

Introduction to CranioSacral Therapy for Sensory Processing Disorders



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When people hear the term Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD), they often associate it with children on the autistic spectrum. However, the reality is that most of us grapple with sensory integration issues; we've simply learned self-regulation, or how to manage sensory input. In this course, we will explore Jean Ayres' 1989 definition of Sensory Integration as the neurological process that organizes sensation from one's own body and from the environment, enabling effective use of the body within that environment. The spatial and temporal aspects of inputs from different sensory modalities are interpreted, associated, and unified. Sensory integration is information processing...the brain must select, enhance, inhibit, compare and associate the sensory information in a flexible, constantly changing pattern; in other words, the brain must integrate it.

Essentially, this means that learning is dependent on individuals' ability to take in sensory information, derived from the environment and from the movement of their bodies, process and integrate these sensory inputs within the central nervous system, and use this sensory information to plan and organize behavior. When sensory information aligns seamlessly, a process of sensory integration occurs. Unfortunately, some individuals struggle to make sense of what they see, hear, and feel, leading to difficulties in screening out what is and what is not important. Therefore, we must consider what the client sees, hears, touches, and smells, when we prepare them for a massage. Recognizing signs and symptoms of SPD allows us to adapt ourselves, our

environment and our massage treatments to better suit the client. We know that information is received through the sensory systems, which include vision, touch, smell, taste, and hearing and the arousal states manifested by our sensory processing, often dictate our behavior.

Consider a scenario where a client reacts unusually during a session. Changes in the environment, such as different scents, lighting, or massage materials, can overwhelm their sensory system. For instance, you may have a client who, after several sessions, suddenly seems a bit off. They cannot lie still and jump with each touch of your hands. Let us take a closer look at what may be happening to their sensory system. The weather has shifted, and you've decided to use brand new flannel massage sheets versus the older thinner cotton sheets. You may have also changed the scent in the diffuser from the lavender scent they are familiar with to a seasonal scent of cinnamon. The room you've been using is occupied, so you're in a different room without natural light, and so you've lit candles around the room. And, because you are in a different room, the only massage oil you have available is cold and thinner. Your client is in sensory overload. The smell of cinnamon reminds them of that aunt that only visited during the holidays, and she was always touching them. Her hands were cold and clammy, just like your massage lotion. The flannel sheets are rough on their skin and the lights appear to be more romantic than relaxing. Your client is unable to self-regulate all these changes, and now their body is in flight or fright. The autonomic nervous system is becoming dysregulated.

This may sound extreme but remember a person with sensory processing disorder has difficulty interpreting sensory information.

Understanding these challenges and adapting our approach is crucial. By exploring the signs of SPD, we can identify accommodations to support clients for success. The skin, our largest sensory organ, uses touch and proprioceptive receptors to regulate itself. CranioSacral Therapy (CST) can aid in organizing and calming the central nervous system, enabling individuals with SPD to participate in massage. CST works with the body's natural self-correcting mechanisms. We access the Craniosacral system (CSS) by listening through palpation and blending with the body's tissues. The CSS has the ability to influence every system in the body, including musculoskeletal, immune, digestive, endocrine, and neurological. CST may help organize and calm the CNS and facilitate the ability of those with a sensory processing disorder to participate in massage.

In this class, students will explore their own reactions to various stimuli. After experiencing how their own systems react to the various sensory stimuli, the students will be provided information on how CST, a gentle, hands-on approach, can address some of the structural issues that negatively impact the sensory systems. Our speaker will provide a thorough explanation of CranioSacral Therapy, Sensory Processing Disorder, how both systems operate, and why CST can benefit all clients.