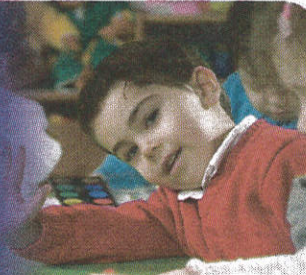


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## THE LUMA CENTER

# What is a Sensory Processing Disorder?

By Nancy Allard, MA, OTR/L

Director of The Luma Center, Valley Forge Educational Services

"The seam in my sock hurts!" "My daughter hates me washing her hair or brushing her teeth." "He can't stop fidgeting and touching and it bothers the other children in class." These are all comments made by parents of children who were later identified as having difficulties in sensory integration or a Sensory Processing Disorder. Other children may be having difficulty learning to get dressed, use a knife and fork, to write or to use scissors.

Sensory Processing Disorder is a complex disorder that interferes with the way in which we filter, interpret and coordinate sensory information for use. Children with sensory processing disorders have varied backgrounds, learning styles, cognitive abilities and personalities. Some children may

**Sensory Processing Disorder is a complex disorder that interferes with the way in which we filter, interpret and coordinate sensory information for use.**

be diagnosed with ADHD, a learning disability, an attachment or autistic spectrum disorder.

However, there are many children who have symptoms of Sensory Processing Disorder that do not have any diagnosis and struggle with little or no help. Many of these children are misunderstood and are identified at a young age as "fussy" babies or are later considered to have "behavior difficulties".

The Sensory Processing Network reports: "Studies show that as many as five percent of all children suffer from SPD. Yet despite this high rate, information and help for those with this disorder is still very limited. This lack of resources, combined with the fact that SPD often looks like other disorders, often results in misdiagnosis and inappropriate treatment for many children. And even when parents do obtain a diagnosis and referral to appropriate therapy, most insurance companies do not cover the cost of the treatment."

What are Observable Signs of Sensory Processing Disorders?

- Over sensitivity to touch, movement, sights, or sounds.
  - Under-reactive to sensory stimulation (body whirling or crashing)
  - Sensory Seeking behavior: Activity level that is unusually high or unusually low
  - Postural and coordination problems (poor balance or motor coordination), poor motor planning
- What are Possible Ef-

fects of Sensory Processing Disorders?

- Delays in speech, language, motor skills, play, feeding and self care skills or academic achievement
- Poor organization of behavior (impulsive, distractible, frustrated, aggressive)
- Poor self concept (may appear lazy, bored, or unmotivated)

Where to Find Help?

Help is available! Occupational therapists with education in sensory integration theory, evaluation and treatment planning are trained to look at how sensory processing and motor planning disorders interfere with daily life functions and learning. The overall goals of occupational therapy should be to help parents understand their child's behaviors, needs, skills and to develop sensorimotor abilities, self regulation, self esteem and social participation across environments. Therapy is fun and aims at improving the way a child responds to and makes use of sensory information to plan coordinate and organize him/herself for daily activities and learning.

The Luma Center, a program of Valley Forge Educational Services, provides therapy, social skills groups and therapeutic preschool programs to young children who have developmental or learning challenges. The Center also provides consulting services to families, schools and community groups on supporting children with special needs. [www.lumacenter.org](http://www.lumacenter.org).