

# Sensory Processing

## In traumatized children

Appended from: Improving Sensory Processing  
in Traumatized Children by S Lloyd



### A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

- Why we need to start with the body, rather than with the feelings...

Sally Lloyd tells us that if children miss out on normal growing up things (like nurture, love and development) then this will harm later development. If we are trying to get our kids to run before they can walk, it's like dropping them into a lake of anxiety. The result will be a flight or fight response!

Sally says the children won't be able to explain why they're behaving like they are (it's buried deep). So what do we do? We notice and we help them to feel safe.

### Glossary

LIMBIC	Links the amygdala to the frontal lobes.
VESTIBULAR	Balance : Foundation of all sensory systems.
PROPRECEPTIVE	Movement and co-ordination.
TACTILE	Sensation and feed-back

Trinity Children's Centre has a dedicated Interventions Team. To contact the team email us : [Yolanda@trinitychildren.org.za](mailto:Yolanda@trinitychildren.org.za)



# A Biblical Perspective

## A brief word...

Your Interventions Team at Trinity Children's Centre do what they do because of their deep conviction of the truths of the Christian faith.

When we use literature from non-Christian sources we will look at them in light of what scripture says, and apply the following:

- 1) Are there principles which contradict scriptural truth?  
[E.g. *You are in control of your own journey/destiny*].
- 2) Are there basic assumptions that contradict scriptural truth?  
[E.g. *Evolution used to explain behaviour*].
- 3) Does what is written speak into our world and life at TCC?  
[*Our specific cultural context*].

### Why is it so important?

It's important because what we believe impacts our behaviour!



So... whatever you do,  
do it all for the glory of God

1 Corinthians 10:31

Our bodies are amazing aren't they? We're born helpless, at the mercy of our parents to teach us what life is all about. Some are lucky and have parents with the time and ability to care for them, but others are not, and yet still make it into childhood although a little less well equipped.

Theories make sense when they follow biblical principles. Sensory Processing works because it follows the principles of Psalm 139, which tells us that God has a plan for every one of us. Before we are even born, God is at work even when parents are not!

If God has a purpose for every neglected or abused child, that gives us hope that despite a bad start in life, there is hope and opportunity to learn, to grow and to develop in healthy and God honouring ways.

What has been observed by clinicians has been known to believers since God first made himself known... We are body and spirit; ignore the body and you miss an essential part of what it means to be human. Ignore the spirit and you get the same result. We are not the sum of chemical reactions in our bodies, we are thinking, feeling spiritual beings responding to an ever changing world in unpredictable ways.

Traumatized children have learned that the world is not a safe space, and they are right! They didn't have the benefit of a protected childhood and so their response is right; to protect themselves from harm because nobody else will!

At TCC, then we have a unique opportunity to not only provide a safe space whilst our kids are at school – but to also help them to understand that although the world IS unsafe, Jesus loves them and has a plan for them, that if they trust Him, they can find peace and rest even when the “earth is shaken and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea”!

*Traumatized children  
have learned the world  
is not a safe space, and  
they are right!*

*For you created my inmost being;  
You knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
Your works are wonderful, I know that full well.  
My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place,  
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes saw my unformed body;  
All the days ordained for me were written in your book before  
One of them came to be.*

PSALM 139:13-18

# The Limbic System

The limbic system is the *Background Music*:



- Develops during mother / baby interaction.
- This is where the Amygdala processes what's happening around us to make us feel happy, upset or scared.
  - When we're happy the Amygdala signals 'calmness' turning on the 'contented' hormones.
  - When we're scared the Amygdala signals 'danger' which turns on the fight or flight hormone.
  - The Amygdala signals for what it feels is right for the body at the time... Either '*this is good, let's carry on*', or '*help... Get me out of here.... Now!*'
- Safe parenting tells us that the world is a safe place, a place to explore and to learn about how it works, rather than being fearful of it.

## What does the Amigdala do?



Consider the child placed in front of the TV: Eyes & ears are engaged, but not the body.

Normal childhood development allows the child to 'grow' into their bodies from rolling over and crawling all the way through to fine motor skills.

# The Vestibular System

- Concerned with BALANCE.
- The foundation of all other sensory systems.
- Is first engaged in the womb and continued as babies are rocked, carried and swayed as well as through self-soothing.
  - Enables a strong core & good posture
  - Without this moving our arms and legs becomes more difficult.
  - It's the difference between a child being able to sit at a table rather than lie on the floor.

# Propreceptive System



## It's all about body movement

How are we able to pick up a coffee and drink from it rather than throw it over our shoulder?

The Propreceptive System, that's how! It is always progressive – beginning with a baby being able to hold the weight of their own heads, then shoulders, body, legs and finally feet.

If a child is either jerky or floppy in their general movement that's because this system is not properly developed.



*Good Propreception is having a good idea of what your body is doing without you having to actually see it. E.g. putting an earring in without a mirror.*



# Tactile System

## Sensation and Feedback

- Closely bound to the Propreceptive System. But whilst the Propreceptive is to do with *internal* muscles the Tactile System is to with *external* stimulus.
- The best place to start rebuilding underdeveloped children.
- In infancy the system is used for protection.
- As the child grows the system becomes more about exploration.

SUMMARY: "When considering a child's emotional difficulties where there has been early neglect or abuse, it can be helpful to think about these other systems & whether the child is trying to build complex social and emotional skill on a firm foundation of good bodily awareness and sensory processing."

# Interventions: *How can you help?*

## Tactile System

**AIM:** To get the child away from the past, and into the here and now.

**ACTIVITIES:**

- Get the child to count their pulse, and then get them to race around and note the difference depending on different activities.
- Get the children into pairs, they have to get a balloon from their head to their feet without dropping it, and without using hands.
- Get the children into pairs. Ask one to draw a shape on the back of the other who must guess what shape has been drawn.
- Can you come up with other ideas?



**AIM:** A more specific example: Getting a child to enjoy and appreciate their food.

Zoe doesn't enjoy food, she gorges on it. As a young child she never where the next meal was coming from!

**ACTIVITIES:**

- A taste test using different (strong) flavoured chips.
- Blowing games (painting by straw-blowing).
- Eating sensory foods; frozen fruit, sherbet etc.
- Toothbrush / toothpaste activity.

Ensure that all the activities you do with the children are FUN!

# Interventions: *How can you help?*

## Vestibular & Proprioceptive Function

**AIM:** To make children 'aware of their bodies'

i) Think heavy!

- Wall squats (back to the wall, feet in front, and squat until legs are in 90°)
- Arrange for kids to carry heavy boxes of books 'where they are needed'. And they may need to be carried back again!

ii) Think grounded!

- Get the child to lay flat on their back and play Simon says.
- Ask the child to do a Superman. Lay flat on their stomach, raise arms & legs off the floor.
- Use a yoga ball to do other balances
- You can get older kids to read whilst lying on their tummy.
- Do commando crawling, or practice doing wheelbarrow races.



**AIM:** A more specific example:  
**Helping children to get comfortable through progressive association.**

Zoe can't sit on her Foster Mom's lap and rock or read a story – she squirms and gets impatient.

**ACTIVITIES:**

- 1<sup>st</sup> step was to play music while she bathed (she loves her bath).
- Gradually increase the volume.
- Once she's happy with music in her favourite place also introduce it in the bedroom with Mom. And then finally add a book.

*"ensure you're tuning in to the child's mood and response."*

YOUR KEY TO SUCCESS:

Sequential, Slow, Safe & Fun