

Behavior Chat: Special Sensory Edition

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Is it behavior or is it sensory?

- ▶ All behavior tells us something
 - ▶ What is most important to you
 - ▶ What do you want or what motivates you
 - ▶ What do you need or seek
 - ▶ What do you avoid and why
 - ▶ What is overwhelming to you and why
- ▶ The key is to find the root

Temper Tantrums vs. Sensory Meltdowns



Temper Tantrums

- ▶ Tantrum communicating a desire or anger about not getting something he/she wants
- ▶ Shorter in duration
- ▶ Often stops when not getting your attention or when they get what they want
- ▶ May resume when he/she noticing that you are looking at him/her
- ▶ You can distract them out of it by something else
- ▶ The child has some level of control over his/her behavior

Sensory Meltdown

- ▶ A reaction to a situation when feeling overwhelmed or over aroused.
- ▶ Tends to be longer in duration.
- ▶ Triggers that ‘fight, flight or fright’ response.
- ▶ The behavior is usually beyond the child’s control.
- ▶ It often doesn’t stop even if the child gets what they want. They often don’t know what they want.

Role of The Senses

- ▶ Protect
- ▶ Discriminate
- ▶ Over registration
 - ▶ Avoid, hyper vigilant, need to control environment
 - ▶ Sensory defensive - F/F/F
- ▶ Under registration
 - ▶ Seekers, easily distracted, frequent movement
 - ▶ Poor awareness of self, others and environment

Eight Senses (1 of 4)

- ▶ Vision- eyes
 - ▶ Acuity, 20/20
 - ▶ Perception-stacking blocks, legos, reading, math, spelling
 - ▶ Social interaction
 - ▶ Over- sensitivity, lights dim, sun glasses, avoid eye contact, notice every detail in the room
 - ▶ Under- miss details, decreased accuracy in FM play, self care, writing
- ▶ Auditory- ears
 - ▶ Acuity: high frequency, low frequency
 - ▶ Localization and foreground vs background
 - ▶ Perception/processing- speech, language, vocabulary/phonics
 - ▶ Over- sensitivity to sounds, cover ears, overwhelmed in groups
 - ▶ Under -talks loud, makes silly noises

Eight Senses (2 of 4)

- ▶ Tactile - skin
 - ▶ Initial sense for learning about our world
 - ▶ Manipulatives, management of tools, writing, self feeding, dressing
 - ▶ Over - picky about clothing, avoids messy, struggles with bathing
 - ▶ Under - constantly touching, bumps into everything, unaware of pain
- ▶ Olfactory - nose
 - ▶ Smells can be alerting or calming (emotional ties)
 - ▶ Over - sensitive to smells, avoids foods
 - ▶ Under - smells everything, doesn't notice strong smells

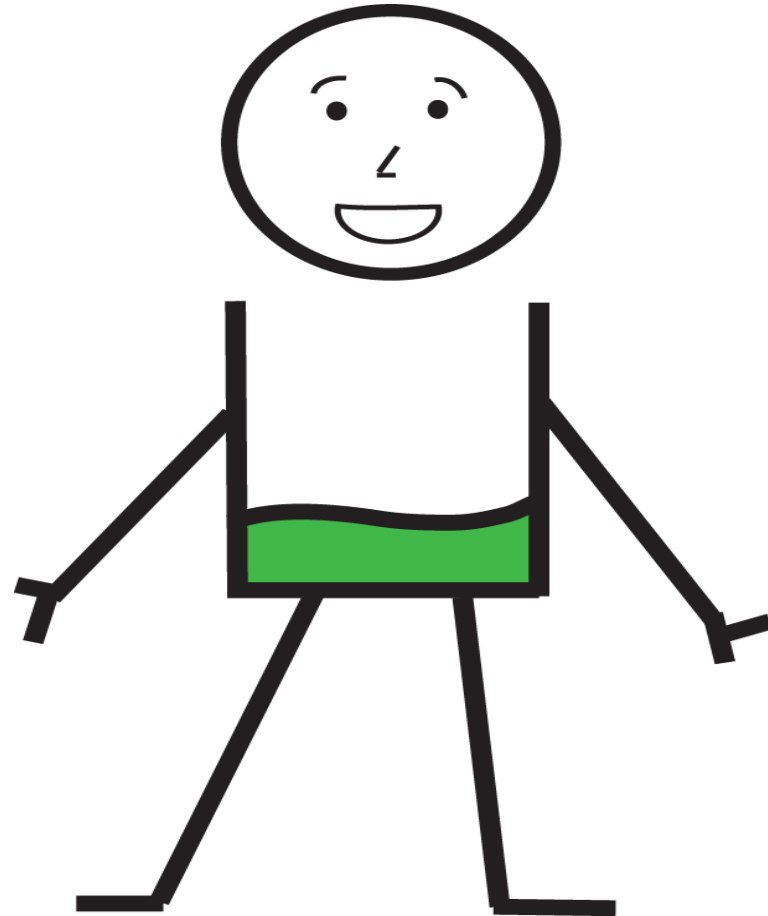
Eight Senses (3 of 4)

- ▶ Taste - mouth
 - ▶ Tastes can be alerting or calming (emotional ties)
 - ▶ Over - picky eater or problem feeder, does not try new foods or different brands
 - ▶ Under - eats anything including nonfood items, messy eater, fingers in mouth
- ▶ Interoception—internal awareness
 - ▶ Hunger, thirst, HR, RR, bowel/bladder, muscle tension
 - ▶ Over - frequent complaints about health/hurts
 - ▶ Under - struggles with toileting, not aware of illness such as ear infection, doesn't sense when hungry or thirsty

Eight Senses (4 of 4)

- ▶ Proprioceptive - tendons, muscles, joints
 - ▶ body awareness, muscle sense
 - ▶ Timing of movement, amount of force to exert
 - ▶ Helps to regulate the vestibular system
 - ▶ Over - more sedentary, avoids activities
 - ▶ Under - bumps or crashes into things/others, seems 'rough'
- ▶ Vestibular— inner ear
 - ▶ spatial awareness, movement sense
 - ▶ Upright vs upside down, forward/backward, fast/slow
 - ▶ Over - motion sickness, fear of heights, poor awareness of body in space
 - ▶ Under - climbing on everything, likes to be up high, poor safety awareness

Sensory needs You Have a Bucket!

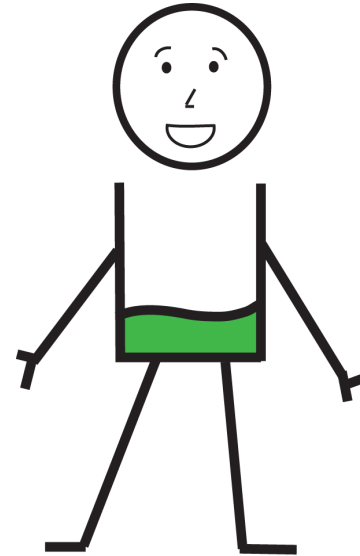


What do you mean, a bucket?

- ▶ Our bucket holds all our sensory stimulation/input as well as the stresses, frustrations, worries, and basically everything that we have to deal with each day

Feeling “just right” is about getting just enough senses* in your bucket

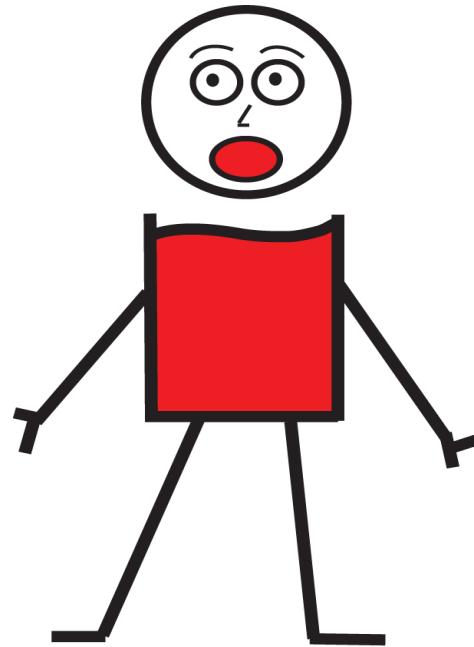
- ▶ Touching
- ▶ Hearing
- ▶ Seeing
- ▶ Taste
- ▶ Smells
- ▶ Movement
- ▶ Body awareness
- ▶ Internal awareness



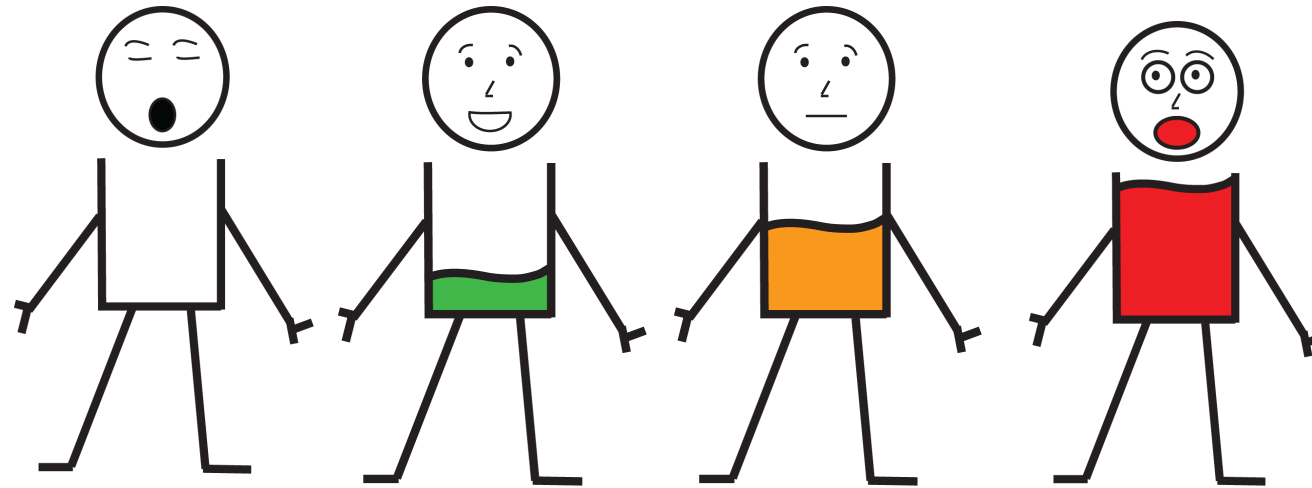
* sensory input, sensory stimulation, etc...

When their bucket is over filled, people may have problems with...

- ▶ How they feel physically
- ▶ Their emotions
 - ▶ Fight (e.g. anger)
 - ▶ Flight (e.g. anxiety)
 - ▶ Freeze
 - ▶ Sadness
 - ▶ Etc...
- ▶ Their behaviours
 - ▶ Withdrawal
 - ▶ Aggression
 - ▶ Controlling
 - ▶ Etc....



It's easier to empty our bucket if we can do it BEFORE it gets completely full



Preventing the Bucket Overflow Environment

- ▶ Decrease distractions (quiet time-turn TV and video games off; calm music on; create a space for 'escape'-fort)
- ▶ Provide organizational structures (daily routine, picture schedule or calendar, timer)
- ▶ Reduce the social complexity of an activity or event (limit number of people and duration at party or play date)
- ▶ Change the social mix (focus on time with peers that are a good fit, at parties have a 'get out' option)

Preventing the Bucket Overflow Task

- ▶ Shorten the task (take turns with steps)
- ▶ Build in frequent breaks with longer tasks
- ▶ Give the child something to look forward to when the task is done (First...then)
- ▶ Give details (checklist or picture of task when complete or timeframe)
- ▶ Create a schedule (list or pictures)
- ▶ Build in choices
- ▶ Make the task more fun

Preventing the Bucket Overflow

Sensory Regulation

- ▶ Opportunities for calm, organizing input (sensory diet)
 - ▶ Calm music
 - ▶ Decreased visual stimulation
 - ▶ Soothing tactile input
 - ▶ Deep pressure touch-massage, vibration
 - ▶ Rhythmical, linear rocking or swinging
 - ▶ Proprioception-jumping, bouncing, marching
 - ▶ Sucking/blowing activities
 - ▶ Soothing scents

In-The-Moment Strategies

- ▶ Watch arousal levels - Zones of regulation
- ▶ Leave the environment at 'yellow'
- ▶ Use the calming space: tent or cubbie
- ▶ Have an exit strategy for social gatherings or community activities
- ▶ Deep pressure input: squeezes/hugs, weighed animals or blanket or backpack
- ▶ Movement input (vestibular): rocking chair, swing, sit and spin, bike,
- ▶ Proprioceptive input: jumping on a trampoline, push/pull/hanging on a pull up bar, putty, squeeze ball, gum, crunchy/chew snack, suck/blow

In-The-Moment Strategies (continued)

- ▶ Tactile bin- bring out favorites: rice, sand, shaving cream, fidget
- ▶ Auditory:
 - ▶ Use a calm, clear voice (sometimes whisper)
 - ▶ Use least amount of words necessary ‘First sit...then snack’
 - ▶ Calm music: open air or headphones
 - ▶ Transition songs
 - ▶ Count 10 sec after direction to give time to process and act
- ▶ Visual
 - ▶ Turn down the lights
 - ▶ Turn off the TV/video games,

Recovery Strategies

- ▶ Re-engaging your child without reigniting the meltdown
 - ▶ Give time to recover
 - ▶ Your child may feel embarrassed or sad
 - ▶ He/she may be physically exhausted
 - ▶ Figure out the right time to review things after you are both calm.
 - ▶ Be brief and factual (leave out accusations)
 - ▶ What happened
 - ▶ What worked/helped with calming
 - ▶ What could be done differently next time
- ▶ Regroup together/cuddle

Resources

- ▶ -Zones of regulation by Leah M. Kuypers
- ▶ -Thinkables/Unthinkables by Michelle Garcia Winner
- ▶ -Mind Ninja by Joeline Lavrick, BA
- ▶ -The Explosive Child by Ross Green
- ▶ -The Out of Sync Child by Carol Kranowitz
- ▶ -The Out of Sync Child has Fun by Carol Kranowitz
- ▶ -Are you in the Zone? By Timothy Kowalski
- ▶ -Gozen.com Anger iceberg

You can find these books in the library but you can also see YouTube videos of the authors sharing key concepts about each resource.