

2 forms of Sensory Processing Challenges in Neurodivergent clients'

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DISCLAIMER!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

- Due to the topic of Sensory Processing Disorders and their associated seeking behaviors and avoidant behaviors not being covered very often at least within the Behavioral Health and Substance Use fields and/or among the Recovery Community at large. Some of the material and/or examples used may be triggering to some attendees due to topics like suicide, trauma, and some types of behaviors persons without IDD find odd like tickling or play wrestling. However, the way this material is presented is to help ensure attendees understand this critical topic.

KEY Purpose

For the purpose of this presentation IDD will stand for people that have a diagnosis that falls under the category Neurodivergent which means differing in mental or neurological function from what is considered typical or normal as well as have co-occurring Mental Health and/or Substance Use challenges.

Learning Objectives

- ▶ Through engaging real-world examples, participant interaction, and a trauma-informed lens, this session will explore:
- ▶ The difference between *seeking* and *avoidant* behaviors related to proprioceptive and tactile sensory input
- ▶ How these behaviors may be misinterpreted as “odd,” aggressive, or inappropriate
- ▶ Strategies for family members, providers, and peers to respond supportively rather than judgmentally

What is Proprioceptive Dysfunction?

- ▶ Proprioceptive Dysfunction- issues with body awareness and understanding one's position in space. Exhibits seeking and/or avoiding behaviors attributed to Proprioceptive sensory signals(ex bear hugs)

What is Proprioceptive seeking behavior

Proprioceptive seekers crave sensory stimulation via movement, pressure, and physical contact with others. Seekers may seem to need constant stimulation. However, they tend to become more deregulated as they take in more input. Many seekers experience symptoms associated with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), such as low impulse control, inability to focus, and behavioral problems.

What is Proprioceptive seeking behavior cont.

Proprioceptive Seekers May:

- ▶ Bump or crash into people or objects on purpose.
- ▶ Enjoy rough play and constantly seem to be wrestling with siblings or friends.
- ▶ Tend to stand too close to others or touch others without permission.
- ▶ Crave bear hugs, holding hands, and other kinds of physical pressure.

How to support Proprioceptive seeking behavior

- ▶ Assign tasks that put pressure on joints, such as carrying groceries or laundry.
- ▶ Use a weighted blanket and deep pressure therapy when needed.
- ▶ Give hugs, cuddles, or other kinds of physical contact when asked.(and appropriate for the relationship between person seeking physical contact and person giving physical contact.)

How to support Proprioceptive seeking behavior cont.

However, do not be surprised if you need to teach the different relationships where physical contact like hugs, cuddling, ect.. are and are not appropriate and be prepared to teach or refer to appropriate support for teaching this important concept. One resource might be social skills therapist. Another potential resource would be Occupational Therapist especially for support with proper use of weighted blankets and/or vests.

What is Proprioceptive Avoidant behavior

Proprioceptive avoiders are highly sensitive to movement and pressure tend to become overwhelmed or distracted by physical contact. Avoiders often have extreme or upsetting reactions to even very mild stimulation. As a result, they can appear withdrawn or defensive and have trouble fitting in with their peers. They also frequently experience symptoms associated with anxiety disorders and engage in repetitive self-soothing behaviors.

What is Proprioceptive Avoidant behavior Cont.

Proprioceptive Avoiders May:

- ▶ Avoid physical contact with others.
- ▶ Appear very timid around peers and avoid physical play.
- ▶ Become anxious in crowded spaces or when standing even somewhat close to others.
- ▶ Be unable to properly assess risk in their physical environment. For example, they may believe they can fall into the small gap between the floor and an elevator.

How to support Proprioceptive Avoidant behavior

- ▶ Warn family and friends ahead of time that hugging and touching is not desired.
- ▶ Give verbal cues regarding your surroundings and properly contextualize the risks. ("There is a gap in the floor by the elevator. It is smaller than your foot. You cannot fall in. Let's step over it together.")

What is Tactile Dysfunction?

Tactile Dysfunction- feels certain sensations more strongly than most people do. Exhibits seeking and/or avoiding behaviors attributed to tactile sensory signals (ex Tickling)

What is Tactile seeking behavior??

Tactile seekers are desensitized to touch and crave sensory stimulation via specific textures, temperatures, and deep pressure. Seekers may seem to need constant stimulation. However, they tend to become more deregulated as they take in more input. Many seekers experience symptoms associated with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), such as low impulse control, inability to focus, and behavioral problems.

What is Tactile seeking behavior?? cont.

Tactile Seekers May:

- ▶ Prefer toys, clothing, and food with varied or specific textures.
- ▶ Constantly touch or fiddle with clothing, surfaces, or other objects.
- ▶ Crave hugs, kisses, and other frequent or prolonged contact with others.
- ▶ Tend to play too rough and accidentally harm others while playing.
- ▶ Have difficulty recognizing and respecting others' personal boundaries.

How to support Tactile seeking behavior

- ▶ Use fidget spinners, stress balls, and stretchy bands.
- ▶ Provide a variety of textures in toys, clothing, and food.
- ▶ Play with finger paints, Play-Doh, sand, mud, and other messy objects.
- ▶ Practice ways to respect personal space while eating, playing, lining up, etc.

How to support Tactile seeking behavior cont.

Including the different relationships where physical contact like tickling, back scratches, massages, ect.. are and are not appropriate or refer to appropriate support for teaching this important concept. One resource might be social skills therapist. Another potential resource would be Occupational Therapist especially for support with proper use of weighted blankets and/or vests.

What is Tactile Avoidant behavior??

Tactile avoiders are highly sensitive to touch or temperature and tend to become overwhelmed or distracted by everyday tactile input. Avoiders often have extreme or upsetting reactions to even very mild stimulation. As a result, they can appear withdrawn or defensive and have trouble fitting in with their peers. They also frequently experience symptoms associated with anxiety disorders and engage in repetitive self-soothing behaviors.

What is Tactile Avoidant behavior?? Cont.

Tactile Avoiders May:

- ▶ Avoid clothing or food with specific textures.
- ▶ Dislike being touched, hugged, or kissed, even by parents.
- ▶ Refuse to wear tight, scratchy, or uncomfortable clothing with seams or tags.
- ▶ Become anxious in crowded spaces or when standing even somewhat close to others.

How to support tactile avoidant behavior

- ▶ Remove tags from clothing and turn uncomfortable items inside out.
- ▶ Buy compression or athletic clothing to wear under loose or scratchy items.
- ▶ Use gloves or tools to engage with new or unpleasant textures.
- ▶ Warn family and friends ahead of time that hugging and touching is not desired.

Why is it important to keep individual(s) with IDD potential support needs in mind

- ▶ 1. Helps establish and maintain an environment where the individual(s) feels included and supported.
- ▶ 2. Decreases the chance of the individual's sensory system being overwhelmed which can lead to a major increase in their anxiety level
- ▶ 3. Provides the individual(s) the opportunity to realize they can accomplish anything they put their mind to

Why is it important to keep potential support needs in mind for individual(s) with IDD con't...

- ▶ 4. Helps support the individual(s) in their recovery.
- ▶ 5. Reduces the possibility of traumatizing and/or retraumatizing the individual(s).
- ▶ 6. Provides those with Sensory Processing Disorders like Proprioceptive Dysfunction and Tactile Dysfunction the support they need to function and not be taken advantage of and/or traumatized from being labeled as predator, perv, weird, ect....

Resources

- ▶ How to Support Proprioceptive Seekers
<https://www.twentysenses.org/2021/01/18/how-to-support-proprioceptive-seekers>
- ▶ How to Support Proprioceptive Avoiders
<https://www.twentysenses.org/2021/01/18/how-to-support-proprioceptive-avoiders>
- ▶ How to Support Tactile Seekers
<https://www.twentysenses.org/2021/01/18/how-to-support-your-tactile-seeker>
- ▶ How to Support Tactile Avoiders
<https://www.twentysenses.org/2021/01/18/how-to-support-tactile-avoiders/>

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