



STEPPING STONES THERAPY, LLC
OCCUPATIONAL & SPEECH/LANGUAGE THERAPY

4300 Montgomery Ave.
Suite 303
Bethesda, MD 20814
301-652-7800
Fax 301-652-0622

Beth Ciangiulli-Levy, M.A., CCC-SLP
Speech Language Pathologist

Rachelle Maisel, OTR/L
Occupational Therapist

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Sensory Integration & Behavior

Children with sensory integration difficulties can sometimes have challenging behaviors. Are the behaviors a result of this dysfunction or not? How do we get rid of the frustrating behaviors? Many of these behaviors may be behaviors that a child uses to maintain their level of alertness or attention to a task.

There are five different ways to regulate alertness: 1) putting something in the mouth, 2) putting something the hands, 3) moving, 4) looking, and 5) listening. These sensory-based activities (auditory, oral, movement and tactile) often help children (and adults too) maintain an appropriate level of attention to complete a given task. This might include sitting in order to eat, complete schoolwork or listen. It helps to think of ways that we as adults often engage in similar behaviors that help us maintain our attention. Like sipping water, chewing gum, tapping our feet or even doodling. We often engage in these types of behaviors when we are having difficulty maintaining or attending,

especially when we have to stay seated for a long period of time. Think about the last professional conference you attended. Was it easy for you to sit and maintain your focus and attention for an extended period of time?

Unfortunately, children with sensory difficulties often engage in less socially appropriate behaviors in order to stay awake and maintain attention. Some of these might include: singing or humming, chewing pencils, shirtsleeves or fingers, wiggling in chair, constantly getting up from chair, tapping a pencil or fidgeting with objects in their pockets. Sometimes the behavior may be more unacceptable, for example, hitting, pinching, biting, or running away.

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Sensory Integration (con't)

It is important to determine what the behavior is accomplishing for the child. Is it to escape from a person or a task? Is it to get attention, power, or control? Is it to get a specific item or activity? Or is it to meet a sensory need? In order to determine the function of the behavior a functional behavior assessment is needed. This assessment should address the following areas: defining the behavior, measuring the frequency the intensity or duration, the setting events and the consequence. This assessment will help to determine the function of the behavior. If the behavior is sensory based then a more acceptable form of sensory seeking should be provided. A behavior plan should be developed regardless of the behavior's function. This will help eliminate the behavior and help a child with a sensory need find a more appropriate way to meet this need.

Look for more information about Behavior Plans next month. If you have any questions talk to your therapist. Some good resources include: "*How Does your Engine Run?*" by Mary Sue Williams and Sherry Shellenburger available through Therapyworks, and "*Oh Behave!*" by Maryann Trott available through Therapy Skill Builders.

**HAVE A SAFE AND HAPPY
THANKSGIVING
HOLIDAY!!**

Schedule Changes

Stepping Stones will be closed on Thanksgiving Thursday and Friday. Please check with your child's therapist about their schedules that week. If you know that you will be out of town the week of Thanksgiving, please let your child's therapist know as soon as possible.



Picture Reminder

In an effort to continue decorating our office, we would love more pictures of your children. We have a color copier if you don't want to part with the originals. We love the way your children look on our walls and would like to expand our photo gallery. Thanks!!

