

I am a Clinical Specialist Occupational Therapist working in a community specialist child and adolescent mental health team (CAMHS). I attended the 7-day, Level 1 Sensory Attachment Intervention Course in 3 parts. The first 4 days in January 2018 with a further 2 days in April 2018 and 1 day in between meeting with a smaller group of colleagues from the larger cohort to discuss and plan a case study to present.

Sensory Attachment Intervention (SAI) is an integrative approach for assessing and treating children, young people and adults who have suffered abuse or severe neglect. Negative experiences in the womb and in early childhood impact on our capacity to cope with stress throughout life. There is a tendency to either: flee and fight, freeze and dissociate, or fluctuate between these stress states when there is a hint or a reminder of traumatic events.

SAI recognizes the need to target the areas of the brain that are the source of the dysfunction. The first requirement is to establish regulation of arousal states i.e. to shift from the Autonomic Nervous System bias of either freeze dissociation or flight fight responses. It then focuses on facilitating modulation of the body senses through the just right combination of up regulating and down regulating experiences. This in turn enables higher level sensory, emotional and cognitive functioning.

This course looked at the impact of Developmental, Trauma, Insecure Attachment and Sensory Processing Disorder on the capacity to self-regulate and co-regulate. The course reviewed the use of existing assessment tools and introduced new tools to assist the assessment and intervention process. Assessments that were taught included: clinical observations of postural control and praxis, the use of profiles to identify stress patterns and sensory modulation patterns. We also learnt how to administer The Just Right State (JRS) Protocol; enabling the young people I work with to achieve the capacity to self-regulate and co-regulate with others. This is particularly suited for those who struggle to participate in intervention programmes because they are in a heightened state of stress and are easily activated.

Having completed the SAI Level One Course for Therapists, I can now state that I use SAI techniques within my practice but does not entitle me to state they use SAI. To become a Certified SAI Level One Therapist, I need to submit an additional case study which is then marked. I have set myself a goal to develop and submit this case study based on a client from my work setting within the next 6 months.

The course was a fantastic experience both in terms of the skills learnt and the other professionals I met. I have made a number of very helpful contacts through the training and the smaller group I was part of to develop the case study has set up a WhatsApp group and decided to stay in touch, meeting up intermittently for peer support and professional development. This is a bonus from the course that I was not expecting. I am very grateful to the FPSA for funding this course and giving me the opportunity to expand my knowledge base and clinical skill in this way. Thank you.