

Working with Autism: Is it sensory or is it behaviour?

Betty Paris and Carolyn Murray-Slutsky

I would like to thank the Foundation for Professionals in services to Adolescents for enabling me to attend this 4 day course in May. The course focused on therapeutic intervention for children and adolescents with autism, looking particularly at the diagnosis and treatment of sensory needs, which are so pervasive in this population.

The first couple of days of the course aimed to get everyone up to speed with the neurological basis for sensory processing difficulties, using video analysis to illustrate three main types of children: the under (hypo) responder; the over (hyper) responder; and the sensory seeker. It was great to revisit my knowledge in these areas and to explore the most up to date research with regard to these. Identification of the types takes skill and experience, especially when working with complex children with severe learning disabilities, as I do in my day to day role. It was so valuable to meet experts in the field who could illustrate these, and to examine intervention strategies in much more detail. The reason behind the sensory behaviours was emphasised, and an easy to use chart was presented for clinicians to use in their practice.

Being the only practitioner in Scotland who works in a CAMHS learning disability team, it is often difficult to find other clinicians who can problem solve with me around very complex cases. Over the last 2 days of the course, participants were asked to submit their most difficult and challenging cases for group discussion. Having a whole room of 70 professionals discussing my case was extremely beneficial. This gave me specific treatment strategies to try, some of which I hadn't thought of, and will directly benefit children in my care. It was also great to be introduced to new products for this group, some of which were on display.

I am so grateful for the support of the Foundation to enhance my experience, understanding and expertise in this way. Thank you.

Claire Wakefield

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