

# ONLINE SENSORY TRAININGS

## Canadian Association for Occupational Therapists

### **Sensory Modulation Approaches to Mental Health Treatment: Interventions for Adults and Adolescents**

September 2021, October/November 2021, February/March 2022

#### **Workshop Focus**

These workshops were designed to help occupational therapists to better understand and to be able to implement sensory approaches to mental health in their practice. The focus was on self-regulation skills that are key to our ability to participate safely and effectively in our life roles including work, school, leisure, and personal relationships. Self-awareness and a “felt sense of safety” are critical skills underlying our ability to self-regulate; these skills are often compromised in people with schizophrenia, mood disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other mental health problems.

#### **Workshop Video Recordings**

The eight hours of pre-recorded lectures were video-taped by Karen Moore, OTR/L. In the February – March Workshop, participants received access to the pre-recorded lectures two weeks before the first lab. This hybrid model of the combination of the taped lectures and live interactive labs was very well received. Participants enjoyed being able to watch the lectures on their own time and at their own pace.



The lectures began with background information on sensory approaches including understanding the stress response system, polyvagal theory and the importance of the “therapeutic use of self.” Each of the senses were explored in order to understand how they impact our experience of life and how they can be used for coping and self-regulation. Included was the important and less recognized sense of interoception, which helps to befriend our body and to become aware of “how we feel” physically as we experience different emotions.

Lectures examined numerous research studies regarding the efficacy of sensory approaches, highlighting the ones that would be most useful to participants to help their colleagues and multidisciplinary staff feel comfortable in supporting the use of sensory treatment modalities. Formal and informal sensory assessments were explored to help people better understand their personal sensory profile (Hitch et al. 2020) in order to choose sensory modulation tools that meet their sensory needs and facilitate occupational participation. Participants learned to match sensory tools to client challenges as well as how to integrate a sensory perspective

on trauma informed care, crisis intervention and alternative approaches to restraint and seclusion. The role of environment was discussed including the use of sensory rooms, spaces, and portable carts. Throughout the lectures personal stories and case examples were used to help participants understand how the use of sensory techniques play out in real life situations.

### **Webinar Labs**

In the February – March Workshop, the four Webinar Labs were spaced out over four weeks. They concentrated on clinical application, case stories, and practice of skills, tools, and intervention ideas. The number of participants in the labs were limited to encourage active participation and the ability to build an online community for the series of labs.



The live Webinar Labs were led by Megan Flood, OTR/L (right) and Peggy Ninow, OTR/L, CHTP, SEP (left). In these labs Megan and Peggy shared their extensive clinical experience using sensory modulation approaches in their practice. Participants learned and practiced different modalities such as Beanbag Tapping, orienting and

“Voo” breathing. Practical ideas were shared on effective sensory tools, non-tool strategies and the integration of ideas into inpatient as well as outpatient sensory groups. Megan and Peggy explained how to get the most from key sensory assessments as they shared experiences of using them in their practice. To summarize, Peggy and Megan brought to life what was learned in the lectures. Feedback on the live component of the workshop was especially positive.

### **Workshop Handouts**

The workshop **Handout Package** was designed to help with carry over and implementation of sensory approaches. They featured informational handouts to use with clients and directional sheets on activities such as deep breathing exercises, Beanbag Tapping and crisis intervention along with screening tools and questionnaires to help explore sensory issues and preferences. Permission was given to Workshop attendees to make limited copies of the pages of the handouts for educational and clinical purposes within their facility or practice.

An extensive list of **References** was provided with the most pertinent research studies highlighted.

A **Powerpoint Slide Handout** was provided for all of the videotaped lectures.

For easy access, a separate **Homework and Lab Activity Package** provided outlines of the labs, directional sheets for lab activities,

worksheets needed for homework assignments and assessments referred to in the labs.

### **Q and A Lab**

In the February - March Workshop, an additional follow up Q and A Lab was held in late April. This added component of a follow-up lab a month after the workshop ended allowed for processing of the experiences of participants in implementing sensory modulation techniques. Questions were welcomed regarding problems and challenges as well as reports of successful clinical stories.

[Outline of the workshop lectures and labs.](#)

[List of references used in the Workshops.](#)

[Learn more about the presenters.](#)