

Web-Based Radio Show


Working with Children Who Are Sensory Craving and Active

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This is Dr. Greenspan welcoming you to our web-based radio show. As I mentioned, today's show is going to focus on a particularly interesting challenge which is how to help a child who is sensory craving and very active, and therefore often very avoidant.


Typically, this pattern is seen in the following way. Little Johnny or Susie, let's say age 3, moves around a great deal – exploring one toy and then another, but hardly exploring, seeming to just touch one or touch another or look at one and look at another. Often the child moves around the room at great speed. In the middle, the child may jump and wave his or her hands seeming to self-stimulate on the jumping or the hand waving. As we come near the little Johnny or Susie, trying to talk to them or trying to gesture to them or just trying to challenge them into some type of engagement, they literally turn and move away from us and go to the other side of the room. We come near them again, and they go to the other side of the room. The more we try to approach, the more active and sensory craving they seem to become. Their sensory craving is that they like to move, they like to touch, they may like to jump, they like to wave their hands, and sometimes they wave their hands and arms or if they are sitting, moving their legs at such a frantic pace that they literally seem distracted by their own movement patterns. So you are not only competing with the objects around the room that they are distracted by, but they are distracted by their own waving hands or waving legs or body movements. Naturally, most parents find it very difficult to help children with this pattern move up our developmental ladder in terms of their functional emotional capacities – to share attention, to engage, to get involved in back-and-forth purposeful actions, to become involved in shared social problem solving with a continuous flow of back-and-forth exchanges of gestures, to use ideas creatively, and eventually to use ideas logically. Naturally, as expected, each of these stages is going to be very difficult because the child is so active, so avoidant, and so sensory craving.



So really a child with this pattern combines many of the special difficulties that we have talked about over the last few weeks. This child does a lot of self stimulation, this child does a lot of repetition because the jumping or the moving may look like it becomes repetitive after awhile where the same kind of movement or the same sort of jumping or hand waving or clapping occurs. So the big question for every one is – professionals and parents alike – how do we work with little Johnny or Susie? How do we help them up the developmental ladder?

Well, the first concept is, and the first principle is that you need to recognize the pattern, and see it not just as the child is very aimless and the child therefore has a great big problem or the child is just a very serious version of their special needs condition, but rather see it in terms of the way the child's nervous system is working. Let's say little Johnny or Susie craves sensations. First you need to try to categorize in your own mind the different sensations they crave - and movement in space is one of them. They crave that little body moving around. They crave jumping, they crave arm waving, they crave touching this or that toy. They may crave deep pressure, liking to bang into things as well. They may crave the airplane game where they are zooming around above daddy's head. So you need to kind of categorize, in your mind, all of the things that they crave; all the things that they seem to want for their bodies.

Secondly, as you are observing that and seeing it as sensory craving, not just as simply evidencing a “disorder,” although the sensory craving is certainly a part of their pattern of challenges, you need to also then look at the possibility that in addition to sensory craving, they may have some other sensory features, such as sensory over-reactivity. Some of the children, for example, while sensory craving on the one hand can also be overloaded by certain kinds of noise or sound or by certain kinds of touch. So for example, high pitch noises or deep motorized noises may overwhelm and overload a child, even though they are basically a sensory craving child. So what happens in such a case is the child gets overloaded by, let's say a noisy environment or the child may be oversensitive to bright lights and get overloaded in the sunlight or in a brightly lit room. Or, just lots of movement around him, in other words lots of children running to and fro in a busy school environment may overload the child. What happens typically is the child becomes overloaded and as the child is overloaded, they go into the sensory craving mode. Typically if a child is sensory over-reactive, they become cautious and retreat when they are overloaded, but here, because the child is sensory craving at the same time, the switch turns and they become even more sensory craving. So we can, inadvertently, contribute to their sensory craving by overloading them, then they go into the sensory craving mode, then if we yell and shout at them to stop or if we get irritated as sometimes




professionals or parents may do, we may overload them even more. And that's another feature of the pattern.

Now it's also important to note other features of their nervous system. How are they at figuring out the space that they are moving in? For example, how is their visual spatial processing? Do they seem to flitter aimlessly from one thing to another or do they seem to, in their jumping and running and avoidant behavior, take in the whole room and explore it systematically? Do they seem to have a sense of a large space and all the component parts of it or do they seem to operate in little tiny spaces with no seeming awareness of their environment? Do they bang into things or do they skillfully, and seemingly without thought, navigate pretty well around the room? So how is their visual spatial thinking? How is their motor planning and sequencing? In other words, here too, how do they navigate that room? How skillful are they when they pick up a toy or an object? Does everything seem to be hard to do; banging into things, knocking things over, or again do they seem to, while moving fast and being very active and very craving, do they seem actually able to occasionally sequence two or three movements – take an object, explore it, put it in something and take it out of something? So what is their motor planning and sequencing like?

Also, how well do they seem to understand gestures or what you say? For example, sometimes children who are sensory craving and moving around may remember whole books that you read to them at the time you get them a little bit quiet so they actually have a pretty good auditory memory. Others may have a very, very weak auditory memory and need work in that area. Even though they are sensory craving, how much do they enjoy physical closeness with you and intimacy? Are there times when they like to cuddle, maybe late at night or do they enjoy banging into you and playing the airplane game with daddy? Or do they prefer their sensory craving alone?

You want to identify where the strengths are in terms of their basic pleasure and physical closeness with mommy or daddy in terms of motor planning and sequencing; in terms of visual spatial processing; in terms of auditory processing. Can they repeat any words or sounds? So we still want to profile them the same way we profile every child. But then the important question, and the more difficult question is: How do we help this child calm down, slow down, and begin moving up the developmental ladder? Because, while they are sensory craving, as I mentioned before, they are often very avoidant.

Now the first step in this, unfortunately for some professionals or parents who like to be more sedentary, it's very challenging for the parent or the professional. The first step is to energize up with the child and begin moving around the room in their rhythm with them. So for example, one little boy recently was aimlessly jumping around and his




speech pathologist was in the room with him and we suggested that she just jump with him. When she started jumping with him, he gave her a big smile and all of a sudden they were dancing and it was interactive, where she would take three steps, he would take three steps, and he seemed to be willing to copy her movements. But it was only because she entered into his rhythm and got this little dancing game going.

So one of the first things you can try to do is to imitate what the child is doing – jump with them, but with the idea of making it a two-some; a two-jumping kangaroos around the room or two dancing ballerinas or two batmen or supermen flying and jumping from space to space and see what the child does. Some children – not all children with this battle – will get intrigued. They now have a partner in crime, so to speak, or a partner in sensory craving and movement. Now, at least, what we are seeing is some shared attention and relating, but on the move. Well, no one said that attention has to be sedentary and sitting. You can attend to someone and be engaged with someone while on the move together.

We know that dance goes back very early in our evolution. We see that in many cultures there are dance rituals, and that is because people like to move together. Communication through movement is very fundamental in human development. So here we want group movement or shared movement. That is your first entrée.


Also, as you are moving with the child, become a facilitator of what he is trying to do. In other words, go with the flow. Take your lead from the child. If the child likes jumping and being elevated, hold your arms out. See if the child wants to jump into your arms. See if the child wants to play the airplane game. One daddy recently did that as his child was being very avoidant and running around the room, so they ran around together and then daddy held his arms out and the child literally jumped into his arms and then daddy swung him and started playing the airplane game. Now not only did we get some engagement and some shared attention as daddy was being the motor for the airplane, but the child gestured whether he wanted to go fast or slow, or up or down. He also began using sounds – “uh, uh” for “up” or “d, d” for “down.” We had nice gestures and the beginning of some words where the child hadn’t spoken before.

So join in the child’s activity, by actually facilitating it so that there is a relationship, and then using gesturing to facilitate it so the child, in order to get what he wants, has to begin gesturing purposefully to you and begin maybe using some sounds and if the child is capable, to actually use some words. Many children who are sensory craving often have the ability to use single words or short phrases, and they can tell you whether to go up or down, or stop or go. So those are some preliminary things to try.



Now another strategy that often works very well and is not mutually exclusive with the ideas I just mentioned, but can follow these or be used when these don't work and the child is just so avoidant, your offer to join him and your actually joining him leads him to keep going to the other side of the room, or when you offer to play the airplane game or pick him up, he moves even faster to the other side of the room, is to play what I call "My Little Moving Fence" game. Here, again we kind of taking our cue from the child. We are using his own activity level and his own sensory craving to his advantage, which is to help him engage and interact. Remember, all children want to engage and interact, it's just that they don't know how to do it if their nervous system is making it very, very, very hard for them. So here, with our moving fence game, we try to put our arms around the child but not physically hold the child. The biggest mistake to make with the sensory craving child is to physically try to restrain the child and then the child gets upset and anxious and you have a tantrum and you have a sensory craving, active, moving child who is now angry and tantrumming, and you have a double challenge. Your goal is to sort of help this wild stallion become regulated, but by this kind of overly assertive maneuver, you are actually aggravating the situation.


So what we want to do here is, with our moving fence game, we move around the room with the child and we try to get our arms around them without actually touching him. So it's like our arms are hula hoops. Or you can use a real hula hoop if your arms aren't big enough. Sometimes it's easier to do this when he moves near a corner of the room or near a wall, then we can use the corner of the room or wall as part of the fence we are building around the child, so we only have to use our body as one side and our arms as the two other sides and the wall can be the fourth side. Now the child is in an enclosed little space with your body, but you aren't physically touching him, but he has to physically touch you if he wants to get out of that little fence or that little corral. Often what he will do is try to duck down or climb over, and here too we have an opportunity to challenge the child to use some gestures. So he can motion to pick up your arms or he can use the word "up" or "out" and we can cue him or prompt him with the gesture or word, "Do you want to go out, out? Arms up? Or arms down?" We see one of two things often happening when we have this little moving fence. One is that some children will turn around and actually enjoy being in the more enclosed space. They actually enjoy the tightness of the fit. They don't have quite this much space to roam in because that kind of overloads them a little bit. Just the luxury of all that space, as I mentioned before, some children get overloaded by sound or by bright lights or by just a lot of movement around them. Well, for some kids, just a big space is overwhelming. It is almost as though their body needs a more narrow space so they don't have quite as many options. The options overwhelm them, of a big space because there are so many possibilities and the big space is over stimulating, even if it is not loaded with all kinds of



toys because if they don't conceptualize the space, if they don't see how it is organized, and can't figure out how to navigate their body in that space, the experience is overwhelming and overloading and a little anxiety-provoking.

So here we have created a small space and some kids turn around and start smiling and start engaging a little more and will play little smiley-face games and little sound games with us in their small confined space. Other children want to break out and go back to their movement around the room. In that case, when the child wants to go moving around the room, again we challenge the child to use a purposeful gesture, or to use a sound, or to use a sound like “uh” (up) or “down” or “go” or “stop.” I would say a good percentage of the time, we can elicit purposeful gestures like moving the arm up, and often sounds and not infrequently, words like “up” or “down” or “open” etc. So the moving fence game gets a little engagement going like getting some purposeful gesturing going, sometimes getting some skillful problem solving going where the child figures out how to get our arms up to climb under the arms or climb over the arms or through our legs. Not infrequently, we even get some level 5 – some use of words. We can bring in some big dollies – a big teddy bear – to be part of our fence. “Oh Mr. Teddy Bear says you have to say the magic word” or “Teddy Bear says he needs a kiss if you're going to get out from under my arms.” So now it's the big teddy bear who is being the fence with you behind the teddy bear helping the teddy bear up and teddy bear needs a kiss. Or, mommy or daddy can need a kiss in order for the child to get out from the fence and get back to his movement around the room. So anything from a kiss to a sound to a word can now be elicited from the fence game.

Another strategy that often works well with a child who is sensory craving is to help the child enjoy their sensory craving by actually moving up to some type of a platform; being above ground a little bit. A very wide balance beam can be useful here or basically simply walking on a couch that is elevated. Simply being above ground – elevated a little bit, whether it's the postural insecurity or security or the experience of gravity or the pleasure in being elevated a little bit or all of the above, each child is a little different – some of the children become a little more focused and a little more purposeful. Now a colleague named Arnie Miller up in Boston has used this as a major vehicle for intervention with all children. He has them up on platforms and uses the platform as a vehicle for helping the child negotiate with gestures and words; both getting off the platform or doing activities on the platform. It has been very helpful for all children with special needs. But in our experience, it is particularly valuable and worth considering with a child who is very sensory craving and very active, because that child requires a lot of movement and simply being held above the ground often supplies some of that sensory craving need as well as a compensatory pattern where the child is focusing and




organizing and concentrating a little more because they are getting some of that. So you can use a very wide balance beam or some other type of platform as part of your play with the child. As part of the airplane game you can be moving around but he lands on the platform, and now he may want to get off the platform or stay on the platform, and it gives more opportunity for interaction.

Another strategy; very similar; and it relates to the airplane game, is to have a swing. There are very nice swings that you can have inside your home now and some of them literally help your child feel enveloped. They are very safe and often it's a material that holds a child in on all sides and the child can swing and yet doesn't have to have any risk of falling off the swing because the material is holding the child just like you hold him in your arms, and the child can experience a lot of movement and a lot of movement in space. This may help with their vestibular system and while in this more rhythmic and in some respects regulated movement, they are much more available for interacting and for gesturing with you and for exchanging sounds, and often for learning new words. So often you can get a lot of engagement going – one person can be swinging the child while another person is talking and working and interacting with the child, or the same person can be doing both. You get it moving and then move with the child – move your face as he or she is moving back-and-forth and begin some gesturing and making sounds. So here you are providing the movement in a more controlled and regulated way and the child isn't having to supply so much himself and that makes it a little easier.

Now another pattern we have observed that has been very helpful for children who are sensory craving, is where, and this is especially valuable when we are trying to help a child become a little more conversational – a child who is beginning to show some words and I'm going to tell you about that in just one second. This pattern is especially useful where the child is distracted by his or her own movements; where the arms and legs are moving so much that the child is literally unable to speak, even when the child has some words at their disposal. So here what we do is, as we are talking with the child, we'll hold the child's hands and we'll move the child's hands rhythmically back-and-forth with the rhythm of our voice. What I found is this sometimes helps the child regulate and slow down. Because we are now moving their hands with our hands in rhythm, we are connecting at the basic level of motor rhythm together, and it helps children then sometimes gesture to us with sounds and often use words that they may have available and sometimes it's a good way of working on learning new words.


So be aware of the fact that the child's own movement can be distracting and rhythmic coordinated movement where you are literally doing a little dance holding the child's arms, but you both might be sitting together or standing together, can help the child regulate. Also for some children, deep pressure is very regulating. Back rubs or a



bear hug or for some children a weighted vest is helpful and a lot of occupational therapists will explore that with different children who are very sensory craving and need the deep pressure. There are many, many ways of making deep pressure available through bear hugs; through firm pressure on the back, tummy, legs, or arms; some occupational therapists have advocated brushing and doing that periodically; joint compression appears to be very helpful for children who are very sensory craving and need pressure. That can occur through jumping exercises, as well as through just direct manipulation with the arms and legs, by jumping on a trampoline or jumping on a mattress can be helpful, and you can jump together and hold hands, and move rhythmically. Also there is rhythmic activity to music or the beat of a metronome that can be very helpful. As children become more verbal and able to follow directions, there is also something called the “Interactive Metronome,” something which is a computerized version of the metronome where the child receives feedback for whether he is on rhythm or off rhythm, but that requires that the child is able to cooperate at least a little bit and has some verbal abilities to follow directions. I’ve been sharing the scientific advisory on the board that has developed the metronome, and we have lots of research showing now that it does help with attention and sequencing and the fundamentals of being able to regulate and organize oneself. We also find that it is helpful in reading and in math abilities with older children, all because of, I think, increased attention, increased sequencing, and better regulation. But that is when children are already a little more advanced. But the principles behind that, which is rhythmic activity, dancing to music, dancing to the beat of the metronome, moving to the beat of the metronome, can be very, very helpful for the sensory craving child.

So here we have reviewed a few examples of how you can work with a child who is very, very sensory craving. They range from being able to move with the child, and all of this can be done in a rhythmic way with music or some other beat in the background, to our moving fence game, to holding the child’s hand and having coordinated rhythmic movement together, to providing deep pressure, and to provide movement in a swing. The idea is to harness the child’s sensory craving; to recognize it as something that won’t distract the child and make it hard for the child to move and make it hard for the child to do other things because they are so overwhelmed by just their basic need to move. As we use that to bring the child into shared attention; into more engagement; into back-and-forth gesturing; and hopefully into some problem solving – then we begin getting mastery of all our functional emotional levels, even though the child is moving a lot.

Now one of the interesting things that happens is, if we take advantage of the child’s movement and move with him and get interaction cooking and use our moving fence game, for example, so he’s gesturing to us or hold his hands rhythmically and he’s



actually verbalizing to us with the rhythmic movement of our arms and his arms, the more interaction we get, the more we get a continuous flow of back-and-forth gesturing, either using just gestures or gestures and words, the more regulated the child becomes because regulation, even for the sensory craving child, occurs when the child is in an interactive relationship where they are beginning to respond to the cues of another person. In other words, the most difficult kind of sensory craving behavior is when it's aimless and unrelated to another human being. We all know of colleagues and friends who are very active and moving all the time, but they are moving around while they are talking to us, or they enjoy sports activities or dance activities that are very movement-oriented. But they can find socially meaningful and useful ways to give vent to their need to move around quite a bit.

So the key to regulation, and the key to mastering the higher levels of the functional emotional development, i.e., thinking skills, the key to that is to help the child use their movement in an interactive way, rather than just a self-stimulatory or isolated way. So here, even with this most difficult pattern – the very avoidant, sensory craving, seemingly aimless child who seems unreachable – I can guarantee you is quite reachable. But again, we have to take advantage of the way the nervous system works for that child by understanding that nervous system and look for our window of entry into that nervous system. I just reviewed a whole bunch of specific suggestions, but the principles around all these suggestions are basically the same ones, which is take advantage of what you are seeing of the child's movement, get involved with the child, and help that child become part of a relationship and the specific tactics for all ways to do that from elevated platform,s to rhythmic movement holding the child's arms or one arm, to one parent holding the child in a bear hug while the other parent talks to the child or gestures to the child or interacts with the child, and so forth.

Now what I want to do, my colleague here, we had some questions come in and I'm going to have my colleague read one of the questions to you and again, I invite all of you to send in your questions either through email or to call in live during air-time. We are now going to read one of the questions and then if time permits, we are going to go into some related topics around education and also around some of the other sensory processing areas. But let's give it over to Sarah who is going to read this question for you.

Sarah: Ok, this is an email that we got from Dawn. She says: *Dear Dr. Greenspan. What is your opinion on a kindergarten student diagnosed with high functioning autism and the use of a one-on-one aide in the classroom? His prerequisite behaviors from meaningful language or back-and-forth interaction both verbally and gesturally, are present. Linguistic skills are above average, and his attention span*

appears to be age appropriate. He may have slightly more loud outbursts or speaking at inappropriate times than others based on being fully engaged in activity and not demonstrating self-regulating behaviors at that moment. Could a one-on-one aide actually stifle the cognitive development of a child at this level if he is regularly being redirected by an aide? Is there any research that I may refer to?

SG: This is a very good question because it opens up the whole door of how to work with children in educational settings. Let's look at this question in its specific form about an aide. It's always a good idea for children who have challenges, particularly challenges in social interaction or challenges in self regulation, to have an aide present. But, the question reveals the problem with the way we think about an aide. She said, "Could it actually undermine his cognitive..." and also many parents have asked me the question, "Could it actually undermine children's social development" to have an aide present who is constantly redirecting the child? That's the nub of the problem because if the role of the aide is to constantly redirect the child, then that may, in fact, limit the child. But that is not the proper role of the aide. So the answer is an aide is a good idea, but the aide has to have their role redefined; not to be a redirector or limit setter or a person who just keeps the child out of hot water or out of trouble. I can't tell you how many stories I hear from parents with an aide who becomes controlling and aversive to a child. But I should also point out that I hear an equal number of stories with aides who are extraordinarily helpful and gifted and doing just what we hope an aide would do.

So here is the real answer. It all depends on how the aide's role is thought about or conceptualized. What we want to do is have an aide who can do a number of things. The role of the aide should be the following:

1. The aide is there to promote social interaction between the child with special needs and the other children.
2. The aide is also there to promote understanding between the teacher and the child.
3. The aide's role is to help the child master each of the functional emotional developmental capacities through direct interaction with the aide when opportunities to interact with other children is not present.

So for example, during the free playtime, the aide should be focusing on interaction with other children and may be creating a small group off in the corner with one or two other children and the special needs child so the child is learning social skills. The aide's goal is just to create a game where they are interacting together. During lesson time, when the teacher is explaining something and you're not sure the child is getting it, then you have a little mini-conversation with the child where you are gesturing and engaging and exchanging information using thinking skills – helping the child reason and answer "why." If the child is working quietly at his desk doing a math lesson, you want

to make sure the child understands that math lesson so you have the child explain to you why he is doing what he is doing at the desk, then the child is learning language as well as math reasoning, as well as social skills with you, the aide. So there is a role for the aide to help the child reason out what they are doing in paper and pencil work. Help the child play with peers during recess or free play time in a kindergarten class or during lunchtime. Help translate complicated directions the teacher may have, using the Socratic method. “What do you think Mrs. Jones wants us to do?” Help facilitate class discussion if the child is a little shy or reticent. The aide can encourage the child to speak up in class or again, get the teacher to ask a question directly to little Johnny. She can say, “You know, I think little Johnny has an answer for you, but I’m not sure he’s ready to share that with you unless maybe you ask him really nicely. That way the aide draws attention to Johnny and the teacher says, “Oh Johnny, could you tell us why Columbus sailed the seas? What was he looking for?” etc. So the aide’s role is really a facilitator of interaction; a facilitator of higher functional emotional levels – not a redirector, not a scolder, not a limit setter. Obviously unless the child is getting into hot water, in which case you have no choice. But any teacher would do that.

Often the aide can retreat and just be a helper to the teacher so if the child is making nice or participating in class, the aide doesn’t need to be doing anything other than helping out with all the children. So the aide moves in and out of working with the special needs child in an integrated setting, as well as helping with the overall classroom structure and all the children depending on the needs of the special needs child. So an aide is a facilitator of interaction and that way it’s a plus-plus and there are no negatives.

Now we have a caller. We’re going to take another question from Istanbul.
Hello?

Caller: Hello?

SG: Hi, Dr. Greenspan here. How are you.

Caller: Hi, how are you Dr. Greenspan. I can summarize your question which is a wonderful thing. I just want to share it with the other audience too. It’s time to share with the others. The goal is to mobilize and support the development processes that are so vital to healthy development. Sharing attention, self-regulation, engaging with the child, two way communication, emotional ideas, and emotional thinking. The key is to know how to harness that. It’s a wonderful thing. You know, I have an autistic child too. First of all, it is not easy for all of us. You have to be patient and everybody has a different problem. We have to be strong, first of all. We need hope and then morality and wisdom. Alright?

SG: Ok, is there a particular question I can focus in on for you?

Caller: I couldn't quite understand you.


SG: Do you have a question that I can answer for you?

Caller: I couldn't hear your voice. There is a technical problem.

SG: Ok, thank you very much for that comment. We heard from our colleague in Istanbul. What she said is just a reaffirmation of the importance of the principles that we've been talking about, and it was a very nice reaffirmation and it was a little hard, I think, for some of you to maybe understand our caller. It was hard for her to understand what we were saying, I don't know if it was the transatlantic lines or just the static on that particular telephone line, but what she was saying was how important it was to engage the child, to get interaction going, move up the developmental ladder, and how it's not easy for parents to do this. It's nice to hear that there are folks working on this in Istanbul as well as here in the United States. So it is very gratifying to get a call like that and we welcome callers from our international colleagues with comments as well as with questions.

Now we were talking about the aide in education and what I want to do is come back to that theme and talk a little bit more about education. Lots of colleagues, as well as many parents ask questions about how do we set up an educational program – a school program – for little Johnny or Susie? The key question is not to assume that just because something is called “school” it is going to be necessary for little Johnny or Susie, or particularly helpful. The key is to match the program to the child, not the child to the program. Many educational settings have excellent programs, but many are fixed in their ways and it may or may not be appropriate for little Johnny or Susie, given their nervous system. So sometimes a child can be spending 3 or 4 or even 6 or 7 hours in a program where the child is simply being constrained and contained and being passive, and not taking much in and not learning much. So he or she is going to school, but not much is cooking and not much is happening.


So the question is, “Can we tailor the approach to the child?” That is not easy to do in group settings that have particularly strong institutional histories where things have been going one way or another way for a long period of time. So in the history of education has been the tendency with young children with special needs to take approaches that have worked for older children and try to use them for younger and younger children. But that is difficult because the young child with a developing nervous system may have very, very different needs. The best way to think about setting up educational environments for children, and many parents elect to set up home-schooling



environments or set up little cooperative ventures with other parents where two or three or four children get together at someone's house and maybe they even hire a teacher or two and develop their own program. The reason why that is becoming popular among many parents is because they can then tailor the approach to their particular child and to the other children rather than having the child try to fit into an existing program.

Now we are going to talk about this more next week, and actually we'll go into it in some detail, but I want to give you a little overview of where we'll go next week about education. The best way to think about it is in terms of different profiles of children and what sort of educational programs they need. The general outline for an educational program is that there needs to be, when we talk about the different kinds of children, there needs to be an opportunity for one-on-one time as well as some group time. There also needs to be the opportunity in both the one-on-one and group time, for helping the child master each of their functional emotional developmental capacities, and for strengthening each of their processing capacities – auditory processing and language, visual spatial, motor planning, and sensory modulation. And, we need opportunities, when children are ready, to master their academic skills. But remember, the overall goal of education is not just to learn math or just to learn reading. It's to learn to be a thinker. So the overall goal has to be to learn to relate, to communicate, and to think. Then as part of thinking, you want to be able to apply that thinking to the traditional academic areas of reading, math, oral and written communication, and then to different subject areas – history, science, social studies, etc. Now often though, we don't realize this important hierarchy or this important sequence. So instead of focusing on the large goals of helping the child relate, communicate, and think, and then on the fundamentals of reading, oral and written communication, and mathematical reasoning, and then specific subject areas like social studies, history, etc., we tend to jump in and try to just teach the child their letters or just to try to teach the child their numbers. So we may have an uncommunicative, unrelated child who is unable to think, but has memorized some numbers and letters. This may pass as academic progress or as education, but it is hardly education. The comments I am making now are true for all children, not just children with special needs. They all need to become thinkers and then to apply that thinking to their different academic areas – the basic ones first which they use to acquire knowledge, i.e., reading, oral, and written communication and mathematical reasoning, and then the more secondary applied ones like history and science, etc.


So this is a good model for all education, but it is especially important for children with special needs. So here is a way to think about it. Some children, as we all know, are struggling with the fundamentals. The fundamentals are of just forming attention with someone else, engaging with someone else and becoming purposeful gesturers and



getting into a continuous flow of back-and-forth gesturing. A child who is working on these fundamentals, whether it's a two year old, a three year old, a five year old, or an eight year old, is going to need, in the educational environment, a one-on-one person working with him on these fundamentals. In our DIR Floortime Model, that one-on-one person is going to need to understand which of these early levels the child has partial mastery of, which he has no mastery of at all, what the child's processing profile is like – whether it's stronger with sound or stronger with sights, how well they plan their actions, and tailor learning interactions to the child. The day should be divided up for that kind of child between some spontaneous Floortime interactions, where they are working on all these fundamental levels in a spontaneous way following the child's lead, it should also then have semi-structured problem solving time where we are working on specific linguistic and language skills starting with gesturing and sounds and leading up to the use of symbols and words eventually, but for this child who is not yet verbal, we want to get them ready through back-and-forth vocal gesturing and back-and-forth appreciation of sound and sound patterns. This may involve some oral/motor work so they can use more sounds. We have a curriculum called the Affect Based Language Curriculum (ABLC) that outlines a program that can be used in schools at all the levels, even at this very basic and primary level.

Then the second part of the problem solving interactions is strengthening the child's sensory processing and motor planning and sequencing capacities and sensory modulation capacities. So we want to have a lot of motor sequencing challenges, balance challenges, left/right integration challenges, rhythmicity and timing opportunities doing things with music, and a lot of visual spatial challenges like tracking and searching for things, as well as sensory modulation opportunities with a lot of movement and work that involves the vestibular system and exposure to different kinds of sensations – different kinds of touch and smell and sound in calm and regulating ways to help the child broaden the range of sensation they can enjoy. For the sensory craving child, lots of modulating games to help that child slow down and regulate will be implemented.

Now also, we want to help children master these basics in relationship to a peer. So we want to create not just one-on-one, but one-on-one with a peer with the adult who is the facilitator. This is going to be hard for the child working on the basics, but we can introduce that – very, very gradually. So fundamentally, for the child who is working on the basic levels, the educational program is going to need to involve a one-on-one helper, different therapists will come in who can both consult to the one-on-one helper and guide them in their interactions like a speech pathologist and occupational therapist to help in the different processing areas, as well as a Floortime specialist to help on the interactions itself, and the activities throughout the day are going to vary from spontaneous Floortime




activities to semi-structured problem solving activities involving speech and language and involving motor and sensory processing skills. The best way to work is in 20-30 minute intervals around these kind of activities.

Now it is also very important for a child working on the basics to have their parents very involved, so they should be sharing with parents and educators of approaches, and parents should be coming into school to work with the child and them sharing what they are doing at home and educators should be showing the parents what they are doing. These should be regular meetings. The parents don't need to be there everyday, but for some of the kids that may be very, very helpful and a very important part of the program.

Also, we don't want a child working on the fundamentals in school for a full day unless there is no one at home to help work with the child. Ideally, it would be a half day program so the other half of the day can be working with caregivers at home, especially mom or dad or other extended family members like siblings because the more intimate relationships for the child are going to be the ones that hold the most value for the child in terms of pulling in the basic patterns of relating and exchanging of gestures and shared social problem solving.

Now for children working on other capacities who have relative mastery of these levels, but are working more on what we call Level 5 and 6 – creative pretending, using words spontaneously and creatively, and using words logically – we're going to want to have a different emphasis. We'll still want to have these same elements of basic Floortime, following the child's lead, problem solving interactions using language and using sensory processing and motor planning capacities including visual spatial capacities, but now we're working on using ideas. So the Floortime will be characterized not only by interactions and getting continuous flow of back-and-forth communication cooking, but now by shared pretend play and by elaborating the child's verbal repertoire. And, we're going to help the child be logical by asking "W" questions – asking a lot of "why" questions in spontaneous play. In the language curriculum, the semi-structured activities, we're going to be working on lots of new concepts and lots of new words. We always do that in an emotionally meaningful way by setting up problems to be solved in the real world so the child understands the words they are using. Then we'll challenge the child also to make sense of what they are saying, to answer the "W" questions. We'll be doing more advanced motor and sensory and spatial exercises that are in keeping with this child's emerging symbolic capacities. We may be ready for some pre-academic skills for this child, so we'll have another component for the child who is experimenting with ideas where they can be learning to discriminate different sounds as a basis for reading and connecting sounds to different visual designs. We can be working with quantity



concepts – more and less – and that can be integrated in the problem solving strategies and in the basic Floortime strategies as well as setting up specific semi-structured games to work on quantity concepts and to work on pre-linguistic part of reading skills as well as some of the visual parts of it. So now we are moving ahead.

Then another group will be working on not just logical thinking, he will have mastered some of that connecting ideas together, but working at the higher levels of thinking, what we call multi-causal thinking and gray area thinking where they can give you many reasons for something happening. They can compare two things and tell you why A is better than B, and they can tell you to what degree A is better than B. So now we're into the more advanced levels of functional emotional development, and now we can be working on more traditional academic skills – reading, oral, and written expression, and math reasoning, but the key here is to be working on this in a conceptual way and while we are working on these things to be promoting all the functional emotional developmental capacities and strengthening all the processing capacities. Many of the children will have some of these higher level skills, but will also need some further work on the basics. So we will be wanting to do some basic Floortime, some problem solving time, as well as traditional academics, but it will be thinking-based academics. Then we'll have children at even higher levels that we'll talk more about next time.

So as we go through our educational program next week, what we're going to focus on is how to set up educational programs for children with different profiles. While every child needs to have a program tailored to his or her unique profile, we'll try to at least create general principles that allows schools to create different kinds of relative programs for children who have different kinds of individual patterns and different kinds of needs. Within that, there will need to be obviously variations for the approaches tailored to the child.

So next week we'll talk about educating children with autistic spectrum disorders and other special needs conditions, and what educating really means as opposed to what often passes for education these days.

Thank you for joining us and again, email in your questions and feel free to call live during the show. We look forward to speaking to you next week. Thank you for joining us today. Bye-bye.