are further enhanced by the inclusion of additional children and the invention of new games to play on the climbing structure. These organizational abilities can then be used to play on other pieces of equipment on the playground.

- **COMMUNITY.** As we saw with the Omni Spinner, the Mobius Climber is a perfect venue for multiple children to use at the same time. This automatically creates an opportunity to work on one's appropriateness level in the community. No matter what the developmental and skill-based level of the child, the therapist can help shape the amount of involvement with other children in the setting. Many children with

SPD and related conditions do not yet understand on an intuitive level the rules of engagement appropriate at their age.

- **EMOTIONAL REGULATION.** Emotional regulation is facilitated through goal-directed play. No matter what skill level the child has mastered, the task is easily graded for success and/or for more challenge. Some children benefit from doing easy tasks, which helps increase their emotional regulation;

bis Climber because many people can use it at a time, including the child, her peers or siblings, and even adults. A child who has challenges playing with peers can start by playing around adults and slowly move toward playing with older or younger children. Peers of the same age will usually bring an expectation of having age-appropriate interactions. As a very general rule, we initially try to pair a child with SPD with those that are half the child's chronological age, to foster

playing together at any given time.

A much younger typically developing child may be at the same emotional level as an older child with SPD, whereas an older child may be just mature enough to tolerate the antics of a child with SPD. Joint attention and mutual pleasure are the beginning points for social participation, having fun, and social-emotional developmental growth.

- **SENSORY SOLUTIONS.** The sensory solution unique to the Mobius Climber is the amount of proprioceptive input provided by the resistance to the muscles and joints while the child is engaged in climbing. Proprioception is wonderful for children with many subtypes of SPD. For children who are overresponsive, proprioceptive input (especially tonic or sustained proprioception) can lower their level of arousal, whereas with children who are underresponsive, proprioceptive input can raise their arousal level (especially phasic or fast proprioception). As useful as proprioception is for children with SPD, it can be difficult to

**“Joint attention and mutual pleasure are the beginning points for social participation, having fun, and social-emotional developmental growth.”**

for others, a nice challenge is just the ticket to raise their self-esteem. Every client is different, and the real job of the therapist (and eventually the parent) is to determine what increases the child's ability to self-regulate. The Mobius Climber affords a fantastic opportunity to determine what level of difficulty is most apt to reinforce regulated behavior for a specific child.

- **SOCIAL PARTICIPATION.** Social participation is enhanced by using the Mo-

shared social-emotional experiences that are “just right” for a child with SPD.

Frequently, because children with SPD are intelligent, their cognitive abilities are often higher than those of other children their age, and they are expected to act their age socially. In fact, their social-emotional age is often way behind the other domains of development. Thus, having a piece of equipment like the Mobius Climber almost ensures that there will be kids with a range of ages and stages

**TABLE 2.** Use of the Omni Spinner by Children with Each SPD Subtype

MAJOR PATTERN	SPD SUB-TYPE <sup>10</sup>	SYMPTOMS ADDRESSED BY USING THE OMNI SPINNER	BENEFITS PROVIDED BY THE OMNI SPINNER
<b>Sensory Modulation Disorder</b>	Sensory overresponsive	Responds too quickly or too much to movement	Establishes trust, provides gradually increasing levels of rotary stimulation
	Sensory underresponsive	Is underaroused in general	Provides “fast/blast” stimulation to increase arousal level
	Sensory craving	Seeks out more and more stimulation and becomes disorganized when it is obtained	Provides controlled, interrupted sensation; the child must learn response inhibition (eg, “stop”) through repetition and practice
<b>Sensory-based Motor Disorder</b>	Postural disorder	Has poor core stability and low levels of movement; needs support on moving equipment	Vestibular stimulation helps facilitate increased muscle tone (the Omni Spinner provides support against the child’s back and sides)
	Dyspraxia	Has difficulty spatially moving around constraints within the environment and sequencing body movements to appropriately meet the demands of the environment	Getting in and out and pushing the Omni Spinner are motor-planning challenges that require a plan of action within the environment
	Sensory discrimination disorder	Has poor proprioceptive and vestibular discrimination	Games can be developed on the Omni Spinner to enhance a child’s vestibular discrimination abilities (eg, “Should we spin fast or slow?” and “Simon Says” for body positioning when moving in space)

design interesting and fun opportunities that are novel enough for the child.

But, the Mobius Climber requires a child to create new paths and routes every time she uses it. It is virtually “reusable ad infinitum” and often influences a child to be in a well-regulated state of arousal. Why is this important? Because there is a direct relationship between arousal and performance. If the child can get into a good arousal state, her at-

tention will improve, and her functional level will also increase.

**Use of Playground Equipment by Kids with Various SPD Subtypes**

There are hypothesized to be six subtypes of SPD.<sup>10</sup> The way any equipment can be used varies, depending on the needs of the client. Each moment is approached individually, and we do not advocate using protocols because they tend

**TABLE 3.** Use of the Mobius Climber according to SPD Subtype

MAJOR PATTERN	SPD SUB-TYPE <sup>10</sup>	SYMPTOMS ADDRESSED BY USING THE MOBIUS CLIMBER	BENEFITS PROVIDED BY THE MOBIUS CLIMBER
<b>Sensory Modulation Disorder</b>	Sensory overresponsive	Responds too quickly or too much to movement against gravity; is fearful of heights	Establishes trust, as the child controls the movement; the child is gradually exposed to moving higher against gravity, with the support and safety features of the equipment
	Sensory underresponsive	Is underaroused in general	Provides increased proprioceptive input to the senses
	Sensory craving	Seeks out more and more stimulation and becomes disorganized when it is obtained	Provides a goal-directed activity with proprioception to produce a calmer state and reduce disorganization
<b>Sensory-based Motor Disorder</b>	Postural disorder	Has poor core stability and decreased strength and endurance; demonstrates poor weight-shifting and equilibrium reactions	Climbing facilitates integration of visual, vestibular, and proprioceptive inputs essential to developing balance and postural control
	Dyspraxia	Has difficulty spatially planning movements up, down, over, under, or across climbing structures; demonstrates poor sequencing of body movements to meet the demands of climbing; is unable to problem-solve interaction with equipment	Provides multiple opportunities to plan, sequence, and master body movements in space and problem-solve different ways to play; practice and repetition of movements are necessary to facilitate more automatic mechanisms
	Sensory discrimination disorder	Has poor proprioceptive, visual, and vestibular discrimination	Games can be developed to enhance a child's vestibular, visual, and proprioceptive discrimination abilities (eg, games based on body position in relationship to gravity; grading force of movement and accuracy of arm, hand, and foot placement along the climbing structure, with and without the use of vision)

to be recipe-like and rarely account adequately for individual variation. The complexity of the differences in needs of children with each SPD subtype is described in Tables 2 and 3, which summarize how the Omni Spinner and the Mobius Climber can be individualized to the needs of children with each of the six main subtypes of SPD.

**Case Study: The PROCESS in Action**

Alena is 4 years old and has been identified as (a) over-responsive to movement and (b) dyspraxic since birth. She is terrified of movement activities and does everything in her power to avoid anything that makes her body move through space, particularly if her feet are required to leave the ground. Because of her motor-planning issues, she has a limited ability to plan and organize her body movement in space to be successful in play activities with peers. She tends to break toys or systematically line them up rather than engage in play that requires manipulation of objects.

Alena’s therapist introduced her to the Omni Spinner and the Mobius Climber slowly, as she understood the importance of a positive adjustment process and thus did not focus on the *product*—the motor-planning actions and getting Alena’s feet off the ground. After 5 consecutive days of treatment on the playground, Alena gradually approached, explored, tested, and played with her parents and occupational therapist on the equipment. The PROCESS Alena engaged in ensured that the focus of treatment was always on engaging with the therapist

and her parents, while making steps toward improving her sensory and social issues.

The process began with using both pieces of equipment as hiding places for a glorified game of peek-a-boo. This progressed to hide-and-seek, with many hiding places being on or near the two pieces of equipment. On the 3rd day, Alena’s stuffed animals pretend-played on the Omni Spinner and Mobius Climber, and they had a (make-believe) great time. On day 4, Alena sat on the Omni

specific moment is called *clinical reasoning*.<sup>11</sup> With parents and children, we use the term *problem solving*, instead.

**Conclusion**

Natural environments, such as playgrounds, are indeed wonderful venues for therapeutic intervention and building relationships and confidence, not only in children, but also in their parents. Although the equipment at the STAR Center sensory playground

**“... we strongly advocate that families and therapists begin to explore natural settings as venues for therapeutic remediation.”**

Spinner, but it stayed still, and she climbed to the first ring of the Mobius Climber almost at ground level. By day 5, she was neurologically and emotionally ready to move forward and try both pieces of equipment just a little bit.

Activities on the Omni Spinner and Mobius Climber are beneficial for children like Alena, who have sensory over-responsivity and dyspraxia. However, as with most pieces of equipment, it is not the equipment itself but how the equipment is used that makes it useful for many subtypes of SPD. The process of deciding what is the right action in the

is not what is typically found on community playgrounds, the environment is familiar and recognizable as a regular playground. Parents gain confidence about going to neighborhood playgrounds, and children can frequently attain many therapeutic goals in this “natural” setting.

Natural settings, such as playgrounds, need to be further explored as therapeutic opportunities that can help children progress from a more structured and controlled (protected) setting of the clinic to a natural place where parents typically play with their kids. The therapeutic playground

provides a bridge between the clinic and the natural environment, providing opportunities for support and scaffolding of the child's development and enabling therapists to coach parents on effective strategies for use in daily life. Children are able to develop the skills and self-confidence necessary for mastery of challenges in the therapeutic environment that can foster success at school, at home, and in community settings. In line with the federal mandate from IDEA, we strongly advocate that families and therapists begin to explore natural settings as venues for therapeutic remediation. ♦

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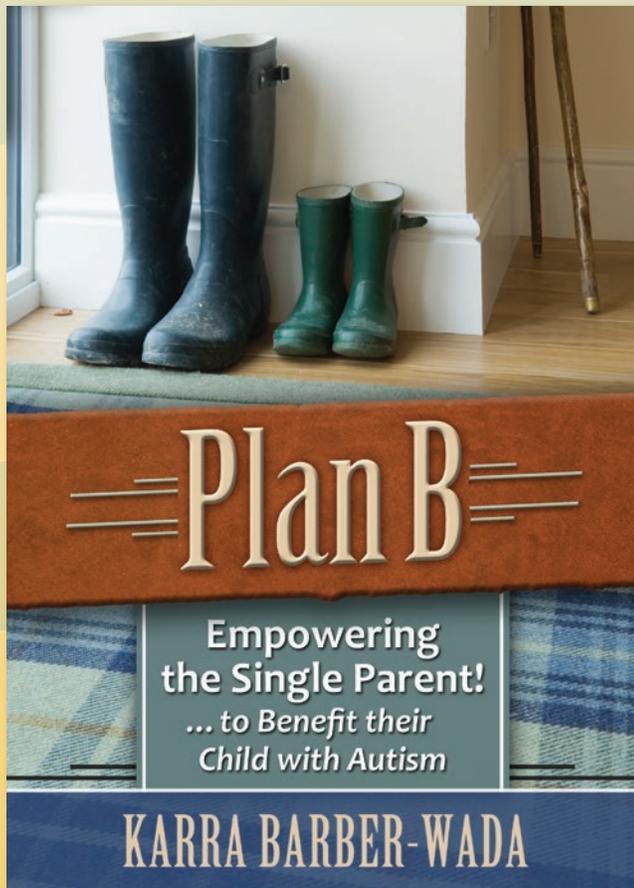
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