Sensory Stories: Improving Participation for Children with Sensory Modulation Challenges

Victoria L. Nackley, MS, OTR/L
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vnackley@utica.edu

Why Sensory Stories???
• Our role as parents / teachers / therapists / aides is to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for school and for lifelong success.
• Children with sensory modulation difficulties have barriers to participation in various tasks.
• Sensory Stories: a tool to increase children’s participation in typical events.

Who is the targeted audience for a Sensory Story?
• Children with over-responsive sensory modulation issues that impact their ability to engage in occupations.

Directions for Use:
• Parents / therapists / teachers / aides can read the story to the child
• The child can read the story him / herself
• Stories can be read daily (regularly occurring events) or each time prior to . . .
• Child encouraged to implement sensory strategies and practice regularly
• ‘What do you need to do now?’
• ‘I’m brushing my teeth. What do I do?’

The Importance of Routines/Habits
• Definition
• Their power
• Their role in people’s lives
• When routine is lacking or ineffective
• Lack of routine with over-responsive sensory modulation
• Relationship to Sensory Stories

Common Interventions to Help Establish Routines

- Establishing Daily Schedules
- Visual Schedules
- Alert to a change in schedule
- Social Stories (Gray, 2000)
- Scripting (McClannahan, 2005)
- Activity Routines (Gut, 1994)
- Discrete Trial Training (ABA, AVBA)
- Sensory Stories (Marr & Nackley, 2006)
The Aim of Sensory Stories

- To identify contextual factors that impede children’s participation.
- To teach children with sensory modulation issues to implement self-imposed sensory strategies.
- To establish performance patterns (habits) that foster participation in childhood occupations.

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Social Stories + Sensory Processing + Technology = Sensory Stories

The Basics

- Approximately 5% of children have some sort of SPD (Ahn, Miller, et al 2004)
- Parents seek tools/techniques to assist their child (Cohn, Miller, Tickle-Degnen, 2000)
- The written word has power in effecting change
- Technology often taps children’s interest

Similar to Social Stories in that:

- Sensory Stories are in story style
- Sensory Stories have specific sentence format
- Sensory Stories are meant to be read frequently to prepare the child for challenging occupations

Sensory Stories are different from Social Stories in that...

- Are all illustrated
- Use more suggestive sentences (not directive)
- Primary purpose is to teach children strategies they can self-employ (before, during and after the event)
- Teach the child the intended results of the strategies

Theoretical background:

- Sensory Integration: Focus is the child with a modulation problem (overresponsive)
- Cognitive Behavioral: Self control through empowerment
- Teaching/Learning Process: Visual and auditory input coupled with practice
- Motor Learning: Practice within contexts
What does Sensory Integration theory tell us???

- The ability to learn is dependent on the ability to take in and process necessary sensory information.
- Difficulties processing sensory information can lead to problems with motor and concept learning.
- Providing specific sensory activities can promote an adaptive response and enhance motor and concept learning.

What is sensory processing?

- Taking in sensory information – basic 5 senses + 2 more
- Organizing the information and making ‘sense’ of the information
- Using the information for function
- Problems with sensory processing can impact balance, coordination of the 2 body sides, planning of movement, perception, body awareness.

What is sensory modulation?

- The regulation of sensory information
- Filtering of extraneous information
- Attention to pertinent information
- Examples . . .
- Comparison with an air traffic controller
- Difficulties with sensory modulation can lead to problems with attention, activity level, behavior, social skills, self-regulation, etc.
- Want to know more? . . . ‘The Out-of-Sync Child’ by Carol Kranowitz or ‘Sensational Kids’ by Lucy Miller

The child with sensory modulation issues (over-responsivity) lives with those unpleasant sensations on a daily basis.
- Additionally, there is variability in the way his or her nervous system interprets sensations.
- Our aim is to make daily life more pleasant for him or her AND to encourage engagement in daily activities. (chap 2)

Calming touch input

- Self-imposed input
- Deep touch – as deep as the muscle and bone
- Try this one: light touch to arm.
- Examples of activities: Sitting & standing
- More problem solving to come

Calming Balance Input

- Slow linear input
- Self-directed
- Examples of activities: Sitting & standing
- More problem solving to come
Calming Proprioceptive input

- Heavy input to muscles and joints
- Active resistance to movement
- Self-imposed
- Examples of activities: Sitting & standing
- More problem solving to come

Environmental Modifications

- I can put on my special headphones so the noises don’t bother me.

Ten Sensory Stories in each contextual area:

Home
- Bathing
- Combing Hair
- Ear Cleaning
- Eating
- Getting Dressed in the Morning

- Nail Care
- Showering
- Sleeping
- Tooth Brushing
- Washing Hair

School:
- Assemblies
- Being in Lines
- Cafeteria
- Circle Time / Floor Time
- Desk Time
- Eating Time
- Moving in the School
- Outdoor Recess
- Physical Education Class
- School Bus Ride

Community:
- Getting a Haircut
- Going to a Restaurant
- Going to a Store
- Going to Parties
- Going to Places of Worship
- Going to the Dentist
- Going to the Doctor
- Riding in an Elevator
- Riding in the Car
- Riding on an Escalator

Ten Sensory Stories in each contextual area

Key Features of Sensory Stories

1. Sensory Strategies
2. Self-choice
3. Self-implementation
4. Socially acceptable strategies
5. Line drawings
6. Innate desire of children
7. Improving awareness
8. Customization
Analysis of the Sensory Story on Assemblies

1. Introduction to the targeted experience
   • An assembly is a special time in the school day when children go to a big room. There they listen and learn from special people.

2 & 3 Identification of the potential negative sensory input during that experience
   Acknowledgement that the experience can be unpleasant/uncomfortable
   • Sometimes it is noisy and crowded. Some children don’t like being in crowded places. They don’t like the noise. They also don’t like being bumped.

4. Strategies that can prepare the child for the experience.
   • I can do special things to make it easier to go to assemblies. Before I go to the assembly I can put on my heavy fanny pack. That helps me to be calm.
   • Then I might put on my headphones. That makes it less noisy.
   • When I get to my seat at the assembly, I can do an elbow check to make sure no one is sitting too close.

5. Outlining the steps of the experience and the strategies to be used during the experience.
   • During the assembly, I can make my muscles tight like a statue. Then I take a deep breath and relax.
   • When I’m sitting and listening, I can push my hands down really hard on my legs and then give myself a big hug. These activities make it easier to listen.

6. Strategies at the conclusion of the experience.
   • When the assembly is over, I can stretch my arms up high and take another deep breath.

7. Ending the story on a positive note.
   • Assemblies at school can be fun!

THIS Sensory Story would be used for:
   • The student with over-responsive sensory modulation issues.
   • Recommended to be read several times prior to the assembly.
   • Read the day of the event.
   • Read during the event.
   • Goal: full participation in the assembly through implementation of self-imposed sensory strategies.
Where does this all fit in?! ?!?

• One possibility to address the participation for children with whom you work.
• Opens the dialog regarding sensory processing
• Provides concrete suggestions
• Child should assimilate strategies to other areas
• Applications not only for school . . . Also for home and the community (A link!!!)
• Should not take the place of therapeutic intervention
• Should be used in conjunction with a sensory diet

What does the research tell you?!?!?

• 14 studies to date
• Mainly level 4 evidence according to Abreu, 2003.
• Results are generally favorable
• You have the data to support the use of Sensory Stories
• Give yourselves a big hug!!!

References


More References